

CHOICE LITERATURE.

A DAY OF FATE.

BY REV. E. P. ROE.

BOOK SECOND.—CHAPTER V.—A FLASH OF MEMORY.—
Continued.

In spite of a restraint that she tried to disguise, she broke out into a low laugh at this reminiscence, and said, "After that revelation of ignorance you will never trust me again."

"I will trust you in regard to everything except kitchen vegetables," I replied, more in earnest than in jest.

"A most important exception," she responded, her old troubled look coming back. "But you are talking far too much. Your face is slightly flushed. I fear you are growing feverish. I will call Mrs. Yocomb now."

"Please do not. I never felt better in my life. You are doing me good every moment, and it's so desperately stupid lying helplessly here."

"Well, I suppose I must humour you a few moments longer," she laughed. "People, when ill, are so arbitrary. By the way, your editorial friends must think a great deal of you, or else you are valuable to them, for your chief writes to Mr. Yocomb every day about you; so do some others; and they've sent enough fruit and delicacies to be the death of an ostrich."

"I'm glad to hear that; it rather increases one's faith in human nature. I didn't know whether they or any one would care much if I died."

"Mr. Morton!" she said reproachfully.

"Oh, I remember my promise to you. If, like a cat, I had lost my ninth life, I would live after your words. Indeed I imagine that you were the only reason that I did live. It was your will that saved me, for I hadn't enough sense or spirit left to do more than flicker out."

"Do you think so?" she asked eagerly, and a rich glow of pleasure overspread her face.

"I do indeed. You have had a subtle power over me from the first, which I cannot resist, and don't wish to."

"I must go now," she said hastily.

"Please wait," I entreated. "I've a message for Mrs. Yocomb."

She stood irresolutely near the door.

"I wish you to tell her—why is it getting dark so suddenly?"

"I fear we're going to have a shower," and she glanced apprehensively toward the window.

"When have I seen that look on your face before?" I asked quickly.

"You had a message for Mrs. Yocomb?"

"Yes. I wish you would make her realize a little of my unbounded gratitude, which every day increases. In fact, I can't understand the kindness of this family, it is so hearty, so genuine. Why, I was an entire stranger the other day. Then Adah and—pardon me—you also used expressions which puzzle me very much. I can't understand how I became ill so suddenly. I was feeling superbly that Sunday evening, and then everything became a blank. Mrs. Yocomb, from a fear of disquieting me, won't say much about it. The impression that a storm or something occurred that I can't recall, haunts me. You are one that couldn't deceive if you tried."

"You needn't think I've anything to tell when Mrs. Yocomb hasn't," she answered with a gay laugh.

"Miss Warren," I said gravely, "that laugh isn't natural. I never heard you laugh so before. Something *did* happen."

A flash of lightning gleamed across the window, and the maiden gave an involuntary and apprehensive start.

Almost as instantaneously the events I had forgotten passed through my mind. In strong and momentary excitement I rose on my elbow, and looked for their confirmation in her troubled face.

"Oh, forget—forget it all!" she exclaimed, in a low, distressed voice, and she came and stood before me with clasped hands.

"Would to God I had died!" I said despairingly, and I sank back faint and crushed. "I had no right to speak—to think of you as I did. Good-bye."

"Mr. Morton—"

"Please leave me now. I'm too weak to be a man, and I would not lose your esteem."

"But will you get well—you promised me that."

"Well!" I said, in a low, bitter tone. "When can I ever be well? Good-bye."

"Mr. Morton, would you blight my life?" she asked, almost indignantly. "Am I to blame for this?"

"Nor am I to blame. It was inevitable. Curses on a world in which one can err so fatally."

"Can you not be a brave, generous man? If this should go against you—if you will not get well—you promised me to live."

"I will exist; but can one whose heart is stone, and hope dead, *live*? I'll do my best. No, you are not to blame—not in the least. Take the whole comfort of that truth. Nor was I either. That Sunday *was* the day of my fate, since for me to see you was to love you by every instinct and law of my being. But I trust, as you said, you will find me too honourable to seek that which belongs to another."

"Mr. Morton," she said, in tones of deep distress, you "you saved this home; you saved Mrs. Yocomb's life; you—you saved mine. Will you embitter it?"

"Would to God I had died!" I groaned. "All would then have been well. I had fulfilled my mission."

She wrung her hands as she stood beside me. "I can't—oh, I can't endure this!" she murmured, and there was anguish in her voice.

I rallied sufficiently to take her hand as I said,

"Emily Warren, I understand your crystal truth too well not to know that there is no hope for me. I'll bear my hard fate as well as I can; but you must not expect too much. And remember this: I shall be like a planet hereafter. The little happiness I have will be but a pale reflection of

yours. If you are unhappy, I shall be so inevitably. Not a shadow of blame rests on you—the first fair woman was not truer than you—I'll do my best—I'll get up again—soon, I trust, now. If you ever need a friend—but you would not so wrong me as to go to another—I won't be weak and lackadaisical. Don't make any change; let this episode in your life be between ourselves only. Good-bye."

