

BEYOND RECALL.

CHAPTER XXXIX.
I TURN PHILOSOPHER.

One Sunday afternoon I found myself dozing over the Encyclopædia. It had been raining all day; my mind was sluggish, and reading had failed to excite a new idea.

Giving myself a shake, I went to the window, thrust my hands in my pockets, and looked out over the dreary moor. Hebe sat hard by, one of the big books open before her on the shelf between two pots of flowers. There was nothing to read but the Encyclopædia.

"Don't you think we might afford to extend our library?" she asked.

"We haven't read a twentieth part of what we've got; these volumes contain all that there is worth knowing."

"Do you think so?"

"What subject of human interest could you suggest as an addition?" I asked, with languid curiosity.

"A work of imagination."

"Oh, a story," said I, with a snort of contempt. "I'll pick up a novel for you the next time I go into the town if I remember it."

"I was not thinking entirely of my own pleasure," she said quietly.

"Well, you need not trouble your head about me. I've got all I need. Romance is good enough for a parcel of girls and boys—and women. But what on earth does a rational man want?" I asked, stretching my arms, "with the history of courtship and marriage? They're all alike—those stories. A couple of young fools fall in love; they fall out of love; they are reconciled, and their folly is consummated in a marriage."

"Romance is not always confined to young people, and it sometimes begins after marriage."

"Oh, if they're not young there's less excuse for their folly, and if they can't live soberly after marriage their adventures can have no more interest for a sane man than the vagaries of a couple of idiots at large."

"Even the vagaries of idiots may excite our sympathy."

"I suppose I've got no sympathy," then, after a long yawn, I added, "Anyhow, I don't want to have it excited by such profitless stuff."

My desultory reading in the Encyclopædia had led me to skim over one or two systems of philosophy, picking up an argument here or there which pleased me, and leaving the rest.

There was nothing in the expanse of leaden cloud and stony moor to interest me, and as Hebe was silent, I continued sentimentally—

"The object of life is the attainment of happiness. True happiness is nothing but a condition of contentment. Contentment is only to be obtained by the complete subjection of those passions that upset the perfect balance of joy and sorrow on which equanimity depends. A wise man avoids anything which excites his passion; and if I thought a book could stir me up either to hate or love, I would avoid it as carefully as indulgence in an intoxicating drink."

My wife sighed. I yawned again.

"I'm not clever enough to argue upon abstract questions," she said. "But all that you have said seems to me quite wrong."

"How's that?" I asked, in a tone of unphilosophic irritation.

"If all that you have said is true, it would seem that the highest aim of mankind is to undo all that civilisation and culture have done, and sink back to the condition of animals—ay, even lower than that, for even they can suffer."

"Well, and suppose we arrived at the condition of vegetables, trees, heather, grass—I don't see that we should lose anything worth a moment's regret. But, hold hard! I exclaimed, waking up with a new idea that had for me the charm of originality; "what is there to justify a belief that the condition of a tree is lower than our own? May it not be that the ultimate end of civilisation is to make man as obedient to the laws of nature as the tree?"

"Gregory! Gregory!" said my wife, passionately. "Did you never love?"

I sat down because I was tired of standing. My wife was opposite to me, the light falling on her face that had lost its color and composure.

"What has that to do with the argument?" I asked.

She dismissed that question with an impatient gesture. Her agitation about such a trifle made me laugh. Then, my elbow on the shelf, my chin in my hand, I turned my head and looked again at the slanting rain. It seemed to me that it would be better for us both if she arrived at the same style of indifference as myself; we should jog on then in this comfortable way without bother.

"I suppose every man must fall in love some time or other," said I, muzzling my words without taking my chin from my hand; "same as he gets measles and other childish disorders. I've got through mine, and am not likely to be attacked again, thank God!"

"You were happy then?" she said, eagerly.

"Myes—sort of. One day mad with joy; next day mad with despair—hope one moment; fear the next—delirious always. Balancing insane delight against insane wretchedness, the result, I suppose, left me something to the credit of happiness."

"But you were happier then than you are now—think—answer me truly;" and then, as I made no reply, she added, impatiently, "Do answer me."

