

## CHOICE LITERATURE.

## TOM'S HEATHEN.

## CHAPTER III.—JOEL DYER'S DAUGHTER.

The summer passed, and Tom's vacation likewise. His elastic step and ringing voice told that he came back to his work with a clear liver and a clear brain. But I was not prepared for the lively way with which he threw himself into my den one Monday evening, crying:

"Hooray, Doctor! Help me exult."

"Because you have gone stark mad?"

"Nonsense!" ejaculated Tom, plunging his fist into the sofa-cushion as if he were pounding an adversary.

"What then? Explain, or I'll have you in a strait-jacket."

"Hold on, old Crusty!"—and Tom swung himself around, dropping his feet on the floor and his hands in his pockets, and looking me in the face, said soberly: "I verily believe I am getting the best of mine enemy."

"An unfair advantage, no doubt."

"How sympathetic! It makes me feel like turning my heart inside out for your inspection."

"Don't do that, Tom; don't. Leave me a little faith in human nature."

"What's the matter with you, old fellow? Has one of your best families called in a brother physician?"

"Tell me all about your enemy, Tom."

"Perhaps I ought not to call him an enemy, since, strictly speaking, he may not be mine enemy at all."

"Worse and worse. You would have me exult because you are getting the best of your friend?"

"Neither can I call him exactly a friend, this heathen of mine. It is singular what an antagonism, a vindictiveness that man arouses in me, as if he had done me or mine a mortal injury. Of course I know that he has done nothing of that sort. On the contrary, he has ever treated me, personally, with the utmost consideration. And perhaps I ought to be grateful for his constant attendance on the Sabbath, and the liberal price he pays for his pew. And there are times when I feel that he is one of the sheep committed to my care, and desire that he should hear the great Master's voice, and follow in his steps. It argues ill for my Christianity, that I should harbour any but the kindest feelings towards any one, and especially towards a man who has done me no harm. While I was away this summer, I took myself in hand for this, and came home resolved to feel that he is in a sense my brother, whom I am under bonds to consider, love and spend myself for, with cheerfulness. And, strange to say, the very first Sabbath after my return, I detected a change in the man's face, as if he were a little less sure that he was entirely right, and I entirely wrong. Probably you will say that it is all in my imagination, or in something I had for my supper the night before. But I know there is a change in the man, and no slight change either. It was more than ever perceptible yesterday. He looked worn and troubled, and his eyes fell every time they met mine—a thing that never happened before; and the latter part of the service he was ill at ease, and could not look me in the face."

"How modest we are. The man was sick or tired; or, perhaps, you were not as interesting as usual." Of course Tom knew nothing of my professional relations with Mr. Dyer.

"Be that as it may, I know he is no longer invincible, and has got through riding me like a nightmare. Hence, I exult. Such is poor human nature."

For several weeks I heard no more of Tom's Heathen or my unique patient.

It had been a cold, rainy November day. Toward night the cold increased. The rain froze as it fell, coating walks, trees and fences with ice; and by dark it changed to a fierce, driving sleet that neither man nor beast could face with any degree of equanimity.

"There, Jack," said I, as we drove up to the office door, "Put up the mare. She shall not go out again to-night for love or money." And getting out of my envelope, I gave myself over to sister Mary, to be comforted by her ministrations, for I had been surprised by that New England nuisance, an influenza.

An hour later, thoroughly warmed and refreshed, and as comfortable as such a cold will permit any one to be, I fell asleep in my chair, only to be aroused by Jack, with, "Doctor, there's a woman in the office, and she will see you."

I groaned as I lifted my sore head, and wished that I had been born anything but a Doctor.

"Who is it, Jack?"

"No one I ever saw before. And how she got here in this storm is a conundrum."

"Somebody's baby has a colic, and its mother don't know enough to give it a little hot water," I muttered, hoisting myself to my unwilling feet.

"You won't go out to-night?" questioned Mary, as I turned to go down to the office.

"Not for all Hartford."

My vexation cooled a little, and I heard the wind shaking the blinds and the sleet dashing furiously against the windows, and remembered that for the love of somebody, a woman had faced this bitter storm; and it fell quite to zero as, entering the office, I saw standing by the stove a slight figure enveloped in a dripping water-proof cloak.

"Good evening, Madam."

"Good evening, Doctor," and she came towards me, pushing, with a dainty ungloved hand, the wet water-proof hood from her head. It was a young, healthy face, and a well poised head. No bad blood, no weak spine there. She searched my face with large, serious eyes, as a tremendous blast spent itself against the house, and I remarked:

"A rough night, Madam."

