

## Literature, &amp;c.

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## THE WIDOW'S CHILD.

A TALE OF THRILLING INTEREST.

I CAME upon them one evening at the grove, it was now midsummer. They were sitting together, hand in hand, upon a turf bench, close to a small waterfall, a favorite resort of theirs, and as they sat they gazed at each other without speaking, she with her face flushed and glowing, and her eyes sparkling in a way I have never else observed, in that attitude they continued several minutes without noticing me, so absorbed were they with each other. She appeared to feel a strange delicious rapture from his mere presence: it was most singular, there was an enthusiasm in it—indeed, now at least the spark had been applied, and that constitutional fanaticism which her mother gave her, and which had lain so long dormant in her bosom, blazed forth in this new form more fiercely than it had ever flamed in her! Was it indeed so, was that frenzied love but an approach to hereditary insanity?

But while this fierce passion had been thus advancing, think not that efforts were wanting to stay its progress. My own advice I ventured to give, but it was received in a way that led me not to offer it again, but the mother—the enthusiastically virtuous, the wildly religious mother—every thing a mother could, she did; she reasoned, entreated, wept and prayed; anon, stormed and cursed, her poor distracted child. Nay once she went through some strange superstitious operations with a minister of her own sect from the neighbouring city, with the view—smile not, reader, at the weak woman's delusion—of casting out the devil, which she firmly believed had entered into her daughter. Sometimes she had recourse even to personal violence; but all was in vain, tears and entreaties, upbraiding and anger, had but the same reply.

'Alas! mother, I know it is wrong to love him as I do, but I cannot help it—oh, can I help loving him, my noble Southern—he who knows more than ever man knew—who speaks to me as never man spoke—who loves me with a love, for which I would exchange the heaven you hope for, mother!'

'Yes, girl, love him: love that incarnate spirit of evil, that the Almighty has permitted to afflict us for a time for our transgression. Love him, and prepare to meet the eternal wrath that will follow on the deep sin he tempts you to. Oh, my child, my one only darling, let us flee from this place, from the circle of this fiend's enchantment; he does not love you, Cheeny, he hates you; he will ruin you, girl, and then spurn you out in the world, a wretched and degraded being!'

In the excited strain of which the above is but a faint and meagre example, did the widow daily and nightly endeavor to turn her daughter from her mad attention. Nor were her efforts always unattended with at least the appearance of success. More than once she got her to confess, she believed he wanted to ruin her; and to promise to forget, to avoid him, even to leave the place, and seek an asylum for her virtue far away from Westwater.

Such confessions and promises she would make, weeping upon her fond parent's bosom: on one such occasion—

'Yes, mother,' it is that dark eye of his that undoes me. He never bends upon me, but I feel him drinking away from me my very soul. I cannot resist it. You are right, he is an evil spirit; he tells me the Bible is a lie, mother (the old woman shuddered), and persuades me there is no such thing as sin or evil.'

'Oh, my child!' exclaimed the mother, 'let us give thanks to Him, who has at length opened your eyes, to the Tophet on whose brink you stood!'

And the two women knelt together, joining their voices in thanksgiving. But as the hour drew near when she was wont to meet her lover, another change came over her spirit, she became anxious and restless, sighed often, moved about from one part of the house to another, and at last springing up, threw her arms about her mother's neck and kissed her, then bursting from her, flew out of the house and away to the grove, where she found Southern, and falling upon his breast, gave way to a wild fit of hysterical laughter and weeping.

But he now began to think the charm nearly wound up, and resolved to remove her from Westwater to a large city; for even he had feeling enough left,

to wish to keep the affair apart from the eyes of the work people.

One evening, when the summer was now wearing over, he broke the proposal to her, that she should leave her mother's house, and become altogether his.

As might be expected, the infatuated girl consented, and promised to meet him next night at a particular place, where he was to be in waiting with his gig, to convey her forever from Westwater. All next day poor Cheeny tried hard to conceal from her mother her purpose; but towards night she could no longer accomplish it, and clasping her in her bosom, bade her farewell.

'What—my child!?' screamed the widow; 'where are you going?'

'To Southern.'

'To be married to him? The atheist, the fiend!'

'No, mother—not married.'

A scene ensued, which I feel myself altogether unable to describe. The widow became perfectly frantic; she prayed her daughter to remain: she commanded, implored, even struck her: but all in vain; the deluded girl would go, and struggled to be away.—There was something fearful in it, and the neighbors trembled as they listened outside the door. At last, when she found she could no longer restrain her, she appeared to yield.

'I will let you go to him—I will; but first answer me this question. I adjure you by (here she used an expression too awful to be repeated here), tell me the truth. Are you still pure as you were before this devil possessed you? Have you sinned as yet in thought only, and not in deed?'