"I'm thinking it over. It's difficult to answer in a moment about feelings that are past. I know this, though: I wouldn't change my present condition for that."

"You would not?"

"No, not for the world," said I with emphasis.

"Then you never loved?" she said in a voice that trembled with sorrowful emotion.

"Never loved!" I exclaimed, as all that I had endured through my passion flashed upon me. "Never loved! I have loved as a man only can love who has loved but once. I've heard that when a disease lays hold of a strong, healthy man the danger is greater than when it seizes a feeble man who has got through a dozen petty maladies. That's why I took it so badly. Never loved—why, I gave my life for the woman I loved. That isn't much, you say; a man's life is worth so little. You may calculate its value in pounds, shillings, and pence—by the sum a suicide has lost on a horse race,

A man will put an end to his life for the silliest trifle. But" I added growing fierce with my recollection of the past. "It's not a trifle that leads him to murder a woman. I never heard of a man killing a woman because he had lost a wager or robbed an employer. A man must be mad with passion to do murder."

"Why do you talk of murder?" asked my wife, quaking with horror.

"Because I cannot think of my love and forget its effect. I tell you it brought me to that pitch. It made me a murderer at heart. I only needed the opportunity to be a murderer in deed. I would have killed the woman I loved."

"The woman you hated!" said my wife in correction.

"I know what I say, and I tell you it was the last convulsion of love. That was long ago—I had time in prison to get over it. A gaol's good for that. A man gets the nonsense knocked out of him there; his sensibilities are stamped under foot till he's callous to pain or pleasure—like a tire-some tooth when the nerve is destroyed. How could he live on and on otherwise?"

I glanced at my wife as I put the question. A single tear dropped from her cheek for reply. She must have seen that I told the truth, for I turned again to look out of the window, unmoved by her sympathy; occupied solely with my own bitter reflections.

"But an attack of that kind leaves its trace behind," I went on after a pause. "It affected my brain long after it had ceased to ravage my heart. They ought to have sent me to a madhouse instead of keeping me here. Perhaps they did not see that I was mad; I didn't till I got away from the punishment cell, and crank, and the irons that stimulated my mania. But I was mad. Oh, you'd admit it if you knew all. Never mind that—it's all over now; and I'm healthier and better than ever I was."

"Better?"

"Why, yes. I tell you I would have murdered the woman I loved; well, now I would not walk across the room to do her an injury. Isn't that an improvement?"

My wife shook her head sorrowfully, her chin falling on her breast.

"And this is the secret of my mercy," I added. "I've no more love for her than I have for that dog."

"Oh, it will come back again," Hebe cried, suddenly, as hope re-animating her. "Just as the buds burst on the trees when the winter is quite gone, love will come back to your heart."

"There's plenty of room for it," said I with a hard laugh; "for there's nothing left of my heart but the shell."

This itch of philosophising took hold of me, and as the weather about this time kept me indoors, where I had no mechanical occupation for the moment, I indulged it pretty freely at my wife's expense. Remembering her suggestion I bought a novel for her—Thackeray's "Esmond."

"Will you read me a chapter, Gregory, while I work?" she asked, thinking, perhaps, to wean me from the Encyclopædia, and humanise me.

My absurd vanity led me into the trap, but without the anticipated effect.

"That's true!" I exclaimed, closing the book at the end of the first chapter. "This man lays bare the secrets which novelists and law makers shut their eyes to."

"I am afraid I do not quite understand," said Hebe.

I opened the book again and read the conclusion of the chapter.

"I look into my heart and think that I am as good as any Lord Mayor, and know I am as bad as Tyburn Jack. Give me a chain and red gown and a pudding before me, and I could play the part of Alderman very well, and sentence Jack after dinner. Starve me, keep me from books and honest people, educate me to love vice, gin, and pleasure, and put me on Hounslow Heath with a purse before me and I will take it."

"And what conclusion do you draw from that?" she asked, diffidently.

"That we are one and all mere creatures of circumstances; and that to reward one man for his virtues is just as unreasonable and unjust as to punish another for his vices."

"Oh, I am sure he did not mean that. You will find, as you read on, that Thackeray loved the good and hated the bad with all sincerity."

