

The Storyteller

AN EVENING IN CHAMBLY.

(Conclusion.)

Calmly she approached and knelt by the sufferer, taking his hand and bowing her fair forehead upon it. Thus she remained for some time in speechless agony, when my ears caught the whispered prayer: 'O my God! if there is pity in heaven for a poor broken heart, let him look upon me once more! Let me hear his gentle voice once again.' Then, placing her mouth to his ear, she said clearly, in a low, pleading tone, 'Will you not speak to me once again, my own betrothed?'

Slowly, as if by a painful effort, the drooping eyelids lifted the long lashes from his cheek, and his eyes rested with unutterable tenderness upon the pale face which was bending over him. 'Oh! speak to me! Say if you know me!' she pleaded, with convulsive earnestness.

Repeatedly did the colorless lips vainly essay to speak, and at length the words were wrenched from them, as it were, in broken sentences, by the agonised endeavor:

'My own, my best beloved! May God bless and comfort you! I leave you with him! He is good to the living and the dying. Trust in Him, my own love, and He will never fail you. I am going to Him, but I will pray for you ever, ever!' Then, with another strong effort, while a sweet smile stole over the features upon which death had set his seal: 'Tell your father I forgive all!' A gurgling sound—a faint gasp—and the light went out from the large, dark eyes, the hand which had held hers relaxed its grasp, and, before the holy priest had closed the prayers for the departing spirit, all was over.

It was the old, old story, repeated again and again, alike in every village and hamlet, on the bosom of old ocean, in the city, and in the wilderness, through all the ages since the angel of death first spread his wings over a fallen world, and carried their dark shadow into happy homes, banishing the sunlight, leaving only the cloud. The same story, ever ancient and ever new, which will be repeated again and again for every inhabitant of earth until 'time shall be no longer'; yet will always fall with new surprise upon the ears of heart-stricken survivors, as if they had never before heard of its dread mysteries! Thank God that it closes for those souls whose loved ones 'rest in hope' with consolations that become, in time, ministering angels over life's dark pathway, smoothing the ruggedness, lighting up the gloom, even unto the entrance of the valley whose shadows are those of death, and supporting them with tender and through the dread passage.

Long did we remain in a silence broken only by bitter sobs pressed from the bleeding heart of that youthful mourner. One by one the Indians, each with his rosary in his hand, had entered noiselessly and reverently knelt, until the lodge was filled with a pious and prayerful assemblage.

In the course of my profession, I had witnessed many death-bed scenes, but had never become so familiar with the countenance of the pallid messenger as to be a mere looker on. A sense of the 'awfulness of life' deepened upon me with each repetition of the vision of death. But I had never before been present at one that so entirely melted my whole being as this—so striking in all the attributes of wild and touching pathos!

God forgive me! I had hitherto lived without a thought of Him or His requirements, and wholly indifferent to all religion. My life, though

unstained by vice, had been regulated by no religious motives, and, so far as any interest in religion was in question, beyond a certain measure of decent outward respect, I might as well have claimed to be a pagan as a Christian. I resolved by that death-bed, while I held the cold hand of that lifeless hero in mine, and mingled my tears with those of the broken-hearted mourner, that it should be so no longer! Then and there I resolved to begin a new life, and offered myself to God and His service in whatever paths it should please His hand to point out to me.

As the morning dawned, old Honey Bee, with gentle persuasions and affectionate urgency, drew the afflicted maiden away, and I saw her no more. I assisted the good priest to prepare the remains of the young officer for the removal, which he was to conduct, and then sought his advice and guidance in my own spiritual affairs, freely opening to him the history of my whole life. After receiving such directions as I required, and promising to see him again soon at Brockville, I returned by the way I went, and never revisited that vicinity.

Some weeks later I was called to the residence of a well-known British officer, a leader of the Orangemen in Upper Canada, to attend a consultation with several other physicians upon the case of his daughter, who was lying in a very alarming state with a fever. Upon entering the apartment of the patient, I was again surprised to discover in this victim of disease the lovely mourner of that sad scene in the wilderness. She lay in a partial stupor, and, when slightly roused, would utter incoherent and mysterious expressions connected with the events of that night, and painful appeals, which were understood by none but myself, who alone had the key to their meaning.