Jane, drooping her beautiful head, avowed herself guilty of no sin greater than loving him.

'Well then, go!'

She went; and as she stepped over the threshold, her mother knelt down upon it, and screamed after her a curse, of a most wild and awful sound of meaning—an imprecation such as none but a mother, and a mother in a state of maniacal frenzy could utter: it had in its strange fanatical blasphemy something at once terrible and sublime, and contained a prayer that the Almighty would smite her with some sudden and dreadful evil before she could accomplish her purpose.

Her daughter, as she heard it, drew herself together as if a stone had struck her, and hurried swiftly away.

As the widow lost her in darkness, she turned into the house, and shutting it up, and putting out the lights, began moaning and wailing aloud, in a manner that drew tears from the wives and daughters of the neighbors, as they listened with fear and wonder around it.

Jane reached the place appointed, and found him waiting.

'Are you mine, love?' said he, in an exulting tone.

'I am Southern—body and soul.'

He lifted her into the gig, and off they flew along the dark road with great swiftness.—She wept much, and he was endeavoring to soothe her with his fondest blandishments when they rapidly approached an abrupt turn in the road, about a mile or more from Westwater. Just then, one of the large waggons belonging to the company, was slowly toiling its way to the factory, loaded with an immense pile of raw cotton. They were on it ere they were aware; and in an instant, one of their wheels struck the fore wheel, and they were discharged from their seats to the ground.

Southern sprang to his feet, unhurt; but ere he had done so, the heavy hind-wheel of the ponderous machine had gone crushing over the left knee of fair Jane Granton, and she lay mangled and senseless in the road.

The astonished waggons lifted her from the ground, and by his directions, put her along with the fragments of the gig upon their waggon, and urged their horses quickly forward towards Westwater, while he, catching his own animal, and disencumbering it of its disordered furniture, mounted it, and dashed furiously away to the city, there to drown thought in a fit of furious debauch.

But who could imagine or describe the mother, when the waggon stopped before the door, and its conductors bore into her dwelling the broken and bleeding body of her only child. At first, she stood struck with wild amazement; then when they told her what had happened she grew pale as death, and remained silent for a few minutes, anon, she broke out in cries of lamentation that were heart-rending to listen to, mingling with strange prayers and curses, clothed in wild, scriptural language, and finally sunk exhausted to the ground as senseless as her daughter.

The waggons, two elderly and humane men, immediately put in order one of the light spring vans in constant use about the factory, and fitting it with a bed, put into it poor Cheeny, and covering her with blankets, and drawing close the canvass covering of the vehicle, attached a fresh horse to it, and drove off to the city, to convey her to the hospital.

The widow recovered in about an hour, and hearing what had been done took her bonnet and staff, and a small bundle, and shutting her little shop, betook herself to the road, and travelled all night after them.

At this time I had been resident about a week at the hospital as a pupil. On the day following the events just narrated, I went at the hour of visit, which was in the afternoon, into the accident ward of the establishment.

It was a long hall, with a range of low ironbedsteads on each side, a large fireplace at the end, with doors to the right and left, leading to two or three small apartments, called the side rooms, where any patients were kept, whose cases required particular attention, or removal from the noise of the ward.

Surrounding one of the bedsteads I saw a crowd of pupils, and among them the surgeon and his clerk; and judge at my surprise to hear the latter read from the journal, a report as follows:

'Jane Granton, aged eighteen, about middle stature, fair complexioned, a very good looking factory girl. Last evening, near Westwater cotton factory, shire, was thrown from a gig, &c.'

I listened with amazement, and elbowing my way among the young gentlemen, saw the identical girl, lying alone in the usual Hospital night dress, her face covered with sweat, while a twang of agony passed over its features, every now and then, when any thing touched the bed, and a bright hectic flush spotted her cheeks. At her head, sat her mother, holding mechanically in her hands a small tin pannikin, containing wine and water, and gazing around her, with a sort of blank amazed look, while her lips continued moving rapidly, though she uttered no sound.

As soon as the clerk had finished reading his report the surgeon examined the knee, and casting a look of compassion at the suffering girl, directed that a consultation should be called that afternoon, and passed to the next patient.

When they had left the ward, I went close to the bed whereon lay my once familiar schoolmate. As soon as she saw me she burst into tears and turned her head away, and her mother rising, bent over her and kissed her cheek, and they wept together.

I was deeply moved; I could not dare to ask them how it had happened,—indeed, I had learned already all that from the waggons, who were well known to me,—but I told them, that if from my residence at the hospital I could be of any assistance to them, they were heartily welcome to it. They both thanked me and I withdrew, indeed, the scene was such that new as I was to hospital life, I was altogether unable to bear it.

That afternoon the consultation was held, and the decision was AMPUTATION.