"Then he was inconsistent, and there's no sincerity in his philosophy."

"I would rather his philosophy were faulty than his heart."

"It's more likely to be the other way about. Guided by reason, one can't go wrong; led by feeling, one can only be chance go right. Why should a man be hated for vices that are the result of condition for which he is not responsible. You might as reasonably hate him for being born; he is not to blame for either."

My wife laid her work upon her lap, fixed her eyes upon me while she collected her thoughts and then, in a low, earnest tone, said—

"Suppose that I sanctioned the course that sent my husband to prison, knowing that another course would save him?"

I nodded, and she continued with an effort—

"Suppose that after that I—I—" she stopped short, the color, covering her face.

"I know," said I with a laugh. "Suppose you were unfaithful to him? All right; I can suppose that."

"Then, would you not hate me? Should I not deserve all your hatred?"

"Not a bit of it," said I, unmoved. "All that is simply the result of education and temperament. You had been taught to love ease and luxury and the flattery of society. You thought you could not live as the acknowledged wife of a condemned convict. You considered that before the twenty years expired, to which your husband was bound to be condemned, either he or you would be dead. And then afterwards—"

"Oh, don't go any further," she cried in horror.

"Very good. There's nothing in your conduct that I myself should not have done had I been in your place, under similar conditions and circumstances."

She looked at me in silent wonder and pain.

"That must be the judgement of any dispassionate mind," I continued. "It proves what I said, that a man cannot be unjust if he is guided by reason. But I would not answer for myself if I were under the domination of emotions. I

couldn't be lenient, even if I had any feeling for you—oh, I know the madness that comes with love!"

"And others—partners in my crime—could you forgive them as readily?"

"You mean Major Clevedon.—I know the whole story. You asked if I should not hate him. No—if met him to-morrow on the moor, I should let him pass without a curse."

It was true. I felt as I walked up and down, thinking the matter over, that, taking all the circumstances into consideration, it would have been a terrible thing for both of us if I had retained any feeling of love for my wife. Our present condition was the most pleasant I could imagine; it was endurable to my wife, and convinced that it could only exist with a philosophical state of apathy on my side, I resolved to keep my passions under subjection to the end.

I might as well have ordered the sun never to rise again, in order that I should sleep in endless night.

CHAPTER XL.
ANOTHER PHASE.

It must have been about three weeks after the foregoing discussion, that, glancing down the list of household requirements Hebe had made for me to take with me into town, I found at the bottom this item:—

"A little quinine."

"What's this?" I asked. "What sort of delicacy requires this ingredient?"

"I don't feel very strong," she explained, in a tone of dejection.

I had been so engrossed in making myself a forge out in the shed, and setting up a bench there, that I had not remarked any change in my wife's condition. Indeed, her undeviating gentleness had lulled me into such a feeling of content and security that I paid less attention to her than ever.

"I've noticed nothing," said I looking at her in astonishment.

"I am glad of that." Her voice quivered a little. I could see now that her face lacked the brightness I had noticed when she told me with buoyancy that she felt stronger than for years before. She must have gone gradually back little by little in slight degrees for the alteration to be imperceptible, even though my thoughts were otherwise engaged.

"You would have noticed," she went on with the slightest accent of bitterness, "if I had failed to supply your wants." Then her lips quivered, and she dropped her head to conceal the rising tears, as she added, "I can't keep up my spirits as I used."

I turned away, fearing there was going to be a scene—irritated that she could not go on just the same as I did. She had her work and her books; and, besides that, there were the dog and the fowls and the household things to amuse her. What else could she want?

"What made you think of quinine?" I asked.

"It did me a little good when I first came to Torquay. Dr. Borington advised it."

"Dr. Borington is the doctor at Torquay?"

"Yes. I thought it might bring back my strength. It is dreadful to feel so tired."

I went out and saddled the pony.

"You had better not sit up for me," said I returning to the cottage before starting. "It may be late before I come in."

"But you may want something. She spoke almost hopefully.

"Oh, if I want anything I can get it myself. I don't want to be waited on."

"No," she said, mournfully. "You could do as well without me as with me, couldn't you?"

