

## CHAPTER XLI

### CONSOLATION

Moses came down from the chamber of Mara in a tempest of contending emotions. He had all that constitutional horror of death and the spiritual world which is an attribute of some particularly strong and well-endowed physical natures, and he had all that instinctive resistance of the will which such natures offer to anything which strikes athwart their cherished hopes and plans. To be wrenched suddenly from the sphere of an earthly life and made to confront the unclosed doors of a spiritual world on the behalf of the one dearest to him, was to him a dreary horror uncheered by one filial belief in God. He felt, furthermore, that blind animal irritation which assails one under a sudden blow, whether of the body or of the soul,--an anguish of resistance, a vague blind anger.

Mr. Sewell was sitting in the kitchen,--he had called to see Mara, and waited for the close of the interview above. He rose and offered his hand to Moses, who took it in gloomy silence, without a smile or word.

"My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord," said Mr. Sewell.

"I cannot bear that sort of thing," said Moses abruptly, and almost

fiercely. "I beg your pardon, sir, but it irritates me."

"Do you not believe that afflictions are sent for our improvement?" said Mr. Sewell.

"No! how can I? What improvement will there be to me in taking from me the angel who guided me to all good, and kept me from all evil; the one pure motive and holy influence of my life? If you call this the chastening of a loving father, I must say it looks more to me like the caprice of an evil spirit."

"Had you ever thanked the God of your life for this gift, or felt your dependence on him to keep it? Have you not blindly idolized the creature and forgotten Him who gave it?" said Mr. Sewell.

Moses was silent a moment.

"I cannot believe there is a God," he said. "Since this fear came on me I have prayed,--yes, and humbled myself; for I know I have not always been what I ought. I promised if he would grant me this one thing, I would seek him in future; but it did no good,--it's of no use to pray. I would have been good in this way, if she might be spared, and I cannot in any other."

"My son, our Lord and Master will have no such conditions from us," said Mr. Sewell. "We must submit unconditionally. She has done it, and her

peace is as firm as the everlasting hills. God's will is a great current that flows in spite of us; if we go with it, it carries us to endless rest,--if we resist, we only wear our lives out in useless struggles."

Moses stood a moment in silence, and then, turning away without a word, hurried from the house. He strode along the high rocky bluff, through tangled junipers and pine thickets, till he came above the rocky cove which had been his favorite retreat on so many occasions. He swung himself down over the cliffs into the grotto, where, shut in by the high tide, he felt himself alone. There he had read Mr. Sewell's letter, and dreamed vain dreams of wealth and worldly success, now all to him so void. He felt to-day, as he sat there and watched the ships go by, how utterly nothing all the wealth in the world was, in the loss of that one heart. Unconsciously, even to himself, sorrow was doing her ennobling ministry within him, melting off in her fierce fires trivial ambitions and low desires, and making him feel the sole worth and value of love. That which in other days had seemed only as one good thing among many now seemed the only thing in life. And he who has learned the paramount value of love has taken one step from an earthly to a spiritual existence.

But as he lay there on the pebbly shore, hour after hour glided by, his whole past life lived itself over to his eye; he saw a thousand actions, he heard a thousand words, whose beauty and significance never came to him till now. And alas! he saw so many when, on his part, the responsive word that should have been spoken, and the deed that should have been

done, was forever wanting. He had all his life carried within him a vague consciousness that he had not been to Mara what he should have been, but he had hoped to make amends for all in that future which lay before him,--that future now, alas! dissolving and fading away like the white cloud-islands which the wind was drifting from the sky. A voice seemed saying in his ears, "Ye know that when he would have inherited a blessing he was rejected; for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." Something that he had never felt before struck him as appalling in the awful fixedness of all past deeds and words,--the unkind words once said, which no tears could unsay,--the kind ones suppressed, to which no agony of wishfulness could give a past reality. There were particular times in their past history that he remembered so vividly, when he saw her so clearly,--doing some little thing for him, and shyly watching for the word of acknowledgment, which he did not give. Some willful wayward demon withheld him at the moment, and the light on the little wishful face slowly faded. True, all had been a thousand times forgiven and forgotten between them, but it is the ministry of these great vital hours of sorrow to teach us that nothing in the soul's history ever dies or is forgotten, and when the beloved one lies stricken and ready to pass away, comes the judgment-day of love, and all the dead moments of the past arise and live again.

He lay there musing and dreaming till the sun grew low in the afternoon sky, and the tide that isolated the little grotto had gone far out into the ocean, leaving long, low reefs of sunken rocks, all matted and tangled with the yellow hair of the seaweed, with little crystal pools

of salt water between. He heard the sound of approaching footsteps, and Captain Kittridge came slowly picking his way round among the shingle and pebbles.

"Wal', now, I thought I'd find ye here!" he said: "I kind o' thought I wanted to see ye,--ye see."

Moses looked up half moody, half astonished, while the Captain seated himself upon a fragment of rock and began brushing the knees of his trousers industriously, until soon the tears rained down from his eyes upon his dry withered hands.