"Oh, you look so ill—so changed—what can I say?" Helpless tears rushed into her eyes. "You saved my life," she breathed softly; but as she turned hastily to depart she met our hostess.

"Oh, Mrs. Yocomb," she sobbed, "he knows all."

"Thee surely could not have told him—"

"Indeed I did not—it came to him like a flash."

"Mrs. Yocomb, by all that's sacred, Miss Warren is not to blame for anything—only myself. Please keep my secret; it shall not trouble any one; and I turned my face to the wall."

"Richard Morton."

"Dear Mrs. Yocomb, give me time. I'm too sorely wounded to speak to anyone."

"A man should try to do what is right under all circumstances," she said firmly, "and it is your list and sacred duty to get well. It is time for your medicine."

I turned and said desperately, "Give me stimulants—give me anything that will make me strong, so that I may keep my word; for if ever a man was mortally weak in body and soul, I am."

"I'll do my best for thee," she said gently, "for I feel for thee and with thee, as if thee were my own son. But I wish thee to remember now and always that the only true strength comes from heaven."

CHAPTER VI.—WEAKNESS.

Soul and body are too nearly related for one to suffer without the other's sympathy. Mrs. Yocomb mercifully shielded me that evening, merely saying that I had seen enough company for one day. My sleep that night resulted from opiates instead of nature's impulses, and so was unrefreshing, and the doctor was surprised to find a change for the worse the following morning. For two or three days the scale wavered, and I scarcely held what I had gained. Mrs. Yocomb rarely left me, and I believe that I owe my life not only to her excellent nursing, but even more to her strong moral support—her gentle but unspoken sympathy. I knew she understood me, and that her mercy was infinite for my almost mortal weakness; for now that the inexplicable buoyancy which that chief of earthly hopes imparts was gone, I sank into an abyss of despondency from which I feared I could never escape. Her wisdom and intuitive delicacy led her to select Reuben as her chief assistant. I found his presence very restful; for, so far from suspecting, he could not understand a wound often more real and painful than any received on battle-fields. I now could not have endured Adah's intent and curious scrutiny, and yet I deeply appreciated her kindness, for she kept my table laden with delicate fruits and flowers.

The dainty little vase was replenished daily also with clusters of roses—roses only—and I soon recognized rare and perfect buds that at this late season only a florist could supply. The pleasure they gave was almost counterbalanced by the pain. Their exquisite colour and fragrance suggested a character whose perfection daily made my disappointment more intolerable. At last Mrs. Yocomb said,

"Richard Morton, is thee doing thy best to get well? Thee's incurring a grave responsibility if thee is not. Emily Warren is quite alone in the world, and she came to me as to a mother when thee was taken ill, and told me of thy unfortunate attachment. As thee said, she is not to blame, and yet such is her kindly and sensitive nature that she suffers quite as much as if she were wholly to blame. Her life almost depends on thee. She is growing pale and ill. She eats next to nothing, and I fear she sleeps but little. She is just waiting in miserable suspense to see if thee will keep thy word and live. I believe thee *can* live, and grow strong and good and noble, if thee will."

"Oh, Mrs. Yocomb, how you must despise me! If you but knew how I loathe myself!"

"No, I'm sorry for thee from the depths of my heart. If thee's doing thy best, I've not a word to say; but thee should know the truth. As Emily said, thee has the power either to embitter her life or to add very much to its happiness."

"Well," I said, "if I have not the strength to overcome this unmanly, contemptible weakness, I ought to die, and the sooner the better. If I'm worth life, I shall live."

If ever a weak, nerveless body yielded to an imperious will, mine did. From that hour, as far as possible, I gave my whole thought to recovery, and was as solicitous as I before had been apathetic. No captain could have been more so in regard to his ship, which he fears may not outlive a storm.

I appealed to Dr. Bites to rack his brains in the preparation of the most effective tonics; I took my food with scrupulous regularity; and in the effort to oxygenize my thin pale blood, drew long respirations of the pure summer air. Mrs. Yocomb daily smiled a warmer and more hearty encouragement.

Under the impetus of a resolute purpose the wheels of life began to move steadily and at last rapidly toward the goal of health. I soon was able to sit up part of the day.

As I rallied, I could not help recognizing the richer colouring that came into the life of the farm-house, and the fact touched me deeply.

"What is my suffering compared with the happiness of this home?" I thought. "It would have been brutally selfish to have died."

I now had my letters brought to me. My paper—my first love—was daily read, and my old interest in its welfare kindled slowly.

"Work," I said, "is the best of antidotes. It shall be my remedy. Men are respected only as they stand on their feet and work, and I shall win her respect to the utmost."