I hadn't the grace to protest against this. In my conceit, perhaps, I thought I might find just as much satisfaction in solitude.

"Anyway, you go to bed when you feel tired," said I.

Instead of going to Tavistock I went to Torquay. More than once on the way I looked at that last line on the list—"a little quinine"—and each time with growing uneasiness, though I did not perceive its pathetic significance then as I do now. I merely considered the personal inconvenience I should be put to if my wife really fell ill and I lost her services.

At Torquay I found Dr. Borington, a keen, dark-eyed, sallow man, with an irritable manner. He glanced at me and then at his watch as if he were in a hurry to get the interview over and pocket his fee.

I told him my wife was ailing. He questioned me closely, and with increasing sharpness as my answers revealed, not only my wife's condition, but my own character. What I did not tell him he divined, and so justly that it seemed to me he must know who my wife was and all her history.

"Your wife is a delicate, sensitive woman," he said, taking confirmation from my face. "A young woman—affectionate disposition—fond of her children, cats, dogs, any living thing—Patient, painstaking—don't bother you with her troubles—keeps them to herself? Had a mental strain at sometime? Suffered a good deal of unhappiness? Stops at home—don't see many friends? No change of scene—no amusements outside her home?" He paused a moment, and went on again. "You say she subsists almost exclusively on a milk diet—been under medical treatment already—that diet was prescribed? Anything else?"

"She took quinine."

"Before the milk diet was resorted to?" He sat down and began to write, still questioning: "No cough—complains of nothing but feeling tired and low spirited? You find her crying without cause? Of course you do your best to cheer her?"

"I have my occupations," said I.

He stopped writing, and, looking up, said—

"You are more concerned about them than the life of your wife."

"What's the matter with her?" I asked, startled by this suggestion.

"A complaint that's only too common," he said, finishing the prescription and rising. "Your wife is suffering from—" he handed me the paper—"a careless husband."

He struck the gong. I could find nothing to say as I put my fingers in my waistcoat pocket for a sovereign.

"I don't want your money," he said. "If the medicine fails to do good to your wife, let the poor soul come to me."

I covered my retreat with the boldest face I could put on it, and with growing discomfort I took the prescription to the chemist whose address was stamped at the head of the paper.

"What should you say was the matter with the patient?" I asked, when the old man had read it through.

"Weak digestion."

"Well, that's not very serious."

"Oh, that's your opinion, is it?" he asked regarding me over the top of his glasses. My look and manner seemed to offend him not less than it did the doctor. He put a paperweight on the prescription, and turned to take down a bottle. Measuring some liquid in a glass, his back turned to me, he resumed—

"If you had a lamp, and for some reason or other the wick ceased to convey the oil properly, should you be greatly surprised if you were left in the dark?"

I could find no reply. The parable struck me with startling force, the conclusion stupefied me.

The living room was empty when I returned. Closing the door as noiselessly as I had opened it, I stood for some minutes there with my hand on the latch, looking around me in dull depression. There was no sound but the low grumbling of the dog, who, coiled up on the landing above kept a jealous eye on me. My supper was laid on the table, my chair placed, a glass of flowers set where the light of the lamp fell. My slippers were by the stove; a chamber candle with a box of matches stood ready on the dresser. She had forgotten nothing.

For weeks she had never failed to open the door to me on my return, to take the parcels from my hands, to open them one after the other with smiling interest when she was assured that I had all that I wanted on the table, and to draw me into conversation about my purchases as I ate and drank. I had never perceived that it was a pleasure to talk and listen to her, taking it as a matter of course, and part of that contented state of mind that I intended to maintain for the future. The difference made by her absence astonished me, and the more so when I reflected that all my physical requirements were as carefully provided for as usual. "All the color is gone!" I said to myself.

Every moment I hoped to hear her footstep overhead. I wanted her to come down, without knowing why. I had nothing cheerful to talk to her about, and if she were tired it was better she should sleep on. This was the first time I had felt it incumbent on myself to make my conversation agreeable, or in any way studied what would be best for her.

