

A Resurrection

By H. B. Marriott Watson

I

THE book slid gently from Gregory's fingers, and closed with a rustle upon the table. He was not conscious of the movement, for in a moment he was rapt among high and tender memories. The verses sang in the current of his blood, and pulsed to the beating of his arteries. They resounded from distant years with the full ryhthm of an immediate echo. These instant reverberations in a heart long silent startled him with their unexpectedness. It was so long since he had provoked that pale wraith and image of his old passion. And now of a sudden his fibres were quick with a soft and melancholy yearning. With that passage in the poem, long since forgotten, the resurrection of this untimely ghost was charged with delicate and private meaning. His eyes fell again upon the closed volume, and he repeated the verses in a soothing whisper to himself.

He could see Dorothea's lips move to the phrases, her hand flutter unawares about her heart, according to a habit which had always affected him. He saw her bend and lean to touch him with her pretty air of assurance ; soft fingers rested upon his arm. He sighed, and dropping slowly in his chair smiled very quietly at his own fancies.

He

He was conscious of a certain penitence for the long omission of this memorial respect. The appeal of those lines allured him ; he smarted and stung to reflect upon that oblivion in which so long she had been buried. Dorothea's eyes solicited him with their soft radiance ; they seemed to intercede with him for an interval of silent communion. That ghostly visitant in his mind tremulously pleaded her cause. Was it so much, she seemed to urge, to snatch a little space, a fragmentary hour, from out a life dedicated to another, a meagre alms to that poor soul he once had loved ? It seemed odd to him that the voice he once had heard ring so clearly in those rooms had been so persistently mute. The echoes of those familiar tones had died out with the years. What brought them sounding from the silent corners at so irretrievable a time as this evening ? He had foregone his lealty. He sighed and directed his glance upon the wall of his study where hung a slight water-colour sketch. It formed but a dash of colour, with no discernible proportions of a woman, and still less the faithful lineaments of the model. Yet Dorothea had stood and posed for that dainty sketch, and she it was in a manner that still inhabited the coarse cloth and looked forth upon him from blurred eyes. Gregory slowly unlocked a drawer in his bureau, and withdrew a photograph carefully enwrapped between covers. He held it before him, scrutinising it with attention, and the light of the reading-lamp streamed thickly upon the face.

There was just such a look in those poor eyes as had fulfilled them many a time in life. She watched him with that grave patience that had so sweetly mingled with her pretty playfulness. The head to Gregory wore an aureole, with its flow of bright hair. As he regarded the picture from under the arch of his hand, the facts and tenants of that room lost their importunate reality. At a stroke the winter was gone, and across the budding English

English meadows he walked with Dorothea in the spring. It was not so very long ago, but the ten years had spanned a tragedy for him. Was it possible, he wondered, that love should pass quite away, should change and commute like the fashions of a generation? His eyes suffused. Ah no, he thought, not such a passionate whole love as theirs. He had not forgotten, only not remembered these six months. Somewhere under the sweet earth Dorothea's gracious heart throbbed to his pulses, her pleading eyes were lit with thoughts of him. The photograph dropped from his fingers, as the book had done, and the curtains swung in a mist before him. His memories provoked a warm and happy past; a sense, as it were, of physical pleasure filled him in the recollection of those fine days, now gathered into forgotten Time. The sadness of his reveries filled him with a positive delight. He sighed again, and his glance fell newly upon the picture. Re-informed by his sensitive imagination the bright flesh sparkled with life, and reproached him with its immeasurable eyes. It seemed that those five years which had sounded in his ears so desolately long, which had worn so wearily, inadequately marked his supreme sorrow. The grass was ancient over Dorothea in those five miserable years. The world might well attribute to him a remarkable fidelity. At nights he had sat and thought upon her, those long and terrible nights when her departure was fresh among his griefs, those sad nights, too, upon which it became something of a solace to recall and remember and to weep. The devotion of his mourning spoke to his great love, and yet now that his old happiness and glory were vivid before him, he knew that not five years, not ten, that a lifetime should be the limit of his irreconciliation. The tears welled in his eyes; a short little sob shook him; his shaded eyes devoured the portrait; and then a knock fell on the door, and a light voice broke upon him.

"May I come in, Frank? Are you busy?"

