Kent News

SATURDAY, - - - JAN. 23, 1897.

THE MADONNA'S GIFT.

I, Ferdinald Brand, an English soldier, lay between life and death in a foreign hospital, nursed by the sisters who devote their lives to works of charity.

But all their kindness could not reconcile me to the weary life that lay before me if I recovered. They gave me no hope that I should not be blind if I lived, and from the aching depths of my sad heart this thought had torn all that made life worth the living.

One day had seemed more bitter than any of its predecessors. A comrade had died near me. And I lived! A blackness of darkness was upon me. I could not rest. I could not sleep. I could not taste the food they urged me to partake. I even wept—I, a soldier. Then I prayed to die.

In the midst of that prayer a strange thing happened to me. I felt a form bend over me. I inhaled the perfume of a breath as sweet as new mown hay. Two lips softer than rose leaves pressed a kiss upon my closed eyelids and a tear dropped upon my forehead.

Involuntary I stretched forth my hand. It caught a woman's fingers. They wrenched themselves from me, but left in my clasp a ring.

"Who is this?" I cried. "Come back! Tell me. Who is this?"

There was no answer. I heard a soft, retreating step and nothing more. The woman who had kissed me, whoever she might be, was gone.

I slipped the ring on my finger and fell into a reverie. Who could this have been? Whose lips had touched my lips? Whose hand had I held? Sister Agatha was large and stout and elderly. Sister Estelle was hard and thin, and her hands were always as cold as ice. Then, nuns were not given to wearing jewelry.

I questioned Sister Agatha after a while as to who had visited the hospital. "Only the mother of Antoine," she said, but I knew that those juicy lips, that warm, fluttering little hand, were not those of any man's mother.

It was a litte incident, but it employed my head for the day. You laugh, but you must lie wounded and weak and blind and far from home and kindred to know the value of a woman's kiss and a pitying tear.

For one or two days I listened for the return of that gentle mystery. For one or two nights I dreamed of her. Then I stopped dreaming. Life dawned anew for me. I opened my eyes one morning and saw a ray of light. I opened them the next to see faintly and dimly the outline of the long room. I was no longer blind. I should be myself again.

Hope healed my wounds. I grew well miraculously. Ere I left the hospital I told the good Sister Agatha of the kiss.

She looked at me solemnly and fell to crossing herself.

"My child," she said, "it was the Madonna. It is a miracle. She has healed you."

"But the ring?"

"Madonna gave roses to St. Catharine. Why not a ring to you?" she said. So the story ran about the hospital. I knew that I had held a mortal hand in mine, and that living human lips had touched me, but who would have blighted the nun's pretty faith by persistent contradictions.

Five years had passed. The war was over. I was in my native land again. I had almost forgotten my period of suffering in the hospital, but I had not forgotten that kiss. I still wore the ring upon my finger, and I still hoped, absurdly enough, to know one day to whom it belonged. I was constant to a memory vague as it was beautiful.

About this time my brother Henry married and brought home his wife, a lovely girl, who won our hearts at once. She had but one living relative, a sister who had been educated abroad, and who was coming to visit her soon. She was said to be beautiful and Henry spoke of her often.

"It would be a lucky thing for you if you could win her heart," he said. "She is almost an angel."

I smiled and shook my head.

"Not that that would be easily done," he said. "Laura is a strange girl. She resuses every offer. She is two and twenty now and has had several, but Emma tells me that she will never marry until she gets over a queer fancy of hers. You'll keep it to yourself if I tell you, Ferdinand?

I promised.

"The girls are orphans," said Henry, "and Laura was educated at a convent in——. By some strange neglect she remained there during the whole of this terrible war. The convent was safe enough, and she had no fear, but it was outrageous. Well, to cut a long story short, there was a hospital at——, and it was filled, of course, with wounded soldiers. The girl just 17 then used at times to go with the nuns, and, protected by their costume, to the hospital. One, a beautiful young officer who had lost his sight, attracted her attention. She used to watch him from afar and think of him when she had left him until she fell in love with him. At last, one day, when he had been suffering very much and had, as she thought, fallen asleep, her feelings overcame her. The sisters were busy alsewhere, and she crept up and kissed him. He was not asleep, it seems. He caught her hand, and she in pulling it away, lost a ring from her finger."

A week after this I went to meet the evening train from London, commissioned to escort Laura Lee to our home.