Usually I returned ravenous from my journey across the moor, and attacked supper the first thing. To-night my appetite was gone, and I set about quietly putting back the things in their places on the dresser and in the cupboard, admiring everywhere the perfect neatness and order that prevailed. Then, when the table was cleared, having as little inclination for sleep as for food, I sat down in Hebe's chair by the window, looking at the folded work on the shelf and the things she had been using during the day. The work was a curtain for the window of my room. In her work-basket was a bodkin of my inventing; I hadn't been able to make it work, but it was there amongst her treasures.

I thought about looking into the Encyclopædia to see what it said on the subject of "Decline," but my courage failed; and at last, finding my spirits sinking lower and lower, I got up, lit my candle, and blew out the lamp. At the door leading into my new room I turned and glanced back. Howler had ceased to growl. There was not a sound. The room looked emptier than ever in the feeble light I held; the shadows on the wall were phantoms; the flowers on the table seemed dead now the lamp was out.

"If it were always like that!" I said to myself in awe.

In the morning I remembered that I had of late forgotten to fetch the water. It was a relief to think that she might not have felt tired without cause. I had the kettle boiling, the room dusted, and the breakfast things on the table before she came down. I was standing outside, undecided what to do next, when Howler bundled down the steps, and set up a regular howl of delight at the bottom. Hebe was looking at the table in astonishment when I went in; but her amazement was greater still when I held out my hand with a bashful awkwardness, and hoped she felt better. It was the first time since the old days that I had offered my hand to her. She put hers into mine, and pressed it in silence, her eyes alone expressing that this was for her a moment of solemn presage.

Howler came up and sniffed at my legs, as though he were in doubt about my identity.

"I thought you might sleep late, so I got breakfast ready," I said, withdrawing my hand, and feeling it necessary to excuse myself, lest she should give me credit for more feeling than I possessed. At one moment, as we stood there hand in hand, a wild tenderness in her quivering lips made me fear she would throw her arms about my neck.

"Oh, I have slept too long; I didn't hear you come in. You could have made no noise at all—and thank you for asking about me; I feel much better and brighter this morning."

She spoke hurriedly, and with agitation. But she regained her composure by the time we were seated at table.

"I've put the things in the cupboard, but I haven't turned them out of the bags, and the quinine is on the shelf."

"I feel now as if I should not want it." "But you must take it, and when that's gone I'll get more. Your hand ought not to be so hot as that." The words slipped out involuntarily, and I hastened to cover them by adding, "And there are some books in that parcel over there, and illustrated papers."

"This is like the mornning you brought the flowers home," she said, with soft gratitude dwelling on every word.

She opened the packet, and bringing the illustrated papers to the table, drew her chair near mine, that we might look at the pictures together. It was as if she had never seen the like before. There was absorbing interest in every one; even the Prince of Wales "laying another foundation stone, poor fellow!" suggested a dozen ingenious comments. I should have dismissed the whole batch in five minutes; the tea was cold before she had half exhausted the fund of amusement.

"If you could make some frames we might hang the large pictures round the room, Gregory," she hinted—never forgetful of my weakness, though perhaps giving it another name. I promised to make frames of an entirely original kind.

"And why did you buy these?" she asked, without raising her eyes from the paper, but with an earnestness that she could scarcely conceal.

"I thought it would cheer you up a bit

when I am occupied with things that make me forget you, you know. It struck me that things weren't exactly balanced as they should be. My work is a pleasure yours is a duty; and you ought to have something to interest and amuse you, just as I have; that's only just; and un-us things are just, we can't go on contentedly."

"Was that the only reason?" she asked without changing her tone, without raising her eyes—"to make me content?"

"I don't remember what response I made; it was scarcely intelligible to myself I know. "Tap"—a tear fell on the paper—"tap!"

"Are you thinking about your children?" I asked, not harshly.

She shook her head.

It was not her tears that moved me; only the thought of being left alone in the world that pushed me on to an extremity.

"If you could manage it somehow," I said, "that you could go and see them."

"No," she said, closing the paper, and hurriedly drying her eyes. "No; they are well cared for, I know. My place is here. I will wait so long as there is any hope of finding my husband."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A BOY IN THE ROLE OF JONAH.

Lowered Into an Elephant's Stomach to Remove an Indigestible Iron Bar.