"Wal', now ye see, I can't help it, darned if I can; knowed her ever since she's that high. She's done me good, she has. Mis' Kittridge has been pretty faithful. I've had folks here and there talk to me consid'able, but Lord bless you, I never had nothin' go to my heart like this 'ere--Why to look on her there couldn't nobody doubt but what there was somethin' in religion. You never knew half what she did for you, Moses Pennel, you didn't know that the night you was off down to the long cove with Skipper Atkinson, that 'ere blessed child was a-follerin' you, but she was, and she come to me next day to get me to do somethin' for you. That was how your grand'ther and I got ye off to sea so quick, and she such a little thing then; that ar child was the savin' of ye, Moses Pennel."

Moses hid his head in his hands with a sort of groan.

"Wal', wal'," said the Captain, "I don't wonder now ye feel so,--I don't see how ye can stan' it no ways--only by thinkin' o' where she's goin' to--Them ar bells in the Celestial City must all be a-ringin' for her,--there'll be joy that side o' the river I reckon, when she gets acrost. If she'd jest leave me a hem o' her garment to get in by, I'd be glad; but she was one o' the sort that was jest made to go to heaven. She only stopped a few days in our world, like the robins when they's goin' south; but there'll be a good many fust and last that'll get into the kingdom for love of her. She never said much to me, but she kind o' drew me. Ef ever I should get in there, it'll be she led me. But come, now, Moses, ye oughtn't fur to be a-settin' here catchin' cold--jest come round to our house and let Sally gin you a warm cup o' tea--do come, now."

"Thank you, Captain," said Moses, "but I will go home; I must see her again to-night."

"Wal', don't let her see you grieve too much, ye know; we must be a little sort o' manly, ye know, 'cause her body's weak, if her heart is strong."

Now Moses was in a mood of dry, proud, fierce, self-consuming sorrow, least likely to open his heart or seek sympathy from any one; and no friend or acquaintance would probably have dared to intrude on his grief. But there are moods of the mind which cannot be touched or

handled by one on an equal level with us that yield at once to the sympathy of something below. A dog who comes with his great honest, sorrowful face and lays his mute paw of inquiry on your knee, will sometimes open floodgates of sober feeling, that have remained closed to every human touch;--the dumb simplicity and ignorance of his sympathy makes it irresistible. In like manner the downright grief of the good-natured old Captain, and the child-like ignorance with which he ventured upon a ministry of consolation from which a more cultivated person would have shrunk away, were irresistibly touching. Moses grasped the dry, withered hand and said, "Thank you, thank you, Captain Kittridge; you're a true friend."

"Wal', I be, that's a fact, Moses. Lord bless me, I ain't no great--I ain't nobody--I'm jest an old last-year's mullein-stalk in the Lord's vineyard; but that 'ere blessed little thing allers had a good word for me. She gave me a hymn-book and marked some hymns in it, and read 'em to me herself, and her voice was jest as sweet as the sea of a warm evening. Them hymns come to me kind o' powerful when I'm at my work planin' and sawin'. Mis' Kittridge, she allers talks to me as ef I was a terrible sinner; and I suppose I be, but this 'ere blessed child, she's so kind o' good and innocent, she thinks I'm good; kind o' takes it for granted I'm one o' the Lord's people, ye know. It kind o' makes me want to be, ye know."

The Captain here produced from his coat-pocket a much worn hymn-book, and showed Moses where leaves were folded down. "Now here's this 'ere,"

he said; "you get her to say it to you," he added, pointing to the well-known sacred idly which has refreshed so many hearts:--

"There is a land of pure delight  
Where saints immortal reign;  
Eternal day excludes the night,  
And pleasures banish pain.

"There everlasting spring abides,  
And never-fading flowers;  
Death like a narrow sea divides  
This happy land from ours."

"Now that ar beats everything," said the Captain, "and we must kind o' think of it for her, 'cause she's goin' to see all that, and ef it's our loss it's her gain, ye know."

"I know," said Moses; "our grief is selfish."

"Jest so. Wal', we're selfish critters, we be," said the Captain; "but arter all, 't ain't as ef we was heathen and didn't know where they was a-goin' to. We jest ought to be a-lookin' about and tryin' to foller 'em, ye know."

"Yes, yes, I do know," said Moses; "it's easy to say, but hard to do."

"But law, man, she prays for you; she did years and years ago, when you was a boy and she a girl. You know it tells in the Revelations how the angels has golden vials full of odors which are the prayers of saints. I tell ye Moses, you ought to get into heaven, if no one else does. I expect you are pretty well known among the angels by this time. I tell ye what 'tis, Moses, fellers think it a mighty pretty thing to be a-steppin' high, and a-sayin' they don't believe the Bible, and all that ar, so long as the world goes well. This 'ere old Bible--why it's jest like yer mother,--ye rove and ramble, and cut up round the world without her a spell, and mebbe think the old woman ain't so fashionable as some; but when sickness and sorrow comes, why, there ain't nothin' else to go back to. Is there, now?"

Moses did not answer, but he shook the hand of the Captain and turned away.