The

The speaker awaited no invitation, as if sure of her answer, but came forward briskly to the table, and placed a hand affectionately upon Gregory's shoulder. With a hasty motion he slipped the photograph between the covers of the blotting-sheet before him.

"Marion!" he said softly, and touched her fingers gently, looking towards the fire in abstraction.

The sudden contrast offered by this apparition took him aback, and for a full moment he was appalled at his own infidelity. Those ashes of the past burning brightly in his heart, he was newly affronted with the present. But the ache faded slowly, leaving in its place a sensation which he could not determine for pleasure or pain. His thoughts ranged vaguely over the enlarged area of the problem.

"You are thinking, dear?" asked his wife, smoothing his hair with a gentle hand.

There was something particularly caressing in her touch, which fitted with Gregory's mood. He looked up at her and smiled.

"Yes, child," he assented with a sigh.

"Aren't they happy thoughts?" she asked, bending quickly to him with an imperious suggestion of affection.

He indulged the sentiment in his blood. He was used to flow upon his emotions, and now the resumed loyalty to Dorothea in nowise jarred upon a present kindness for the beautiful woman at his side. He patted her hand, and sought her face with a distant smile. As he did so the tenderness of her regard struck him. Her hair, the full form of her face, were as unlike Dorothea's as they might well be, but there returned to him sharply the nameless and indefinite resemblances which had first attracted him to Marion. Was it merely that she inspected him with the same eyes of love, or was it some deeper community of spirit between the dead and the living that recalled this likeness? For the first time he realised quite

quite clearly why he had married her. Turning with an abrupt movement in his chair, he held her with his melancholy gaze. The sudden act ruffled the papers on the desk, and the blotting-pad slipped and fell to the floor. With her usual impulsiveness Marion stooped and gathered the scattered papers, still clinging to his hand. He had not understood the misadventure, and her next words startled him.

"Who is this?" she asked.

Gregory saw that she had the photograph in her hand. He thrust out his disengaged arm, and put his fingers on it.

"It is a—a friend," he murmured faintly. Her clutch resisted his; she surveyed the portrait slowly.

"What friend?" she asked curiously, and glanced at him.

Something she perceived in him made her drop his hand, and scrutinise the photograph again.

"Who is it, Frank?" she said, with a show of agitation.

He cleared his throat. Though to himself the situation presented no anomalies, he felt that this was no occasion for candour.

"Oh, a very old friend, who is dead," he said; and then, breaking the silence that followed, "let me have it, Marion, I'll put it away."

"No," she said, starting from him. "I know."

He seemed to catch something tragic in her tone, but he laughed a little, as though undisturbed. "I don't think you do," he said vaguely, "you never met her."

"So this is she," said Marion in a low voice, heedless of his interruption. She contemplated the picture in silence, and then with a bitter cry threw it from her. "If I had known," she moaned, "if I had only realised!"

Gregory stirred uneasily. "Come, Marion," he said soothingly.

She

She shook off his hand, and lifted her face. "Did you love that woman?" she asked suddenly.

Her manner hardened him; it was ungenerous that she should so reproach him.

"You know I was married before," he said coldly.

"Did you love her?" she repeated.

Her demeanour put him in the wrong; it was as if she was inviting him to plead guilty that she might pronounce his sentence. He rose impatiently.

"I think we have discussed this enough," he observed.

"You will not answer me," she broke forth passionately; and then "yes," she assented, "quite enough;" and without a word further walked from the room, closing the door behind her softly.

Gregory was vaguely troubled. A confluence of emotions mingled in his mind. He resented the interruption upon his thoughts. The opposition of the two women did not appear to him incongruous. He had been willing enough to entertain them in company, the one as that revisiting memory, the other as the near associate of his life. He had a sense of irritation with Marion's jealousy which had thus disturbed the current of his great regret. He was not a man accustomed to confront vexatious problems, and wondered petulantly why he might not follow his own feelings without challenge. He walked to the fire and poked it in annoyance, and then, returning to his table, once more took up the photograph. The simplicity of that countenance was undrugged; its regard dwelt upon him with changeless affection. He sighed. Dorothea, at least, kept her full heart, placid with the old accustomed passion. It pleased and soothed him to consider that here he might commune with her still, discharged from the gross accidents of life. His attachment to Marion did not conflict with his undying compassion for the forsaken companion of his youth. And now, again, his blood

was spinning with thoughts of that one who had been wrapt these five years in the shroud of death. The flow of the old mood resumed in him, and softly replacing the picture in his drawer, he opened the long windows of his room and walked forth silently upon the lawn.

