

CHOICE LITERATURE.

THROUGH THE WINTER.

CHAPTER XVI.—SORROW BRINGS ITS SOLACE.

"God doth not leave His own!
This sorrow in their life He doth permit yea, chooseth it,
To speed His children in their heavenward way,
He guides the winds; faith, hope, and love all say,
God doth not leave His own!"

Though the next morning found Helen still pale and weary, it found her also moving softly about the house, and bent on performing all her accustomed duties. And Dr. Waldemar, when he met her, though her appearance grieved him, said nothing to change her resolution. He contented himself with seeing that the stimulating coffee was renounced for something more nourishing, and, with only a short absence, remained in the sick-room. There was a change in Ronald during the night, and the doctor's experienced eye saw that the end was near.

Upon the sick child the sun was slowly rising, and, marking it, Dr. Waldemar had not the heart to forbid Helen the mournful privilege of doing all she could—of watching by him to the last.

If she could endure for a little while longer, then, in the consciousness that she had failed in no loving care and attention, perhaps her sorrow would find comfort; and the forced inaction that she knew must come then, would not be too bitter a thing to be called—rest. And so, while his heart ached for the sorrowing family, Dr. Waldemar waited and watched.

Slowly the long hours of the quiet day went by; throughout the house a silence that seemed like sleep reigned; friends came in softly, and went out with sad, tearful faces. No loud voice, no harsh sound broke the hush that brooded, like a mournful spirit, over the shadowed home.

The dreary day shook hands with a drearier night. Mrs. Waldemar came at twilight and took her place among the watchers, who could do little now but wait and pray. Death, sure of the victory, loitered now; and life struggled desperately against defeat.

By some mysterious, subtle intuition there dawned upon Ronald now a consciousness that he was dying, and with it there came a horror of great darkness, a terror strange in one so young, and heartrending to those who witnessed it.

"What's the matter?" he cried piteously; "am I dying? am I going to die? Doctor, can't you help me? O doctor, can't you help me?"

With tender, piteous yearning, Dr. Waldemar leaned over the little sufferer, but no mortal voice could reach him now, no human tenderness allay his fears.

Helen knelt by the bed, and with long drawn, shuddering breaths prayed that the conflict might be brief. It was all she could do now; the last service earthly love, at once so strong and so powerless, could render to its own.

No sound broke the mournful silence, save the helpless wailings of the little one. Suddenly the child's face changed; the look of pain and terror vanished; a smile of exquisite sweetness played round his lips; the voice, that had been so strained and wild, grew soft and gentle.

In the deep stillness, and where only spirit can commune with spirit, angels were whispering to him, and their words were making the dark valley very beautiful and bright.

The small, thin hands were feebly raised and clasped in prayer; while in low, sweet cadences the child repeated:

"Suffer little children and forbid them not, to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

He paused a moment. The past teachings of the Sunday school were coming back to him, with the simple questions and answers of the infant-class.

"Who said that?" he questioned, firmly; and in a tone of childlike gladness the answer followed,

"Jesus said that."

Again he was silent; then, as if a starry light broke on the precious truth, he murmured wearily, yet sweetly;

"Then, if Jesus said that, He'll take care of me."

The golden head moved restlessly for a second on the pillow; the clasped hands fell apart, the fluttering breath grew still; and with a smile of ineffable peace Ronald was gone.

Silently, in the sacred pause that followed, with bowed head and breaking heart Mr. Humphrey rose and went out. Helen lingered—as we are so prone to linger when God is taking our treasures from us. She could not give her darling up, she could not leave him, though she knew that it was in the cradling arms of Christ.

"My darling," Mrs. Waldemar said, tenderly, while her own tears fell fast, "you must not stay here longer; you must come with me."

She made no answer. But when once again Mrs. Waldemar spoke she leaned forward, laid her own hands gently on the fringed lids and closed them forever for their dreamless sleep, pressed one long and loving kiss on the silent lips, and then let Mrs. Waldemar take her, and do with her as she pleased.

In the quiet days that followed before they laid their darling out of their sight forever, Helen bore up bravely. She comforted Fred and Philip in their passionate sorrow, she watched with tender care over her father's comfort, saying little, but striving in a thousand nameless, touching ways to soothe and cheer him; she gave directions and attended to all her duties calmly and well.

The dangerous illness of his uncle summoned Dr. Waldemar to Boston the day after Ronald's death.

Mrs. Waldemar, with a basket of fair, sweet buds and blossoms whose destination she sadly guessed, brought Helen a little farewell note of sympathy and regret. It ran as follows:

"DEAR MISS HELEN:—There are hours in life when Christ comes very near us: when He brings His cross and lays it at our feet, and sweetly, but firmly, bids us take it up and follow Him. If we take it up, we take Christ's hand

with it; and taking that, find that our weakness is made strong in His strength, our darkness cheered with His light.