"Yes," she answered, in a low, earnest voice, "or I should not be here. My father is in great distress, and needs immediate attention. I have done all that I can do for him, and come for you, fearing you would not come if I sent for you."

"Who is your father?"

"Mr. Dyer, a patient of yours."

This, then, was the daughter to be benefited or otherwise, by his money; the Vassar student Tom supposed a heathen by inheritance.

"What is the matter with your father to-night?"

"He is having frightful paroxysms of pain. They have increased in frequency and intensity for several days, till today they are almost incessant, and opiates are powerless. He told me that you studied the case for him, and that there is no help, but I am sure there must be a temporary relief."

"Chloroform."

"Yes, but I have never seen it administered. If you will come over and give it this time, I may not be obliged to trouble you again."

She saw me hesitate, listening to the storm without, and feeling the aches and pains in my own person, and without moving her beseeching eyes from mine, she added, almost in a whisper, "In the name of Him who suffered for us all, come."

It was a prayer that I could not withstand, and perhaps she knew it; for without waiting for an answer she replaced her hood and hurried out into the storm.

"That woman must be crazy to go out on such a night as this," remarked Jack, struggling to close the door that blew open after her exit.

"I don't know which is the crazier," said I, putting on my arctics with one hand while I held my aching head with the other.

"But Uncle Doctor, you are not going out in this storm, and sick, too?" cried Jack in dismay.

"Bring my heavy overcoat and fur cap, and tell your mother not to wait for me."

"Haden't you better have one of the horses?"

"No."

But I repented before I was half way to Column Avenue, for the sleet drove spitefully in my face, blinding me effectually; and the wind taking advantage of my breadth of beam and the slippery walk, forced me into a sitting posture more than once. How that slender girl had come and gone over the route before me, passed my comprehension. Tired, breathless, and feeling as if I had within me the whole army of martyrs from Stephen downwards, I clambered up the icy steps.

Instantly the door swung open, and I stood in a sumptuous hall, bewildered by the abrupt transition from the storm and darkness without, to the light and warmth within.

A servant was helping off my wrappings, when a voice at my elbow said:

"You are good to come out to-night," and turning I saw a daintily dressed young girl, looking like serenity itself, waiting for me to speak.

"Was it you who came to the office?"

"Yes; only don't tell papa. It might trouble him."

"How upon earth did you get there and back again?"

"I flew both ways," she answered, with a smile that lit up her face like sunshine.

"I believe you, and I wish I had the same means of locomotion. Now I will see your father."

We went up the staircase together, and as we reached the upper landing I heard stifled moans from an adjoining room, and following her, stood at her father's bedside.

"Father, father!" she called, bending over him; "the Doctor is here and he will relieve you." He slowly turned his head till his eyes met mine. They were fierce with fever and deeply sunken, and his pinched nose and drawn lips, told of unutterable suffering. He stretched out a thin, hot hand, saying pluckily:

"Doctor, you see I am down, but if I could get a little rest I would soon be up again."

"Yes," said I, after a moment's examination, and I will see that you get a little rest. You are not afraid of chloroform?"

"Not in the least," and making an effort he continued: "Doctor, this is my daughter Agnes," looking fondly and proudly at the girl still bending over him. "She came home as soon as she learned that I was sick, and allows no one else to nurse me. If you want anything she will get it for you."

She looked at me with a smile and a nod, and stood waiting.

I asked for a handkerchief, and as she expressed a desire to know how to administer chloroform in an emergency, and as I was convinced that her intelligence and discretion could be trusted, I gave her minute directions, and saw that she counted his pulse accurately, from ninety down to a little above forty, when I laid aside the handkerchief signing for her to look at him. He had surrendered himself implicitly, having no fears, and had fallen into a deep, quiet sleep. It was pleasant to see the sharp wrinkles fading out of his high forehead, and the tense lines about the mouth relaxing in the absence of pain, even if the counterfeit death took on somewhat startlingly the appearance of reality. For a moment the colour forsook her face, and her eyes sharply questioned mine.

"It is all right," I answered, with my finger still on his pulse. "A person under the influence of chloroform will look like that."

She was reassured, and as she turned to him again her face was shadowed by a grave, sad tenderness, and the slight, tremulous motion of the full downcast lids, betrayed the gathering tears, though resolutely suppressed.

"Poor father!" she whispered, without raising her eyes, and as if speaking to herself. "He suffers so much and is so brave! It seems as if there ought to be some compensation, and yet—I know—"

and broke off as if met by a conviction or a doubt that she could not answer.

"Are you his only nurse?" I asked at length.

"Yes," she answered, raising her head and returning promptly to her surroundings. "Papa likes me best, and surely it is my place."

"How long has he been confined to his bed?"

