

**FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE:
A STORY FROM "TEMPLE
BAR", AND "TALES OF THE
DAY". COMPLETE**

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FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE.

CHAPTER I.

THE time was evening; the scene a small quiet garden, ivy-covered walls shutting out every thing belonging to the old city but the gray weather-stained tower of the cathedral close beside it; the persons, a young man twenty-five years old, and a girl about a year younger, tall and slight, with pale oval face, dark hair, and deep earnest gray eyes. They were in earnest conversation.

"It seems very hypocritical of me to talk of despising riches when so much happiness or misery apparently depends on their possession."

"Perhaps, Ralph, it is the temptation against which we are appointed to struggle. Every heart has its own es-

pecial trial to pass through. We are poor, and so are always sighing for riches, in a vague belief they would give us the one thing wanting to make us happy; and yet with riches how often comes the closing up of the heart against all its better and holier impulses!"

"I dare say, if the truth were told, poverty is not so great an evil as we are often led to believe. If we are obliged to calculate ways and means so narrowly, and debar ourselves from the pleasures and luxuries others indulge in, it is very good discipline for the heart; it calls out energies we might not know we possessed, had no motive arisen for exerting them."

"I do not think I should feel so dispirited if I alone had to suffer; but there

is mamma, who has seldom had a wish ungratified, if it were in papa's power to grant it, at however great the cost to himself, and Grace, and Ethie, and poor Frank —"

"And yourself, Margaret. Why do you exclude yourself? If comparative poverty is hard for them, it is equally so for you."

"If I only felt certain they could live comfortably on what my father was able to save, I could trust confidently to my own future; I should at once seek some employment which would make me independent."

"You would go out as a governess, you mean, my dear Margaret."

"There are many worse lots than a governess's, Ralph; but I have few qualifications for such an office. Too much stress is laid on accomplishments nowadays, for me, with my matter-of-fact education, to be successful in such a calling. When I start in the world on my own behalf, I must take a very sober course. The education of the heart and hands would be all I could attempt."

"A village schoolmistress, for instance," Ralph Atherton said; and he laughed out in spite of the grave, serious face turned to his. "O Maggie," he added, "you little calculate on all the clever things you would be expected to teach in even the humble sphere your modesty has made you fix upon. There will be no end of government certificates, and abstruse studies, enough to daunt a braver heart than yours, my little sister."

Margaret smiled as she looked up into his handsome face. "You should not despise my choice; you do not know how useful a one it may be: and even without a government certificate, you will think of me for your school when you get your curacy, Ralph?"

"I will think of you as my house-keeper: you must live with me, wherever my home may be, remember."

"Once I used to dream of such a thing, and the idea always came fraught with a thousand bright suggestions; but, like many other dreams, that is over now. You must get a curacy and a wife. I

have my mother and sisters and Frank to care for."

There was a silence for a few minutes, and then Ralph said, "I cannot quite see what is to be done about my mother and the girls. What do you propose, Margaret? or have you not yet thought seriously about it?"

"O, indeed, it seems the one thought never absent from my mind since our father's death. I think I told you the long conversation I had with him the night before he died. I was alone with him, and it seemed a relief to him to be able to tell me what he most wished us to do."

"You mentioned that much, but you never told me more."

"It has all been so hurried and sad," Margaret said, passing her hand wearily across her brow, "I can hardly think of any thing beyond the present moment. But he told me how greatly it had tried him that he could save so little for his wife and children. Our mother's money has remained untouched, and accumulating; and that, he hoped, with a curacy, would give you a fair start in life, and where, if needs be, you might, for a time, share your home with Grace and Ethie. His insurances, he hoped, with great care, would support my mother in such a way as should make her regret least the comforts of the home she must now quit. His books and furniture would, he hoped, more than pay off his few debts; and he would trust to me to do my best for Frank until his pay in the navy was sufficient for him to live on it, without the assistance he had hitherto given him. You know, Ralph," she added, "how little my mother has been accustomed to struggle with difficulties; and seeing how anxious my dear father seemed about her, I promised him, so far as I could, that she, my sisters, and Frank should henceforth be my first consideration."

"My father, I know, always had the greatest confidence in you, Margaret, but I am sure he never meant that you should entirely forget yourself in your anxiety for them and me."

"I have no anxiety for you, Ralph;

you are sure to get a curacy somewhere before long; and that will be a home for Grace and Ethie, if need be. Frank will soon be able to shift for himself. You need not be unhappy about me; a life of activity is the only one I could endure at present: had it been left to choice, I should have chosen it."