"And the cross does not come without a promise: to-day, in the silence of your sorrow, can you not hear Him saying, 'All things—even this loss and bereavement that now is smiting your heart so sorely—work together for good to them that love God.'

"I am very sorry to leave Quinnecco now; but my duty will admit of no delay, and, however reluctant, I must go.

"For the sake of the dear ones still left you, I trust it is unnecessary for me to say, take good care of yourself, Miss Helen. I hope to find you much improved in health and strength on my return.

"And now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, help you to rejoice in the thought of eternity's spring-time—the glad resurrection that is coming, and give you peace always, by all means.

"Your friend,

"GUYON WALDEMAR."

The kind words soothed and comforted Helen.

It was in the afternoon of one of the early March days that they laid Ronald to rest by his mother's side. It was such a day as often comes in March, when clouds and sun are alike uncertain, and nothing seems sure but the wind; and even that came only in long, trumpet blasts, at fitful, irregular intervals. The graveyard stood a little back of the village, on a low hill, directly opposite the ocean; and though some distance from it, the beach banks were worn away, and a long stretch of the blue waters, in all their vastness and solitariness, could be distinctly seen.

For a day or two after the funeral Helen seemed stronger; but then there came the necessity for a little extra exertion, and it was followed by another distressing attack of faintness and weakness. She soon rallied, but Mrs. Waldemar, who chanced to call just then, was much alarmed, and insisted that Dr. Sullivan should be called, and she herself waited until he came.

"Put this child to bed, and keep her there," he said, sententiously, to Mrs. Waldemar after he had briefly interrogated Helen; "she is not sick, but she is worn out. Don't let her read, or think, or do anything but sleep. She doesn't need medicine; nature will do all that is necessary, if you will only give her fair play and a good chance."

And having given this bit of sage advice, the doctor turned and walked deliberately down stairs, and into the sitting-room, where he found Mr. Humphrey, sitting, as usual, in his arm chair over the fire.

"I wonder if you know, Humphrey," he said, with an odd mixture of kindness and bluntness, "what a tender plant you have up-stairs. It won't need much more rough handling to transplant her from this world to a better one."

"If we could all be transplanted together, I don't know but it would be the best thing that could happen to us," Mr. Humphrey replied, cynically.

"Tut, tut, man; is this the fruit of all your boasted philosophy? If you talk in this manner you'll make me believe—that I have suspected for some time—that there is not as great a difference between a fool and a philosopher as some of the wise men would like us to suppose. Meet your troubles like a man. Believe me, it is infinitely wiser to cope with those you see, than to fly to others that you know not of."

"It's easy to talk," Mr. Humphrey retorted, contemptuously.

"Humph! well, I don't know. I fancy that depends somewhat upon one's audience. But I'll tell you this, Humphrey: if it is easy to talk, it is infinitely nobler to act; and that's what I'd like to see you do now."

"What would you like to have me do?" Mr. Humphrey questioned, indifferently.

"Do? that's for you to decide. You are not poor, neither are you old; there are long years of life and usefulness before you yet, if you only will choose to improve them; and you have two fine, manly boys growing up, who ought to be made something off—more than you ever will make of them if you let them stick here in the ruts of Quinnecco."

"You seem to forget," Mr. Humphrey said, much as a prisoner might plead handicaps for not escaping from justice, "that if I have sons, I have also daughters to consider and take care of."

"No, I don't. It is of them I am thinking particularly—one of them, that is. Give the little one plenty of pure air and sunshine, and good food, and she'll do well enough for some years to come. But the other has reached an age now when she needs something more than the supply of mere physical necessities. She needs care, counsel, culture, and every other good thing that life can bestow, to prepare a girl to meet successfully the trials and perils of womanhood. And instead of recognizing this truth, and acting in accordance with it, you keep her here, burdened with cares a mature woman might sink under, if she had not her husband's courage and strength to encourage and uphold her, and fainting under sorrows which call for the tenderest sympathy."

White with rage, Mr. Humphrey started to his feet.

"If any other man had dared to speak to me as you have," he said, angrily, "I'd order him out of my house: but you—you presume on your office, doctor."

"I presume on nothing more or less than my friendship for you and yours," Dr. Sullivan replied, coldly. "A friendship that must always wear gloves is, to my mind, like some kinds of glass, of too dainty and brittle a nature for service in this working world. I am a plain man, Humphrey; I believe in the power of plain, honest words; if you had heard a few more of them in your life it is my opinion you would be a better man to-day, I have no intention of begging your pardon for anything I have said; it is gospel truth—every word of it. And I tell you plainly now, you must do something, and do it soon, if you want to keep that girl from following her mother."

And having discharged this final warning-shot the doctor took his hat and walked off, leaving Mr. Humphrey to his meditations.