"Only a few days. He was about the house when I came home. I wished him to call a physician then, but he explained that it was useless." Here she looked at me as if she would ask a question, but instead she went abruptly over

to the window, and parting the curtains stood half hidden and quite motionless, apparently listening to the storm.

She seemed to have fallen into one of her father's abstractions, or to have been communing with some unseen presence; for when, after a long silence, she returned to his bedside, there was an air of tender solemnity about her that I was loth to disturb.

"Will he remain in this condition through the night?" she asked at length.

"Probably; but he will need watching, and, perhaps, more chloroform; and as I shall stay with him till morning, you had better go to sleep."

"But you are half sick, and ought to sleep yourself. I did not expect you to do this," she said, regarding me earnestly.

"I am better off here than I should be wandering about the city in this storm. For after my experience in coming over, I am no wise certain that I could find my way home before daylight."

"But you could sleep here."

"No; I prefer to watch him."

She went to the next room and drew in a large, easy chair, which she arranged with cushions and a foot-rest till it was more like a lounge than a chair. "Take this," she said: "I have passed several nights here, watching father. You will find it comfortable," and bidding me good-night, she disappeared.

## CHAPTER IV.—A HARD QUESTION.

An hour passed and my patient still slept, though with a stronger pulse and a more life-like look. It might have been quite safe to have left him, but as he had never before been under the influence of chloroform, and as there is always a little uncertainty attending its use, I preferred to see him well through its prolonged influence.

A little later I noiselessly arose to cool my throat with a draught of water, and passing the half-open door leading to the adjoining room, saw something that arrested my steps. The gas was burning dimly, but in its light stood Agnes Dyer, whom I supposed soundly sleeping. She had exchanged her dress for a long, loose wrapper of some soft gray material; her abundant hair was loosely wound about her head, and as she stood with her hands clasped behind her back, her head inclined, and her eyes on the floor—her father's very attitude—she made a picture that I never forgot. She was curiously like and unlike her father; she had the same tall figure and fine head; and her hair was a dark brown, while his had been black before it was gray. Both had deep blue eyes and clear cut features; her hand, that was a model of his, and her step, voice and attitude, all proclaimed her Joel Dyer's daughter. But there the likeness ended; the "principle within" that informs the features, and that is the real individual, was of a totally different pattern; or, perhaps I should say, derived its qualities and its motives from an entirely different source.

I must have stood looking longer certainly than good manners warranted, when, as if feeling my gaze, she lifted her head and met my eyes. The warm color swept over her face, but, without unclasping her hands or changing her position, she said quietly: "Pardon me! I could not rest. Is he still sleeping?"

"Yes."

"Will you come here, then?"

She waited till I stood quite near, and, looking steadily in my eyes, with a just perceptible tremor in her voice, she said, gravely: "My father tells me that his disease is incurable, and that he has not long to live. Is it altogether as hopeless as he supposes?"

The pathetic voice and eyes were hard to answer. I would have given much if I could have told her anything but the truth.

"My dear young lady, you would have me deal candidly with you?"

"Certainly," with a pitiful quiver of the lip.

"The disease is incurable; at least there are no instances on record of its permanent cure; and, so far as my own observation goes, it is quite unmanageable. But as to time, there are well defined cases where the patient has lived thirty years. Your father has a good constitution and great tenacity, and if he could be made to feel that it was worth while to live he might last a good many years yet."

"As he is now?"

"No; he is passing through the acute and probably the most painful stage of the disease. After a little, this will abate and it will run into the chronic form, which, though tedious, is bearable. He will be able to go about, and with occasional relapses, he may live for years if he will."

"You think he does not care to live?"

"I thought when I last talked with him, that he seemed indifferent, or that he considered life scarcely worth having upon such conditions. I gathered the impression that having been well all his days, he did not understand that a man could be an invalid and still be comfortable and useful to himself and others. Some of the most telling work that has been done in this world has been accomplished in pain and weakness that would appall a healthy man. The mind has almost unlimited influence over the body; some people cannot be killed, at least by disease, so long as they are determined to live."

"You think if my father wished to live it would make a difference?"

"Not if he merely wished to live. Mere desire is not strong enough. If he were steadily determined to live, he might live, because, being determined, he would use all known methods and precautions; and besides, there is a resistant power in a strong will that baffles or holds in check the inroads of disease."

"Then one might live indefinitely?"

"No, not quite that—I said the mind has almost unlimited influence upon the body; but there comes a reaction—a time when the body dominates the mind and worries it into submission. At some one of these seasons of depression the man succumbs and dies."

She stood as if in deep thought and I turned to go away, when she asked: "Would mental uneasiness or anxiety tend to keep him down?"