The wind was blowing through the garden, and the rain flew in gusts upon his face. He passed down the walks and entered the dark shrubbery. Here was an interval of silence in the savage night. The little arbour peered through the barren branches, seeming to beg his pity, thus abject to the desolation of the winds. He could see through the dull panes Dorothea's face pass and repass. Her large eyes beckoned him. This spot was consecrated with recollections, and the horrid winter aspect made him shiver. It appeared to consist with the broken pieces of his life. He recognised now how tragic was the dissolution of the beautiful dream. Inside the house he had taken a warmer prospect; but here his heart turned cold insensibly. The shrieking in the branches and the driven rain, the rude turmoil of these barbarous elements, partook of a demonstration against him. Only here, and apart from the public spaces of the garden, lay a little private altar between him and the past. He wondered drearily how he could have married again, wondered with no judgment upon himself, but only with a caressing pity, with tears, with a pathetic sense of isolation.

He had grown into a very tender mood, and once indoors again, went direct to his wife's room. In the dim light he could discern her stretched in abandonment upon the bed, and putting out his hand he touched her.

"Come, dear," he said gently.

He was very full of kindness, and had the desire to hold her to him, and to comfort her. The roaring rain and the wind accom-

panied his feelings. Marion moved convulsively and gave no answer.

"Come, dear," he repeated affectionately.

She broke out weeping, and he gathered her in his arms, hushing her as he would a child upon his knee. He was sure that his heart was buried with Dorothea, and it was duty to console and soothe this poor girl with fraternal solicitude. Suddenly she sprang from him.

"No, no," she cried between her sobs ; "your arms have been about *her* ; *her* head has rested on you. Oh, my God, Frank ! Why didn't you tell me ? Why didn't I realise ? You have given me nothing—I have only the remnants. You are divided between me and the dead."

"No, no, no," he urged softly ; "you are overwrought ; you are foolish, Marion. This is being morbid." He would not deny the re-arisen love. It had broken its grave, and come forth, and its arms were about him.

She clung to him ; she whispered passionately in his ear : she pleaded with him to dishonour and annul that old affection so associated with memories. And slowly in the accession of her neighbourhood, and under the warm spell of her arms, the forlorn images which he had entertained in his fancy retreated. Her clasp stirred him ; the grace of her slender body, abandoned to this agony of weeping, shook him ; her face, superfluous with its tears, invited his hesitant lips. He drew her closer, whispering to her questions.

"Yes, yes, you know I love you, dear," he murmured ; "and you are first, darling, you are first."

Before this renunciation that freshly-awakened ghost withdrew reluctant. She was denied her dignity ; her attendance was discharged. Beneath the earth, where Dorothea's gracious heart had

had so long beat to his, she must again seek the cold refuge of oblivion.

Marion put her hands about his neck, and the eyes that looked upon her were alight and shining.

II

As the sun struck through his window Gregory set down his pen and looked forth. It was odd, he reflected, that these thoughts pursued him at this particular stage in his life. The remembrance of his first wife had not fallen upon him since his re-marriage, until this trivial accident had provoked it. And now she returned persistently. He was quite aware that the verses upon which he was engaged were inspired with the sentiments of that revival. He felt in his secret thoughts that it was impossible to forget. He was still loyal to his dead wife, and it was only in the actual mellay of daily life that the living interfered with her sovereignty. He hung now between the past and the present, with no embarrassment and with no mental confusion, but merely with alternate and comfortable changes of sentiment. Though Marion's nature was infinitely more emotional in reality, his own was wont to be more readily occluded by the drifts and shadows of spectral passions. She, upon her part, was for the time reconciled with her fears. He had confessed that she was first in his heart, and in the glory of that truth she was losing her pain at the knowledge that he had ever thought he cared for some one else.

"It was before he met me," she repeated to assure herself, "and he has never loved any one but me." . . . "Men make mistakes," she told herself, "and he took pity upon her. . . . With that
childish

childish face, of course—— ; ” and of a sudden the image of the woman that had forestalled her stabbed her like a knife. But in the glow of her returning confidence she put the temptation from her heart. And thus Gregory sat in his room composing his tender lyric to the dead, and his wife following her domestic charges about the house smiled at her foolish distrust.