If I had formerly been amazed to see the change a few days had accomplished, how much more was I now shocked at the ravages wrought by sorrow and disease! Could it be possible that the shrivelled and hollow mask before me represented the fair face that had been so lately blooming in beauty—shining with the joy of a glad and innocent heart?

The anguish of her haughty father was pitiful to see! Determined not to yield to the pressure of a grief which was crushing his proud spirit, his effort to maintain a cool and dignified demeanor unsustained by any aid, human or divine, was a spectacle to make angels weep! Alas! for the heart of poor humanity! In whatever petrifications of paltry pride it may be encrusted, there are times when its warm emotions will burst the shell, and assert their own with volcanic power! When the attending physician announced the result of the consultation, in the unanimous opinion that no further medical aid could be of any avail, he stalked up and down the room for some time with rapid strides; then, pausing, before me, and fixing his bloodshot eyes on my face, exclaimed violently, 'It is better so! I tell you it is better even so, than that I should have seen her married to that Yankee Jacobin and Papist! At least I have been spared that disgrace! But my daughter! Oh! she was my only one; peerless in mind, in person, and in goodness; and must she die? Ha! it is mockery to say so! It cannot be that such perfection was created only to be food for worms! As God is good, it may not, shall not, be!'

While he was uttering these frantic exclamations, a thought struck me like an inspiration. The image of old Honey Bee arose suddenly before my mind. I remembered that she had gained the reputation among the settlers of performing marvellous cures in cases of this kind by the use of such simples as her knowledge of all the productions of the fields and forests and their medicinal properties had enabled her to obtain and apply.

Therefore, when the haughty officer paused, I ventured to suggest to his ear and her mother's only, that the Indian woman might possibly be able to make such applications as might at least alleviate the violence of the painful and alarming symptoms. He was at first highly indignant at the proposal of even bringing one of that hated race into his house, much less would he permit one to minister to his daughter. But when I respectfully urged that she be brought merely as a nurse, in which vocation many of her people were known to excel, and which I had known her to exercise with great skill in the course of my practice, failing not to mention her love and admiration for the sufferer, the entreaties of the sorrow-stricken, anxious mother were joined with mine, and prevailed to obtain his consent. I was requested to remain until she should arrive. Nothing was said of the matter to the other physicians, who soon took their leave. When the old friend of the hapless maiden arrived, she consented to take charge of the case only upon condition that she should be left entirely alone with the patient, and be permitted to pursue her own course without interruption or interference. It was difficult to bring the imperious officer to these terms; but my confidence in the fidelity of the old squaw, and the increasing assurance that the only hope of relief for the sufferer lay in the remedies she might use, combined with the prayers of her mother, won his reluctant consent, if I could be permitted to see his daughter daily and report her condition. This I promised to do, and found no difficulty in obtaining the permission of the practitioner to that effect.

Whether the presence of a sympathising friend assisted the treatment pursued I do not know. There are often mysterious sympathies and influences whose potency baffles the wisdom of philosophers and the researches of science. Certain it is that, to my own astonishment, no less than to that of the gratified parents, there was a manifest improvement in the condition of their daughter from the hour her new nurse undertook the charge.

In a few weeks, the attendance of old Honey Bee was no longer necessary. The joy and gratitude of the father knew no bounds. He would gladly have forced a large reward upon her for services which had proved so successful, but she rejected it, saying: 'The gifts that the Great Spirit has guided the Honey Bee to gather are not the price of silver and gold. Freely He gives them: as freely do His red children dispense them. They would scorn to barter the lore He imparts for gold. Enough that the daughter of the white chief lives. Let him see that he quench not the light of her young life again in his home!'

'What does she mean?' he muttered, as she departed. 'Does she know? But no, she cannot; it must be some surmise gathered from expressions of my daughter in her delirium.'

In accordance with my promise, I had called daily during the attendance of the Indian woman, who found opportunity, from time to time, to explain to me the circumstances attending the rescue of the Lightfoot.

The Indians, by whom he was greatly beloved, supposed, when they saw his vessel go down, that he was lost, as they knew him to have been

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