"And once it might have been so different for you!" This was said as if Ralph were rather thinking aloud than addressing his sister, round whose waist he fondly passed his arm and drew her close to his side. Margaret looked up into his face. "Hush, Ralph; do not say so; it is better as it is now," she said in a low tone. They had reached the little door in the wall, half hidden by the ivy which trailed over it. A narrow lane divided the garden from the cathedral cloisters. Margaret slipped back the bolt, closed the door behind them, and the next minute the brother and sister were standing in the centre of the small plot of grass round which the cloisters ran, looking down with tearful eyes and saddened hearts on the small square stone at their feet, with the simple initials "R. A." engraved upon it. Neither of them spoke. Each was trying to realize the bright exchange the purified spirit of their father had made in those last awful moments which had separated parent and child; while they, in all the bitterness of their own great loss, were striving to say from their hearts, and not their lips only, "They will be done."

CHAPTER II.

Few people had better performed their duty in this world, or had gone to the grave more honored or respected, than Dean Atherton. Simple and unostentatious in his manners, and yet earnest and energetic in his office, the cares of his deanery, together with his struggle to maintain his family in the position they filled on an income barely sufficient to cover his limited expenditure, told severely on a constitution never strong, and weakened by the effects of a hot climate. Never entirely recovered

from an illness engendered during the previous winter, a sudden attack of influenza, with its attendant prostration and debility, had overpowered his enfeebled constitution, and carried him off almost before the absent members of his family were fully aware of his danger.

Many years before our story begins, Mr. Atherton was a curate in a small village on the sea coast of H—shire, where, during the summer months, an old gentleman and his daughter occupied a little cottage opening on the shore. Mr. Waldron was a Quaker, but his daughter had for some years joined the Church of England; and here, in their bright summer home, Margaret Waldron cultivated her kindly charities among the poor, and entered warmly into every scheme for their improvement. The young curate often found his way into their cottage, at first for the sake of the arguments he was fond of holding with the venerable disciple of George Fox, but afterwards for the love which insensibly grew up between himself and the old man's daughter. Ralph Atherton's prospects were fair. He had few relations of his own—none near enough to be consulted on such a step. His little patrimony had well nigh been expended in his school and college life; but he hoped, as all young curates do hope in the first blush of their career, to win his way to something better than the small curacy he then held. Mr. Waldron frankly told him that Margaret's property would be settled on herself and children. At his own death she would inherit all he had, which was no great deal; but that, until that event occurred, she could only have the little he could spare from his own income. The old man was too fond of his child to deny her any thing it was in his power to grant; and though in a worldly point of view he thought she might have done better, he liked the young curate too well to make any serious objections to the match. As he could not bear to be parted from his child, he took up his permanent abode at Sandham. For some years they continued to reside close to each other; but soon after the

birth of their second child, a chaplaincy in the East India Company's service was offered to Ralph Atherton; and with the increasing necessity for some effort on his part, while health and vigor were his, to enable him to make provision for his family, neither he nor Margaret thought it right to refuse it. This decision, however, was not arrived at without painful thought and anxiety. The separation it entailed on Margaret from father and children called forth all her Christian zeal and fortitude to sustain her in this overwhelming necessity; but the sacrifice was for their sakes, and that feeling nerved her to its endurance.

Long and fondly the young mother lingered over the last embraces of her father and children. Some doubts had arisen in the mind of Ralph about their religious training during their tender years; but to have made any other house their home than that tenanted by their grandfather would have utterly crushed the heart of the old man; and as Margaret trustfully dwelt on the same good Providence which had brought her through the narrow views of Quakerism to the place found in the fulness and truth of the Church's teaching, she could not doubt that He who never fails those who really trust in him would so order the future for her young lambs as should eventually bring them at last into his fold. The discipline of Quakerism Margaret did not fear for them; and before they were old enough to feel the want of the sustaining helps and guides, which only can be truly experienced in the sacraments appointed by the Church for her believing people, she trusted either she or her husband would have them again under their care. This hope, however, in her own case, was never to be realized. In less than two years after quitting England, a premature confinement, followed by fever, laid Margaret Atherton in an Indian grave. The intelligence reached her father when he was slowly recovering from an attack of illness, and so great was the shock to his already weakened frame that a few weeks only intervened before he also succumbed.