But in truth these various moods were too delicate to endure, and the passionate nature of the woman was as perilous as the sentimental weakness of the man.

“ Sing something, Marion,” said Gregory in the evening.

She started, roused sharply from a temporary doubt that was darkening her thoughts.

“ What shall I sing ? ” she asked unemotionally.

She wondered dismally if such a request had ever been presented before in that room, and the recurrence of that thought quickened her with sudden pain. She glanced at her husband, where he lay sunk within the comfortable arms of his chair, his own gaze vacant and wistful upon the fire.

“ What is it you want ? ” she demanded in a sharper note.

He started. “ Let us have—you play Chopin, don’t you, Marion ? Play that waltz. You must know it. I think it’s 69.”

Marion’s hands fell rudely upon the keyboard. Like himself she was designed by her own emotions, with little interference of her reason ; but what in him proceeded in weak sentimentality issued of her in loud passion. Her blood was resolutely gathering heat, and she was slowly graduating into a frenzy of anger. But Gregory sat by unconscious, floating upon the music along past reaches of his life. He stirred upon the conclusion, and lifted his chin with a sigh. At that, the woman broke forth on him.

“ Why do you sigh ? ” she cried fiercely, turning swiftly upon her seat and confronting him. “ What do you mean by treating

me

me like that? How dare you? You coward! You're thinking—you're thinking—I know what you're thinking of. You cannot deny it. I defy you to deny it."

To his early start of surprise succeeded in Gregory's face a cold disapproval.

"I do not understand you," he said in a chilling voice. "You are singularly hysterical. I cannot pretend to follow you."

She laughed harshly, and struck the notes in a discord.

"Don't you? I have less difficulty in following you," she replied, with suppressed scorn. She played a bar or two. "I will not be used to recover your memories of the dead."

A flush sprang in Gregory's cheeks. "What do you mean?" he asked angrily.

"You understand quite well," she replied with passionate deliberation, smoothing her cuffs with studied calm. "It was an excellent thought to make me fill the place of that—that woman. Men must condescend to makeshifts and stopgaps. But now that I know, it is another matter. I have no intention of supporting the memory, or of filling the post of—what was her name, by the way?" she inquired with some exultation.

Gregory shuddered. He had been hurried into such rude and abrupt emotions. As he considered her, Marion appeared to him at this moment vulgar, clamant, almost as a shrieking shrew with hands to her hips. And he had been roused from a meditation of sorrowful sweetness to confront this. He had been moving freely among the tender memories of Dorothea, and the music had assisted his mood. This strident outbreak irritated him, and he frowned.

"You—you drive me beyond endurance," he cried, in a lower voice and with a gesture of despair.

Marion laughed. "Oh, I daresay," she said, being herself indeed

indeed under the stress of feelings that could find no issue in language.

He rose, and the sound distracted her. She clutched him fiercely by the arm.

"It was true?" she asked, fixing him with her scornful eyes.

"What was true?" he asked, shifting his glance uneasily.

"You were thinking of—why, what was her name? I ought to have informed myself of that long ago."

She laughed hysterically. He shook off her hand; the woman was blatant, and deserved no consideration.

"It was true that I was thinking of past episodes in my life which were more pleasant than the present," he said slowly, and with the intention to hurt her.

She rose with a cry from her stool, and, with blazing eyes, confronted him a moment. Then, with a swift change, the whole aspect of her face was struck to despair. She sprang to him.

"Oh, my God! don't say that, Frank, don't say that. Oh, you will break my heart—you are killing me."

She broke into convulsive sobbing; a great, dull pain throbbed in her side. Mechanically he patted her.

"There, there," he said.

"Don't you see you are killing me?" she murmured. "Oh, you don't know. You kill me. Oh, my God! I don't want to hear her name. Say, you lied, you lied. You did not think of her, did you—did you, Frank?"

The desolation of that clinging figure touched him.

"No, no," he said soothingly, "no, no, dear. You—you are mistaken. But you aggravated me. You——"

"Yes, yes, forgive me," she pleaded. "I know it was only the piece itself affected you. We have both been melancholy to-day. Oh, Frank, Frank!"