When it was announced Jane turned deadly pale, while the cold sweat broke out anew upon her face, and a low moan was groaned out bitterly from her bosom. The widow clasped her hand and looked upward, trembling like a leaf of a tree.

The hospital at — was a large, dark, stone edifice, consisting of two parts joined together, like the limbs of a letter T. It was several stories high, and over the centre of its roof arose a great glass dome, which formed the operating theatre. The situation was chosen, with the view of preventing the cries of patients from reaching the ears of their fellow unfortunates in the wards, or of the public, in the streets. It was reached by a series of wide stone stairs, with long lobbies and passages leading to the different parts of the building. In the interior was a circular place, with an area in the centre of a similar shape, and tiers of seats rising all round, one above another, to a considerable height. A circle of pillars supported the dome, which was very lofty, and round about the cornice, over these were a number of medallions, bearing representations of figures dancing, playing on lyres, &c.—not very suitable ornaments, certainly, for a place of such a description. It also contained, on one side, a pulpit and clerk's desk, for it served likewise as a chapel for the patients on Sundays. In the centre of the area, which was laid with red painted canvass, stood the operation table, a most striking thing to look at. It ap-

peared very heavy and strong, was covered with dark leather, and had dispersed about it a quantity of iron machinery, which gave rise to the most revolting ideas in the mind.

It was now two o'clock in the afternoon. The place was already nearly filled by medical gentlemen, and I, who felt very strongly, as it was the first important operation I had ever seen, took my position close to one of the pillars that supported the roof. We waited for some time, when the folding doors were thrown open, and we saw Jane borne in by the dressers and nurses. As soon as she saw the crowd of spectators—many of them mere boys—the flush of pain forsook her cheeks, and she became pale as her dress: but on the instant as if a floodgate at her heart had been thrown open, a red blush gushed over her face and neck completely suffusing them. She was placed on the table, whose machinery being slightly put in motion, immediately placed her in the most suitable and safe position. But who is it that stands beside her head, whispering endearment to her, and fondly caressing her fair brow, whereon the sweat now glistens in diamond like drops?—it is her mother,—the mother, who, in her prozery, prayed Heaven that this might befall her. How changed how dreadfully preyed upon, looks that poor woe stricken parent now!

But the tourniquet has been applied and the surgeon, after a short examination, to make sure of his course, motions with his hand to a tall young man, who stands apart. What is that they pass under the table, glancing for a moment, clear, cold, and metallic? It is the knife. It was quickly handed, but she saw it, and made a convulsive spring, that shook the iron work of the hideous table, whilst an expression seized her of mortal fear and horror. My eyes were now fixed immovably on the operator. Balancing the long sword-like instrument in his hand for a moment he struck it into the milkwhite flesh of the noble limb, transfixing it completely, and cutting rapidly to the surface. Thereupon the red blood splashed on the floor, and there shot up into the echoing concave of the lofty dome, a protracted shriek—the wild 'Oh my God!' of agony unendurable by human spirit. It was followed by a succession of short, sudden, exhausted gasps, like efforts to catch at and retain a life about to take wings to itself, and flee away forever. But are these the only sounds. No; what voice is that mingling its unearthly notes in the dreadful discord? It is the widow's. Falling at once upon her knees, while her cap drops from her head, and her long gray hair streams abroad upon her shoulders, in the disorder of extreme excitement, she stretches wide her arms, and prays with the strange and vehement fervor of her sect that He would give her poor afflicted darling strength to drink to the dregs the cup of his wrath, or would, in his mercy, give the suffering spirit permission to escape away from its mangled tenement.

It was indeed a most appalling scene; so much so as even to shake the nerve of the surgeon, a most determined and experienced gentleman, whose habitually florid countenance grew pale as that of the fainting girl under his hands—but he went on with his work. I could not look at it. I felt sick and dizzy, and turned my eyes for relief to the bright blue sky, seen through the glass overhead, and was watching the sunny white clouds sailing along. Hark! what hideous sound is that, heard so strangely distinct above the groans of the daughter and the prayers of the scarcely less agitated parent? It is the harsh grating of the SAW, as it rasps through the living bone and marrow.—oh, most horrible.

The dis severed member was hurriedly pushed under the table.

'She is gone!' said some one.

'I knew He would take her!' said the widow rising to her feet, 'I never prayed to Him in vain!'

'No, no,' cried the surgeon, 'lower her head; a little wine Mr —, addressing the clerk.

She sighed deeply, and slowly returned to consciousness. In the meantime the vessels had been secured, and the dressing having been completed with much dexterity, she was removed to one of the quiet side rooms of the accident ward.

'My dear —'

'I regret exceedingly my idea of carrying the girl Granton to the city. The adventure should have been consummated at Westwater;—but indeed with her own and her mother's madness, I always had doubts about whether the affair could be brought to a desirable wind up. I think she can be of little