In the cathedral town of Wyminstre resided the younger brother and sister of Mr. Waldron. Formerly the brothers had been in partnership in a small country bank; but having amassed enough money to satisfy their moderate wishes, they had given up the firm to the two clerks, who had saved capital sufficient during their servitude under generous and considerate masters. With his sister, the youngest brother still resided in the old red-brick house they had inhabited so many years. It was a tall unsightly edifice in one of the back streets of Wyminstre; but its pleasant garden front opened on a lawn, intersected by straight gravel walks and gay flower borders, with such an abundance of fruit, flowers, and vegetables as would have astonished a modern gardener. Miss Waldron's favorite parlor looked out on this bit of bright floral beauty; and sitting in the bow-window, in her arm-chair, with her little old-fashioned round table beside her, dressed in her dove-colored silk gown, the thick folds of her clear muslin handkerchief crossed on her ample bosom, the little silk shawl pinned so exactly over her shoulders, the closely crimped border of her clear muslin mob-cap softening and blending with the narrow bands of her soft brown hair, still only here and there streaked with silver threads, — she imparted an air of purity and quiet simplicity you hardly expected to encounter, under a roof apparently so destitute of all the luxurious adjuncts of modern taste and refinement. The greatest simplicity pervaded their small establishment both in furniture and dress; but in this contrast to the world neither she nor her brother exercised any self-denial. If his coat or her gown were the self-same pattern as those worn by their parents before them, it was no act of self-denial in them to wear them, even when mixing with the gayest votaries of fashion; but had the shape or shade varied in ever so small a degree from their own self-established model of right or wrong, it is doubtful whether their peace of mind would not have been seriously disturbed; exemplifying, even in the case of the most

rigid followers of George Fox, an evil he in his leathern doublet could hardly have foreseen, and which Quakers, in their great anxiety to avoid, have most unwittingly rushed into — that of allowing their minds to be unduly influenced by trifles in matters of no real importance.

Naturally shrewd, intelligent, and full of that kindness of heart so characteristic of the sect, they could not see their little grand-nephew and niece homeless without at once bringing them to the old place their mother had filled years ago. Margaret was too young to have more than a confused remembrance of her first entrance into her uncle's house. She and her brother, ever kept studiously neat and plain in their dress, were allowed to range at will over the roomy old-fashioned house and large garden. And well could they remember the old pony they were allowed, as they grew older, to scamper up and down the orchard, and the pleasant rides they took in the quiet country lanes in their uncle's old-fashioned, roomy gig; and the long walks beyond the old city walls with their active aunt Sarah, and their visits with her to the poor families crowded into the narrow back streets behind their own house. It was these visits which first awakened in Margaret's young heart an intense love for the poor, and an earnest desire to do her part towards ameliorating and improving their condition.

The only recollection the children had of their father or mother was connected with two drawings, which an artist of little celebrity had taken of them many years ago, and which now hung in Margaret's bedroom. But the strong imagination of the little girl needed few outward aids to developing bright pictures of her own future, in which her father invariably held a prominent part. Sunday after Sunday, she sat by her aunt's side in those dull silent meetings, at first striving hard to compose her rebellious hands and feet into the same statue-like stillness, which seemed to fall like a spell upon the grave motionless figures around her; then dreamily

wondering why people should punish themselves so severely when they were old enough to do as they pleased; listening to the cheerful chimes of the various church bells as they broke on her ear; following the loud hum of some large restless fly, whose very freedom as it flitted by her she felt tempted to envy. Or tracing by the aid of her quick imagination, in the large flaws and cracks in the whitewashed walls of the sombre meeting house, all sorts of quaint faces and odd pictures. Or her active mind would rove away into her own world of thought, and visions of her dear papa would flash across her, toiling away in a distant land. Or she would draw airy pictures of some pretty home in this country, to which he would return; and of her being to him all that a daughter could be — housekeeper, companion, friend. Or she would go to him, and amid the splendors of a dazzling Indian home, such as she delighted to picture, she would rival the princesses of her own fairy tales. These day-dreams she never confided to her aunt. Young as she was, she soon acquired an intuitive knowledge of her aunt's practical and very unromantic mind, and she felt she would not only meet with no sympathy, but would most probably get rebuked for indulging in such idle and enervating speculations. At ten years old, Ralph was sent to Eton; a piece of parental extravagance his uncle and aunt could neither comprehend nor approve. Why so much money should be lavished on a boy, whose education elsewhere for a quarter of the sum, they believed, could have been carried on equally well, was a wastefulness in their nephew they could never understand. Unwillingly enough they sent him, and under the firm conviction they were assisting to lay the foundation for all sorts of future extravagance. When her brother left, a craving came over little Margaret for the companionship of younger people. Her aunt, therefore, who had hitherto been her only instructress, sent her, with the sanction of her father, as a daily pupil to two amiable and intelligent Quaker ladies, who were educat-