Her arms encircled him ; he was enclosed, as it were, within the greedy emotion of her love. Her face, moist with tears, entreated him with a quick access of affection. He bent and kissed her.

"I think we must not misunderstand each other, Marion," he said. She lifted her face against his with a little shudder.

"O darling," she sighed, "I am mad, I am mad. Of course I know. But you see, dear, it is this way. Now I know that you care for me, and never cared for her. It's bad enough like that, isn't it, dear Frank ? But we won't think of that. I am your only love. Men make mistakes ; there are many fancies, but only one thing is real. Isn't that it ? "

"Yes, dear, yes," he murmured tenderly.

He was engaged in the proximity of her beauty. He felt that he loved her. No shadow of the dead fell across that reconciliation.

"We will never think of it again," he whispered.

"Never, never," she murmured tenderly. "We will destroy all traces that might bring bitterness. Come," she cried, starting from him impulsively, "let us do so now."

"What do you mean, dear ? " he asked softly.

"The—the photograph," she answered. "Let us burn all our misunderstandings with it."

She caught his hand, and the warmth of her touch stirred him. He followed her from the room into his study.

Marion opened the drawer and withdrew the picture. She held it averted from her.

"Take it, dear, take it," she cried tremulously. She thrust it into Gregory's hand, and, still with his clasp in hers, he contemplated in silence the faded lineaments. A vague sense of pitifulness crept over him. The claims, embodied in that face, arose

resurgent

resurgent in his heart. Dorothea looked forth on him with the familiar eyes ; but this unnatural conflict were best determined, this memory were best re-laid in its habitual grave. He moved towards the grate.

" Throw it in," urged Marion. He stood hesitant, the prey of discordant motives. " Frank ! Frank ! " she called pitifully.

With a sudden movement of his fingers the card was jerked into the fire, and lay for a second intact upon the bright coal. He drew a long breath of pain ; a sigh came from Marion also.

" Was she beautiful ? " she asked, her hand covering her eyes.

He paid no heed to her question. Marion lifted her hand and pushed the poker into the coals ; the flames leaped and lapped about the discoloured pasteboard.

" There, dear ; see, we are burning our misunderstanding. You are mine ; you have always been mine," she cried.

The stiff board slid forward and presented itself for a moment to Gregory's gaze. A black streak lay like a cruel tongue across the face.

" Poor girl ! poor girl ! " said Marion. She wrung her hands. " She was nobody—what has it to do with you or me ? There burns a young friend of yours, Frank—a friend only."

Suddenly, and with an exclamation of horror, Gregory stooped low and snatched fiercely at the smouldering fragment.

" What are you doing ? Frank ! Frank ! " cried his wife in distress.

" Leave me alone," he said sharply, shaking off her hand.

" Do not touch it ! Dare to touch it ! " cried Marion, gasping.

He turned with the blackened paper in his hand, and his face was torn with emotion. She appeared to him like a brutal wanton, a devil that had tempted him to a cruel act. Ah, the pain of that sad, desolate heart beneath the grass !

" I will

"I will never forgive you all my life," he broke forth angrily.
"You—you are a devil."

"Why—why—" she stammered, her mind tossing in the drift of her emotions.

"I loved her," he said furiously; "I loved her, do you hear? And you—you who attracted me by a chance resemblance, you—"

His passionate utterance went no further. Her face had fallen ashen; she moistened her lips, and then with a little meaningless motion of her hand, she stroked her hair.

"Let me go," she murmured, and walked uncertainly to the door.

The long windows of the dining-room stood open, and the moonlight was in flood upon the garden. Marion walked forth without intelligence of her action. Her dress trailed heavily upon the wet grass, and was snatched and plucked by the briars as she passed. Her brain was a heavy lump within her head; her heart, faint and tremulous, was shot at intervals with ominous pains. The calamity had fallen at the very moment of her triumph. She understood now that when she had merely dreaded she had not really suffered. Now that she realised, her frail world broke about her. His words had been a pitiless weapon against her, and she had fled as by instinct to hide the dishonour of her wounds in private, as some poor hunted creature steals away to die.

