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No. 15.

For the Hearthstone,
WINTER.

BY DR. NORMAN SMITH.

The frost-king is roaming,
And wild winds are moaning
Over the valleys, the hill-tops and leas;
Over the wide wilderness,
So gloomy and cheerless,
Over the waves of the deep rolling sea.

The tree-tops are bending,
"North snow flakes descending,
So gently to cover the earthland o'er;
Like grim sentinels they stand
Over all the fair land
With swaying locks all frosty and hoar,

The flowers we cherished,
Have withered and perished,
And are buried 'neath the cold pearly snow;
But the sun's genial rays,
In the spring's balmy days
Will cause them again in beauty to grow,

Now the sweet singing rills,
That have danced from the hills,
In ice-festers bound are smothering no more;
But they'll sparkle again
Through the meadows and plain,
With merry glad songs the same as of yore.

The now winter so drear,
The long night of the year,
Thickly enshrouded in darkness and gloom,
But the morning of spring,
Soon over us will fling
Beautiful garlands of roses in bloom.

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IN AFTER-YEARS; OR, FROM DEATH TO LIFE.

BY MRS. ALEXANDER ROSS.

CHAPTER IX.

The mills of God grind slowly,
But they grind exceeding small;
Though in patience He stands watching,
Yet exactly grinds He all.

Adam in his shepherd's hut on the mountain height was in sore trouble. His thoughts were with the twin children; some mysterious influence from another world told him they were in dire distress, but how was he, a helpless old man, to help them? Even if he could gain access to them, and this was impossible, the gates were barred day and night, the keys in Sir Richard's possession; and even were he to obtain entrance to the grounds, who was there to brave a man's anger that they might grudge what would be deemed the childish wish of a poor old man?

The garish light of day departed, and the long Scottish gloaming came on, and with it Adam's trouble doubled; he could not remain in the hut; he must be out beneath the firmament of heaven, and as he paused on the threshold, his soul sought counsel of his father's God, and the prayer of his heart which ascended to heaven was:

"Lord direct my steps, show me what Thou wouldst have me to do."

His prayer was heard and answered; he involuntarily took his way down the hill, on and on, until he came to the barn-yards of Haddon Castle.

To his surprise, he was met there by Mary, the former scullery maid, now promoted to be cook, who told him she had been gone all day, searching for a woman to spin wool for the Castle.

She had the key of the barn-yard door to let herself in. Adam had done Mary many a kindness in the old time, and when he told her his earnest desire to see the young ladies, she consented to let him enter, on condition that should he be found out, he would carefully conceal who let him in.

She told him the young ladies' room was in the north tower, the room adjoining the outside corridor, but he must not think of going near them until nine o'clock, then Sir Richard would have retired and all would be safe.

Adam knew he could easily obtain an entrance to the outside corridor through a postern door, and up a back staircase of the main building, from a window of which he would step out on the barbacan, and thence to the corridor of the tower.

The gloaming had changed to darkness; no light save the pale light of the stars, as Adam and Mary entered the place which to him had been home for half a century.

Adam could not wait for the hour appointed, he felt that life and death was on his mission; he was sent of God, and was to him if he tarried; the God whom he served could deliver him if need was, as he did Daniel of old from a burning fiery furnace, and he feared not the wrath of Richard Cunningham.

The postern door was fast barred, and all his efforts were futile to force an entrance there, so perforce he was obliged to have recourse to his friend Mary.

Before trusting himself to enter the servants' apartments, he reconnoitred each window carefully. Several were enveloped in total darkness; the others opening from the kitchen had a dim gray light borrowed therefrom, but no sign of other inhabitant except Mary.

Having satisfied himself of this he boldly en-



A PAINFUL SIGHT.

tered the passage leading from the kitchen door to a side staircase,—communicating with the main building, by which he could gain the corridor of the north tower in the same way as Sir Richard had done, when he went to fasten out light and air from the wretched children now lying alike unconscious to good or ill.

A short time spent in groping his way through dark passages and narrow winding stone staircases, brought him to the corridor he sought at the top of the north tower.