Reuben and Adah read to me. The presence of the former, like that of his father and mother, was very restful;

but Adah began to puzzle me. At first I ascribed her manner to an extravagant sense of gratitude, and the romantic interest which a young girl might naturally take in one who had passed with her through peril, and who seemingly had been dangerously ill in consequence; but I was compelled at last to see that her regard was not open, frank, and friendly, but shy, absorbing and jealous. It gave her unmingled satisfaction that I did not ask for Miss Warren, and she rarely spoke of her. When she did she watched me keenly, as if seeking to read my thoughts. Reuben, on the contrary, spoke freely of her; but, from some restraint placed upon him, by his mother probably, did not ask her to relieve him in his care of me again.

After I began to sit up Miss Warren would not infrequently come to my door, when others were present, and smilingly express her gladness that I was improving daily. Indeed there would often be quite gay repartee between us, and I think even Adah was so blinded by our manner that her suspicions were allayed. It evidently puzzled her, and Reuben also, that I had apparently lost my interest in one who had such great attractions for me at first. But Adah was not one to seek long and deeply for subtle and hidden causes of action. She had a quick eye, however, for what was apparent, and scanned surfaces narrowly. I fear I perplexed her as sorely as she did me.

In spite of every effort to remain blind to the truth, I began to fear that she was inclined to give me a regard which I had not sought, and which would embarrass me beyond measure.

That a man can exult over a passion in a woman which he cannot requite is marvellous. That he can look curiously, critically, and complacently on this most sacred mystery of a woman's soul, that he can care no more for her delicate inebriation than would a grim idol, is proof that his heart is akin to the stony idol in material, and his nature like that of the gross, cruel divinity represented. The vanity that can feed on such food has a more depraved appetite than the South Sea Islander, who is content with human flesh merely. It would seem that there are those who can smile to see a woman waste the richest treasures of her spiritual life which were designed to last and sustain through the long journey of life—ay, and even boast of her immeasurable loss, of which they, wittingly or unwittingly, have been the cause.

The oddest part of it all is that women can love such men instead of regarding them as spider-like monsters that, were the doctrine of transmigration true, would become spiders again as soon as compelled to drop their human disguise.

But women usually idolize the men they love into something very different from what they are. Heaven knows that I was not a saint; but I am glad that it caused me pain, and pain only, as I saw Adah shyly and almost unconsciously bending on me glances laden with a priceless gift, which, nevertheless, I could not receive.

Her nature was too simple and direct for disguises, and when she attempted them they were often so apparent as to be comically pathetic. And yet she did attempt them. There was nothing bold or unmaidenly in her manner, and as I look back upon those days I thank God that I was never so graceless and brutal as to shew and feel anything like contempt for her gentle, childlike preference. Very possibly also my own unfortunate experience made me more considerate, and it was my policy to treat her with the same frank, undisguised affection that I manifested toward Zillah, with, of course, the differences required by their different ages.

Adah was no longer repulsive to me. The events of that memorable night of storm and danger, and the experiences that followed, had apparently awakened her better nature, which, although having a narrow compass, was gentle and womanly. Her old stnppancy was gone. My undisguised preference for Miss Warren after I had actually made her acquaintance, and my persistent blindness to everything verging toward sentiment, had perhaps done something toward dispelling her belief that beauty and dress were irresistible. Thus she may have been led honestly to compare herself with Emily Warren, who was not only richly endowed but highly cultivated; at any rate her small vanity had vanished also, and she was in contrast as self-distrustful and hesitating in manner as she formerly had been abrupt and self-asserting. Moreover she had either lost her interest in her neighbour's petty affairs, or else had been made to feel that a tendency to gossip was not a captivating trait, and we heard no more about what this one said or that one wore on her return from meeting. While her regard was undoubtedly sincere, I felt and hoped that it was merely a sentiment attendant on her waking and idle spiritual life, rather than an abiding and deep attachment; and I believed that it would soon be replaced by other interests after my departure. For my own sake as well as hers I had decided to leave the farm-house as speedily as possible, but I soon began to entertain the theory that I could dispel her dreams better by remaining a little longer, and by proving that she held the same place in my thoughts as Zillah, and could possess no other. There would then be no vain imaginings after I had gone.

I rather wanted to stay until I had fully recovered my health, for I was beginning to take pride in my self-mastery. If I could regain my footing, and stand erect in such quiet, manly strength as to change Miss Warren's sympathy into respect only, I felt that I would achieve a victory that would be a source of satisfaction for the rest of life. That I could do this I honestly doubted, for seemingly she had enthralled my whole being, and her power over me was well nigh irresistible.

I knew that she understood Adah even better than I did, and it seemed her wish to afford the girl every opportunity, for she never came to ask how I was when Adah was present; and the latter was honest enough to tell me that it was Miss Warren who had suggested some of the simple yet interesting stories with which my long hours of convalescence were beguiled; but in her latent jealousy she could not help adding,

"Since Emily Warren selected them, thee cannot help liking them."

"I certainly ought to like them doubly," I had quietly