Marion stood near the gateway and looked out across the meadow. It seemed to her now that she had come into this house upon a false pretence; she had no rights in it. She compared dully her joyous entrance barely six months before, in the full tide of summer, with this ruthless and ignoble expulsion. Circumferenced with her humiliation she contemplated the ruins of her life with staring, tearless eyes. The dark vault of the night, scattered with stars and

spread

spread with moonlight, shone blue and clear above her. The earth under the white frost glittered and glowed with a cold radiance. The moon struck the face of the world to silver ; the illumination of her sorrow lay around her. Marion's eyes travelled over the great meadow to the verge of the uplands, and to them appeared in that far distance Gregory's slight and elegant figure, with its quiet loitering gait ; she saw him raise his head ; the pale face with its odd fleck of colour in either cheek, smiled upon her. He opened his arms. . . . The meadow waved with wheat, but the same moonlight visited that opulent field of gold as shone upon this white and arid stretch before her. She could not discern between these rival pictures, the cold purview, this pitiless outcast, and the clangling gates that opened on her Paradise that warm summer evening. She clung to the palings of the fence, her body taut, her vision straining to resume that sweet inveterate fancy. A physical pain dwelt persistently in her side.

The phantasmagoria dissolved into the inhospitable winds of night. She clapped her hands to her face and cried aloud. The agony of that irreclaimable remembrance mocked her. She left the gates and walked wearily through the copse. The bare, disparaged trees crowded upon her like curious, pitiful strangers, receiving her to a community of desolation.

"But they will awake," she cried. "The spring will bring them life."

She sank upon her knees in the vacant summer-house. She realised now that what she had intended was impossible. She could not leave him ; she dared not forego the sight of that false face. Poor, passionate heart !

"I am a coward," she thought, weeping. His eyes had encountered other eyes in affection ; other lips had touched his lips with thrills of happiness. And she inherited but the shadow

of

of a loyal love; it was with the rags of that strong passion that she was invested. It was hard that she should be the victim of that great fidelity. . . . Suddenly a great pain stung fiercely at her heart.

His outbreak left Gregory with a slight feeling of remorse, instinctive with a gentle nature. That stricken face made him uneasy, and he turned at once to comfort himself for his cruelty.

"It was diabolical to make me do that," he argued, and in an instant the appeal of that burned and charred fragment diverted his pity to the dead. But most of all it was himself that he commiserated. He had compassion upon himself when he remembered how Dorothea would have winced under this shame. He had denied her, and must carry a heavy load of guilt upon his sacrilegious soul. He offered himself to the enjoyment of sorrow. The grave had not held its tenant; the disembodied ghost stole silently along the familiar corridors with a new face of reproach. Her features were marked with agony; he had invoked her from oblivion to disown and disown her. The ruins of that picture made his heart ache. Her radiant flesh was scarred and whealed with his handiwork; it was as though he had struck her in her patience and her resignation. She had asked but a private corner of his heart, and he had refused her with contumely. He wept upon that dead despoiled face. The memories of that young love were bright and persistent. They dissuaded him from his constancy to the present. Now he thought upon it, every act and issue of his late life revolted him in his infidelity to Dorothea. Her voice sounded low and musical in the room; her hands turned the pages of her favourite volume. She sat against the fire and watched him with a sigh, unobtrusive, silent, a voiceless, motionless reproach. Gregory rose and thrust aside the curtains. Across

the

the lawn she seemed to move in her cerements, as she had moved five years ago, but now with a saddened step and downcast eyes. She paused by her rose-bush ; she lingered in reluctance on her way. Opening the window he followed, in the conscious pursuit of his melancholy fancy.

There, below the hollies, she might now be preceding him, as she had walked a thousand times in life. He entered the copse, and could imagine that she stopped and beckoned to him. His eyes fell upon the arbour. Surely it was thither that she would have him go, to commune there together as they had done so many summer evenings long ago. As he approached the summer-house a flash of wonder turned his heart to stone and then set it beating hard. From the high regions of his soaring fancy he fell suddenly to fact. He sprang forward with a cry of bewilderment ; for Dorothea's face, white and immobile, peered through the dim and grimy panes at him. He pushed aside the ivy, trembling, and stood staring through the entrance. . . . Was it Dorothea's ? . . .

Upon that new grave he might now rear a second temple to the dead, and from her quiet place among the shadows she too might now steal forth to revisit his melancholy dreams.