The old man staggered with fear and dismay as he came close to the chamber occupied by the twins. The shut and plastered iron shutters told a fearful tale of guilt and murder, suffering and death. It was the work of a moment to unlatch the shutters and pull them back, the soft plaster falling on the corridor like curd.

The pale light of the rising moon showed him the broken window, and inside a dark mass, which he judged too truly was the prostrate bodies of the twins.

The window was of the old French fashion, opening in the middle, so prevalent in Scotland during the reign of the third and fourth James, and as it was attached to the casement by hook hinges, it was with ease Adam lifted it off.

Although a rush of fresh air had preceded Adam as he entered, the room was so close and the air so thick and fetid as almost to induce fainting in the old man, who in all his previous life had never experienced such a sensation.

But the foul air was escaping fast; and the sweet wind of heaven blowing in the direction of the window, his sickness was but momentary.

He raised and looked at, first one pale young face, and then the other; breathing had ceased, but the flesh was warm and flexible.

In a few minutes both were lying on the corridor outside, their heads raised by pillows taken from the bed inside.

All his efforts were fruitless, he must seek water. In less time than he had taken to reach the tower at first, he descended to the kitchen and regained the corridor with a pitcher of

water, with which he bathed each fair face and head.

At last a tremulous movement of the eyelid, and then a slight opening of the upper lip, told the old man that life was not extinct. He now bathed their hands and endeavoured to make them swallow a few drops from the shepherd's flask he carried in his pocket; he was successful; their young life was coming back.

The old man stood over them, almost as breathless as the motionless forms he so earnestly strove to reanimate, with eye and ear intently stretched to discover sight and sound, which would add hope to hope.

They were both breathing, fitfully it is true, but living and breathing, filling the old man's heart with joy untold.

He succeeded in placing them in a sitting posture, with their backs leaning against the lower wall, thereby enabling them to inhale the fresh air more freely; their strength came back by slow degrees, but as time sped on each half hour left them stronger than it found them, until they could eat the oatmeal bannock and goats' milk cheese, which together with his shepherd's flask, the old man always carried in his wallet.

By midnight they could walk steadily and speak with Adam of what course they would pursue, in making their escape from their persecutor.

The man who was turned out of the Haddon Arms was a nephew of Adam. He now lived in a farm house on the road between Haddon Castle and Aberdeen, and carried on the business of carrier between the country districts and the city. To his house Adam proposed they should first direct their steps; they could rest there for a day, and consult with the man, who was intelligent, and had received a better education than falls to the lot of most of his class. He might be able to propose a mode of procedure, better and safer than they or Adam, with their limited knowledge of the world, would be able to think of.

The moon was now sailing high in the heavens, pale for weariness, climbing ever climb-

ing, wandering companionless, looking down on earth as if seeking for some object worth her constancy. Adam knew by her altitude that the hour must be nearly one in the morning, and they proposed to set out while yet the deep shadows cast by the moonlight favoured them, to pursue with soft stealthy steps the most perilous part of their journey, that which would bring them out of the Castle and its grounds.

They were well supplied with money. Their father had five hundred pounds in the house when he died, and this sum he, impelled by an unseen power, had told them where to find, directing them to lay it aside, mentioning their possession of such to no one, but to keep the gold against any emergency which might occur. It was now, by Adam's advice, placed carefully in the bosoms of their dresses, each carrying a part, he himself bearing a bundle hastily put up, containing a change of linen. All was prepared in readiness to start, when suddenly the deep silence of the midnight was broken by voices talking in the hall below in suppressed tones, which sounded appallingly distinct as they vibrated in the surrounding hush and gloom.

This continued for some time, and then footsteps hastily seeking the stables, the tread of horses and rolling of wheels from thence to the great door, from which they again started off with redoubled speed down the avenue in the direction of the gate, when again all was silent as before.

Five minutes scarcely elapsed from the time the first low voice fell on their wondering ears, until the former silence reigned in and around the Castle; but to the two frightened and startled girls, shivering with apprehension lest their proposed flight should be discovered, and they together with their deliverer, consigned again to the living tomb they had been rescued from, the minutes appeared hours, their hearts throbbing in great distinct beats, their heads dizzy with fear.