Apropos to the incident related recently of the death of Zipp, the big elephant at Barbo, Wis., from having swallowed a chain weighing 90 pounds, a reminder was called up and related by Dr. Hume of Denver.

"Just prior to the demise of the much lamented Phineas T. Barnum I was touring in Connecticut and called upon the great showman at Bridgeport, who invited me to see the circus animals in winter quarters. On arriving at the great caravansary where the wonders that tour the country year after year are stored, the illustrious owner was informed that Beta, the prize trick elephant, was ailing. All the symptoms of the poor beast pointed to the fact that she was suffering from acute gastritis and means had been tried to relieve her without avail.

"It was finally discovered that Beta had by some means wrenched off an iron bar from her stall, and as it could not be found it was surmised that she had swallowed it, and which accounted for the gastric irritation of the valuable pachyderm.

"Mr. Barnum saw that poor Beta must soon succumb to the inflammation caused by such a large foreign body and with ready wit resolved on a unique plan to remove it. Attached to his large winter hotel was a small colored boy who went by the name of Nigger Joe. He was but little larger than a full-grown possum, and P. T. sent for him and explained that he must take a rubber tube in his mouth to breath through, and with a rope round his waist, must go down into the elephant's stomach and get out that bar of iron.

"Joe rolled his eyes and demurred, but he knew his employer too well to refuse. Accordingly Joe was anointed with a pound of vaseline and Beta being safely gagged, he was gently pushed down the giant oesophagus head first, a smooth stick well oiled landing him at the bottom. According to instructions the boy soon gave three tugs at the rope to be pulled out again, and sure enough, tightly clasped in Joe's hands was the offending and indigestible iron bar. It is needless to say that Beta's life was saved and that Nigger Joe was handsomely rewarded for his cure of the valuable elephant's indigestion."

An Extraordinary Story.

An extraordinary story—one of the reality-beating-romance style—reaches us from Kieff. The news reads like a shilling-shocker or a Porte St. Martin drama, and, without entering into all the unsavoury details on which our correspondent dwells, we may summarise his narrative briefly, as follows:—It seems that, by the orders of the Central Revolutionary Committee, one of the affiliated and entrusted last October with the strange mission of eloping with the wife of one of the chiefs of the famous Third Section of the Imperial Chancellery, the object of the proceeding being to extort from Madam la Generale some information about a fresh system of reprisals against Nihilists, as planned by the High Police. The mission it appears was not one of extreme difficulty, for on the 10th of November the couple were travelling in Italy under the respective descriptions of Anna Ritter, vocalist, and Richard Werner, impresario, and several voluminous reports had been despatched to St. Petersburg. In the meantime, the escape had been made known in every detail to the police all over the Empire, and when the couple returned on the 12th of December to Russia, and repaired to Kieff, that hot-bed of Nihilism, it was only to meet a speedy doom. Man and woman were recognised immediately, and his Excellency, telegraphed for from St. Petersburg, started without delay, and surprised his wife with her paramour in an hotel. Before the gendarmes who were following him could interfere, the General, drawing his sword, began to hack about, decapitating his wife with a tremendous blow, and mortally wounding the man. The body of the woman was buried the same night, and the wretched man thrown into prison, where every care will be taken that he does not die before he speaks out. So eager is the Russian Government to know every particular of this story that a special emissary has been despatched to retrace the route journeyed by the two lovers.

A TERRIBLE WRECK.

Collision of a Passenger Train With a Cattle Train in Hungary.

A Buda Pesth, telegram says:—A passenger way train and a cattle train collided near Grau-to-day. The cattle train was heavily loaded and its impetus forced the locomotive over the locomotive of the passenger train and into the first and second carriages. The other carriages of the passenger train were partially smashed. In the first carriage three persons were killed instantly and 10 more were severely, perhaps fatally injured. In the second carriage 15 persons were injured too so seriously that they are expected to die. In the other carriages 18 persons were cut or bruised, but none dangerously. The engine drivers of both trains were terribly burned, but may recover. Three hundred head of cattle were killed. Most of the injured who could be moved have been taken to the Grau hospital. The misplacement of a switch is supposed to have caused the accident.