

"NOT SURE ABOUT THAT SAME."

"AN OWER TRUE TALE."

BY MRS. E. OAKES SMITH, AUTHOR OF THE "SINLESS CHILD," ETC.

"AND so you have had two wives, Robert, they tell me, and you are a very young man still."

This was said by way of parenthesis to Robert Kennie, the gardener, who had a year before married a pretty seamstress, very much to his own happiness and the discomfort of certain families in the neighbourhood, who from that time forth despaired of having "gaging," "side stitch," or "over and over," ever again done to their liking. And now Jeannie was slightly ill, began to look shy, and her blushes were brighter than ever; and many were the old baskets and "budget bags" examined in her behalf.

"Two wives did you say, ma'am?"

"Yes, Robert," and the last parcel was thrust into the basket in the same breath with the response. Strange enough, Robert set the basket upon the floor, and the smile of honest pride and pleasure, at the interest we all took in the affairs of little Jeannie, passed from his face, and he replied, in a thoughtful, musing manner—

"I am not sure about that same, ma'am. 'Twould be a great easing to my mind, ma'am, if you would explain things a bit to me."

"Certainly, Robert, I will aid you in any way I can, to the best of my judgment; but will not Jeanie be expecting you home?"

"No—Kate Randell is staying with her; and I think I might be made a happier man by telling a bit about poor Mary."

He had taken a small rake, unawares it would seem, into the room; and now having respectfully taken the chair I pointed out, he leaned his two hands upon the handle of the implement, and to my astonishment I beheld the large tears dropping from his eyes upon the floor. I did not interrupt his grief, for it was too late to tell him he had no right to call little Jeane his wife, if the memory of Mary was still so painfully dear to him. Besides, he was a poor unlettered youth, and while so many of his betters sanction all sorts of inconsistency in matters of sentiment, it seemed idle cruelty to attempt to set him right.

"So many of his betters!" But Robert shall tell his own story, and then we shall see if the unlearned and simple-hearted do not live nearest to the Temple of Truth.

"I am thinking, ma'am, I committed a great wrong in the matter of poor Mary, and my mind is never quite easy about it. I did'n't think so much about it till the day she died, poor thing!"

Here Robert was silent, for his voice was fairly

choked by his emotion. I, too, half arose from my seat, and nervously re-arranged the geranium stand, with that instinctive selfishness natural to persons of quick sensibilities, who dread to have their sympathies painfully awakened. The movement aroused the professional jealousy of Robert, whose habits of forethought in the taste of these little arrangements seemed to be impeached by my interference. It gave him, too, a more defined current of thought.

"I am thinking, ma'am, that some women folks are just like these flowers. They must have just the right kind of sile, and the right light, and the right heat, and every thing suited to their natures, or they will die. 'Tis'n't so with all plants, for some will seem to get along and grow, and flower, and look well, under any treatment, and so it is with most of women. But poor Mary was like one of these geraniums, and when she withered away, it seemed a kind of cruelty, just as it always looks to me, to see a geranium dying out of place."

This professional illustration of the point in hand seemed to linger upon the fancy of Robert, as if by dwelling upon it, his taste and his sentiment were both alike gratified.

"Why, Robert, you are certainly indulging a sickly fancy in talking in this wise of Mary; and as to any self-reproach, it ought to be out of the question, for I am sure you have too good a heart to neglect any one. And then too, Robert, I shall speak frankly, for I have heard that Mary was a sickly, complaining, melancholy creature, likely to make both herself and you miserable. Now, Jeane

"God bless her," interrupted the gardener, rising to an attitude of respectful earnestness; "but indeed, ma'am, that is why I wish to tell of Mary, because she was blamed when I was the one to bear the blame. God forbid that I should ever have neglected Mary. No, no. I cared for her night and day, but it wasn't the right kind of care, nor from the right one, and she grew sickly, pined, and died. She didn't love me, ma'am, as a woman should love to become a wife."

"Robert, have you ever been to your priest, and told him of this matter? Did you ask counsel of him?"

"In part, ma'am, but he doesn't seem rightly to understand me, and things are not clear to my own mind; only I believe but for me Mary Duncan might at this day be fresh and blooming, and singing like a bird, as she always did, poor thing!