In the pale moonlight shining full on the corridor, Adam could see their faces white as

to wn marble, their wildly distended eyes and parted lips all betokening the intense fear under which they laboured, and endeavoured to reassure them. It was evident some one in the Castle was sick, perhaps nigh unto death; it might be the Castle's Lord, the one they most dreaded on earth, who had been stricken down in the midst of his sin.

Whoever it was who had left the Castle, or from whatever cause they had gone, it was evident now was the time for their own departure. They had only two hours of darkness left, and of these hours they must make the best use possible; again, the longer they delayed their journey, the more risk they ran of encountering the phanton and its occupants on their return to the Castle.

All this Adam urged upon the terrified girls again and again, but his words seemed to fall on ears that had lost the power of hearing, or on minds incapable of comprehending his words.

The long course of confinement to the house, almost to one room, with the life of oppression which they had endured in the past year, added to which the physical suffering of the struggle for life in death they had gone through, had been too much for frames never very robust, and accustomed to be tended on, and watched with a care, known to few, dictated by an affection of which they were the sun and centre, the beginning and end.

Adam looked on the trembling forms, the white faces, in which the life blood seemed to have ceased to flow, the heavy eyelids drooping with weakness, so that the dark lashes almost lay upon the marble cheek, the only contrast to the deathly pallor pervading alike lip and brow; and his heart sank within him, as he saw the impossibility of these two fragile girls, performing a journey of five miles, amid the dews of night and darkness; yet he determined they should at least leave the Castle, in the grounds, if they were unable to walk farther, here were several places in which he could hide them, until their situation was made known to the family at Incheverie, and if their strength held out until they were outside the gate, he trusted to find some mode of conveyance, better suited to the weakly state of his charges.

He spoke a few words impressing on them the necessity of immediate flight, and then taking Margaret, who was the weaker of the two by the hand, he led her, followed by Adam, through the tortuous way, by which he had gained his entrance to the tower.

The old man drew a long breath, and uttered a brief "Praise to the Lord" as he and the twin girls stood on the green soft grass, under the shade of the overhanging beech trees.

No sooner had their feet touched the green sward and they felt once in a measure free, than Adam saw that new vigor had been infused into the veins of his helpless charge, and he resolved to get them as far outside the gate as possible; he had provided himself while in the Castle, with instruments by the aid of which he could lift the side gate of its hinges, and while he was doing this the girls might rest; yet his heart beat with apprehension as he thought, that while thus employed he might be discovered by Sir Richard, whom he had no doubt was one of the occupants of the phanton, and not on a sick bed, as he had suggested to the children in order to quiet fears in their minds, which he acknowledged to himself, were but too well founded.

While the strength remained which he well knew would be afterwards, he urged on the footsteps of the girls; binding his shepherd's plaid around him so as to support the parcel he carried, he took a hand of each, as he had been accustomed to do in their early girlhood, when he brought them to climb the rocky heights that he might see them clap their hands with delight at the discovery, they fancied they themselves had made of a bird's nest with the yellow young, or the bed of a fellow deer with her fawn.

Walking thus, each with her soft white hand clasped in the grasp of the strong old man, they seemed to borrow strength from him, and walked on with something of the elasticity of step they had known before the blight fell on their youth, the gate was soon reached, and lo! it was wide open, the very catch idle, the chains hanging loosely to the ground.

The open gate told its tale to Adam, experienced as he had been in the ways of the Castle, from his boyhood; Sir Richard was abroad, none else dare leave the great gate so carelessly open, and the haste the open gate betokened, showed that the heir of his land was sick nigh unto death; whatever leech he had gone to seek he would not tarry long, and the route of the girls and himself must be taken amid the trees which skirted the roadside. There were two roads, one by the sea, another through the wood on the uplands, the way by the sea was the one, he judged for many reasons Sir Richard would take, and he chose the other, certain that there lay his best chance of safety for the twins; even there, he would not dare walk along the road, but kept to a winding path amid the trees.

For the first mile the girls held out pretty well, after that they had to stop every now and again to rest, the pauses becoming more frequent, and the time consumed in resting longer, until by the time they had gone two miles, they were quite unable to proceed, except at a snail's pace.

Adam saw that the strength of his helpless