The result of his meditations were revealed in part when in the course of a few days a strong, energetic, capable woman appeared and was duly installed as housekeeper. She was a woman of excellent judgment, who understood Matsie, and knew well how to influence her for good; and it was a great relief to Helen to resign to her the cares that had proved too heavy for herself.

She was sitting with Sibyl one breezy, sunny afternoon that seemed like the Herald of spring when the door unceremoniously opened and Margaret Waldemar walked in.

"I've come to take you home with me for a long visit," she said, breathlessly, while she almost stifled Helen with her kisses.

"Mamma sent me: she was coming, but someone came in and prevented. I called at Mr. Humphrey's office with a note from mamma, and he gave his consent: said I might tell you it was his wish that you should go. There is nothing to keep you here another minute: so come, Helen, do go and get ready."

"Ain't I going too?" Sibyl asked, looking up with a sadly disturbed, piteous face.

"Why, of course, little sunbeam: do you think we'd leave our sunshine behind us?"

Full of rest for mind and body was the next week to Helen. Mrs. Waldemar knew well how to cater for her: she understood precisely how to strengthen the body, and at the same time cheer and invigorate the mind; insisted that the girls should spend much of their time in the open air. Helen rallied like a plant that, after being kept long in some dim, dark room, is at last brought where sunshine and warmth can exert their power and do their work.

A week passed swiftly and pleasantly, Dr. Waldemar being still detained in Boston. His uncle, though quiet recovered, was loathe to have him leave him, and, though much against his will, the doctor felt compelled to remain. But one pleasant morning, just as they were rising from breakfast, a telegram came for Mrs. Waldemar: "Expect me on the noon train," it said, and at once all was bustle and pleasurable excitement.

When at twelve o'clock the carriage was ready for the depot, Mrs. Waldemar sent the girls in it.

"The ride in this lovely air will do you both good," she said, "and it will give Guy great pleasure to see you waiting for him."

They drove rapidly, expecting every moment to hear the car-whistle, but found, on reaching the depot, that though behind time the train was not yet in sight.

Helen was standing opposite the window looking curiously in. She saw the operator's face suddenly change, and heard his low, careless whistle give place to the quick, alarmed ejaculation: "What!"

He seemed to telegraph a hurried question, and then waited in evident impatience, for an answer.

"There has been an accident," he said, gravely, "about twenty-five miles from here; they want all the help they can get. We shall send a car at once. Mr. Rogers speaking to his impatient questioner, "will you drive as fast as you can and bring Dr. Sullivan?—he is needed."

An accident! What a thrill of terror and of pain the simple word sent through the hearts of those who heard it! What might not have happened? who could tell if their dear ones were safe?

With pallid faces and trembling lips Margaret and Helen looked at each other.

"What shall we do?" Margaret cried, excitedly. "Guy is on this train. Helen, hadn't we better go right on and find him?"

"Wait a moment," Helen said, huskily, and she turned to the operator, who had just come out to give some order to one of the railroad employes: "Will you please send a telegram for us?" she said. "Ask if Dr. Waldemar is safe."

The man looked at her compassionately. "I'll do it," he said; "but you see the trouble is, no one will know him; and then if he is well—the man stopped: he could not tell the pale, trembling girl before him the thoughts that at that moment flashed across his mind—the conviction that if Doctor Waldemar were safe, he would not wait to be telegraphed about: he would send tidings of his safety at once.

"The conductor is safe," he said, pleasantly, "and I'll send the message to him. The doctor goes back and forth pretty often, and I guess he'll know him. Don't you worry. I don't believe but he'll be all right." The message was sent, and with beating hearts the girls waited.

Once again the little instrument uttered its mysterious language, and very kindly, when it ceased, the operator came to them.

"Don't be frightened," he said, soothingly, "I don't believe it's anything very bad; but—I'm very sorry to have to tell you—but the doctor is hurt."

"Does it say where? how much?" Margaret gasped.

The man shook his head.

"I am going to him," she said, in great excitement, with equally great decision, "there is no time to wait, he may be dying while we stand here. Did you say you were going to send a car?" and she looked at operator.

"It's all ready to start," the man answered; "we are only waiting for Dr. Sullivan."

"Then, when Dr. Sullivan comes, we'll go on with him, Helen."

Helen hesitated.

"Ought we?" she said; "think of your mother, Margaret."

"I do think of her," Margaret answered, with an excited sob. "If she were here she would go, I know; but she can't get here in time for this car, and while we wait Guy's left alone. Send her a message by the coachman, will you?" she said to the operator.

He nodded affirmatively.

"There's Dr. Sullivan now," he said, as at that moment the doctor's kind face darkened for an instant the door of the room.

Margaret sprang towards him.

"Dr. Sullivan, wait!" she cried.