You see, when I first came to this country, ma'am, I was employed by old Mr. Brewster upon his grounds, and Mary was a bit of a lass doing small work for the ladies of the family. At first she was always smiling like, and singing. Then she began to grow pale, and mute; and I—I, a fool of a boy, must needs think she was pining for me. Then I began to think how wondrous lovely, and meek, and good she was. One day I did something tender-like to her, and she burst out a crying as if her little heart would break. I put her head on my shoulder, and comforted her, and she seemed like a dear child to me. You must know that Mary talked the whole matter over before she died, and she seemed more like the holy Virgin in spirit than any thing else.

"I never talked love to that child, ma'am, never; and yet I began to talk about going to the priest's. Mary was fearful in her nature, and she did not tell me all about herself. She was an orphan with neither kith nor kin, and like one of these plants made to cling to something else or they cannot grow. She had a lover, to whom she had been attached like ever since they were little children. She did not tell me this till I began to regard her so much mine, that it would have been terrible to part with her. He was to come out at a certain period, and she was to keep her faith till that time. If he did not come, she might suppose he was dead or changed.

"Poor little Mary!—this was the time I first began to notice her. She moved about heavy-like, and grew pale, and the smallest thing set her to crying. She sometimes thought he had forgotten her; and then come the fear that he might be dead. My sympathy—for I thought maybe the child is ailing for home,—helped to turn her away from gloom; and we sat hours talking about auld Ireland, and the places and people we had known there. Then when I began to go with her wherever she went, never talking about it,—for somehow I did not, yet I could never bear to see any body else near her, and even was angry when Mary did not look to me for protection. Then Mary told me of the absent lover. She was gentle and loving in her nature, and had regarded me as a brother whom she might love and trust with no thought as to the future.

"Ma'am, I was nigh on't wild when I heard of this; and I made Mary promise, that if Dermott did not come within two weeks after the time appointed, she would be my wife. You may think she was unhappy, ma'am. No; she was so like a sweet child, that when she saw all smiling and happy about her, she couldn't be miserable herself, even though things weren't quite to her liking. But I remember now, and, ma'am, I shall never forget how tearful her eyes looked sometimes, and how she tried to smile and it came faint-like, and her hands grew icy cold, and her voice stopped its singing. But I would'nt regard these things then; and God forgive me, often and often I wished Dermott would never come—for I was selfish, and

full of a blind love for the meek, innocent creature."

Robert was for many moments silent, as if a perplexing and painful current of thought oppressed him. He resumed.

"Well, the time come, and no lover come with it; the two weeks were over, and the bridal made ready. We had a few of our own people, and the priest made Mary mine; and she seemed quite gentle and content, and I thought more beautiful, and lovable than ever. I don't know why it is, ma'am, that a sorrowful face should go so nigh to the heart; but so it is.

"We were to have a fine treat; and while the females prepared that in one room, the younger folks were making merry in the other. We heard a knock at the door, and then some one spoke. Mary sprang for the door, and I, ma'am,—yes, I,—held the poor child back with a grasp that left the prints upon her arm. I held that child from the heart that——"

Robert's eyes were distended as if with horror at the recollection, and then suddenly drawing in his breath, he sank like a stricken child upon his knees, and scarcely above a whisper, uttered—

"Tell me truly, ma'am, was it not my duty then at that moment to have given her to her lover?"

"Most assuredly, Robert. God forgive you that you did not."

"Amen."

The voice was so sepulchral, that I started and looked around to see from where it could have come.

"I did not. Ah! she was so beautiful, so lovable, and the priest had bound her to me. She was mine. I could not, would not resign her to another. The very peril of losing her made me more fiend than human."

"What did Mary say, Robert?"

"Poor girl! She only looked into my face, so still, so sorrowful, her blue eyes without a tear, and her dear cheek white, and the light curls all away from one side of her face, just as they had fallen when I thrust her back. I thought she had stopped breathing. Then the door opened, and closed softly, and the room was hushed as if for the dead.

"My mother whispered how Dermott was there, and how she had told him all; and that he was sitting by the door with no power to move. And then she turned to Mary, and said, 'He only asks one kiss of ye, Mary, and then he will never trouble ye again.' 'One, Robert, only one,' said poor Mary, rising to go. 'Ye are my wife, Mary, and James Dermott shall never, never kiss your cheek;' and I held her with a strong hand. Mary neither spoke nor moved."

"Robert, Robert, you may well pray God to forgive you —" I stayed my speech, for the man was crushed at his own recollections.

"Mary never uttered his name from that time forth. She strove to smile. She was gentle and good; and oh! so quiet, that I would have given worlds to have met an angry glance. I would

have given worlds to have had her reproach me. But night and day I watched over her. I was doomed to early lose the being I had wronged, and whose patient misery was a perpetual reproach to me. I neglected every thing to meet her slightest wishes; while she, as she never reproached me, so did she forbear always to call upon me for the slightest attention. She had a forlorn aspect, as a plant will have that has been left to the mercy of a storm."

"Did she live long, Robert?"

The man started with a sharp expression of pain.

"One day my mother came in and told us that Dermott was dead. It was not a year from that fatal night. The third day Mary was in her grave. A blossom of beauty, and a bud never unfolded to the light. My mother—for women feel differently about these things from what we do—my mother bade me bury Mary beside of Dermott, and I obeyed."

"Robert," I said, "you are ill. This is so unlike you, that I cannot believe it to be a real truth you have told me."

"Aye, ma'am, it seems like a terrible dream to me. I have tried to think it over. I have tried to find an excuse for my cruelty. But poor dead Mary,—it is too, too true. It was not love that I bore her—it was the love of power—the tenderness of a brother;—but I could never bear opposition. I could not sacrifice my own will for the happiness of any creature, till this great grief changed my whole nature."

"But where is Jeane all this time? Did you conceal this strange story from her?"

"God forbid. I told it her when I first found what it meant to lose another. And to-night she bade me talk with you, thinking you might see it in a different light from what I did."

"No, Robert, no; do not hide your great fault from your own eyes. Dare to look it in the face, and repent manfully therefor. Mary was no wife of yours in the sight of God, and you should have yielded her to the lover, the betrothed lover, whom you defrauded by a miserable quibble—for days and weeks are not to be named in the calendar of vows between true hearts."

Robert bowed his head in silence. At length he resumed, in a tone trembling from anxiety—

"Jeane is not in the least like poor Mary; and yet now when she is moving in the very room where poor Mary used to sit so quietly, and she is silently making this small work, I have more than once shuddered to see just such a look pass over her face as Mary had. I sometimes fear I am to be punished in a still greater manner—that the four years of agony is not atonement enough!"

And the tears gushed from the eyes of the darkened man, and he grasped the chair convulsively.

Little can be said upon subjects like these. They are viewed according to the enlightenment of sentiment, and conscience; and only to the Great Comforter can the weary heart carry its burden.

Robert's presentiments of evil, however, were unrealized. Jeane is as blooming, and more cheerful than ever—for a house is ever prosperous where love presides at the altar; and the smiles of infancy will of themselves chase away all the spirits of evil.

THE MOURNER.

BY MRS. M. CARPENTER.

Droop not, pale mourner! clouds of transient sorrow
May dim life's brightest day.—
Sleep thou with hope, and thou shalt wake to-morrow,
To find them pass'd away.

The rose that droops and withers, does not perish!
But, with its mother earth,
Its forces mingling, serves to aid and cherish
The plant of later birth.

So, if beneath the blessed eye of heaven
Blooms the eternal mind;
Even in our ashes will some good be given,
To those we leave behind.

Be thou in faith's white beauty so excelling,
That all shall miss thy loss!
As a fair spire, that threw o'er humblest dwelling,
The radiance of the cross.

We know, to him whose footstep does not falter,
But onward, upward tends—
Whose prayer, an incense from the pure heart's altar,
To Heaven alone ascends,

Death comes not like a doomsman of dread presage;
But with such sweet command,
As if he were an angel with a message
From the soul's fatherland.

And each good deed he flung on ocean's bosom,
While sailing o'er life's wave,
Shall bear to him an odour and a blossom
Beyond the silent grave.

Then be of cheerful heart, O weary mortal!
For after this world's wars,
The narrow valley hath a glorious portal
Of sunbeams and of stars.