When I first spoke to her, she looked at me in a singular way and her color came and went rapidly. As for me, it seemed that I had known her all my life. How I told her the story I do not know, but tell it I did on my way home. And the ring that I had snatched from her hand adorned it again—a betrothal ring—when we crossed the threshold of home together.

Once—a year or two ago—my wife and I visited the continent, and stopping at——, went to the hospital. A sister who was quite unknown to us showed us through it. Over one cot was a little shrine and a picture of the Madonna.

"It was here," said the nun, "that our Lady graciously performed a wonderful miracle. She kissed open the eyes of a young English soldier and left in his hands a ring."

Where Mother Is.

In the crimson and gold of the setting sun
The white little lambs o'er the meadows run;
And the birds wing their way to the sweet home nest,
Where is waiting the one that loves them best.
There's a voice in the breeze that goes wandering by
And a whisper that falls from the deepening sky;
Oh, the mother heart cries to each weafy rover,
And where mother is, home is, the wide world over.

'Tis the song of the brook on its silvery way,
The crickets have chirped it with darkening day;
And the first pearly stars in the azure dome
Seems to whisper a message sweet of home.
In the bud and the leaf and the slumbering flower
There's a thought of the peace of the rest giving hour
When the mother heart calls to each weary rover,
And where mother is, home is, the wide world over.

Now the brown bees have ended their day-long quest
The butterflies folded their wings to rest:
And the twinkle of lights in the cottage pane
Tells of joy that has blest the hearth again.
And I read in the eyes of the little ones sweet,
In the shouts of delight, and the pattering feet,
Oh, the mother heart calls to each weary rover,
And where mother is, home is, the wide world over.

GEORGE COOPER.

Conference of Health Officer.s

The State board of Health, with the co-operation of the Medical and Chirurgical Faculty of Maryland, is about to invite all the Health Officers of the State to a conference in Baltimore.

They are arranging an attractive programme, and hope to call out the interest of the press, the school authorities, the local Boards of Health and the medical profession throughout the State.

The conference will occupy two days, holding two sessions each day, a morning session from 11 A. M. to 3 P. M.; and an evening session from 8 P. M. to 10 P. M. There will be no dry discussions, and no ultra-scientific papers. There will be many microscopes, plenty of apparatus, abundant laboratory supplies, and a corps of demonstrators who will give every man in attendance an opportunity to see and examine for himself all things displayed. All the latest knowledge upon the subjects treated will be fully illustrated.

One session will be devoted to a demonstration of the pathology and bacteriology of typhoid fever. The bacillus of this disease will be shown growing in various articles of food and drink. The newly discovered reaction between typhoid bacillus and typhoid blood will be shown, and the privilege to each man present to make the test with his own hands. The bacteriology of drinking water will be illustrated, particularly the methods leading to the detection of bacillus coli communis.

Another session will be given to the bacteriology of Diphtheria. Experiments will be made with the toxin and antitoxin of diphtheria. This exhibit will be as full and interesting as that upon typhoid fever.

At one session an expert upon Vital Statistics will address the conference, and there will be a general discussion of Funeral Laws.

HIS EXPLANATION.

"He made ducks drakes of his money."

"Yes? And those promissory notes of his?"

"Decoys!"—Chicago Record.

AN INGENIOUS YOUTH.

Freddie—"What do you want to catch the fly for?"

Little Johnnie—"Sister has just made herself a glass of lemonade, and I'm awful dry."—Pittsburg Bulletin.

WHY will you mention obligations? Love never confers any. It doth everything for its own sake.

[Communicated.]

CONGRESS OF MOTHERS

To be Held the Coming February, 1897.

The idea has resulted from discussions at some of the mother's meetings at Chautauqua the summer of 1895.

Realizing the necessity for such work and the benefit to be expected from a union of mother's influence and efforts to improve the present faulty domestic conditions, and to arouse an interest in questions concerning the welfare of the home, this national appeal for attention to these important matters has been issued.

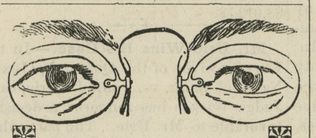
Motherhood is the crown of womanhood, and the duties and responsibilities of the sacred trust of children can not be too highly estimated.

The potency of feminine influence for good and alas! also, for evil, is admitted, and it may reasonably be expected that the interchange of views by many women in conference, must be efficacious in solving home problems. Every thinking person realizes there are multitudes of young women utterly unprepared for and ignorant of how to fulfill best the highest mission of life—the care and training of young children. The girl who spends years acquiring her mental equipment for the future has had very little, if any, instruction bearing directly upon her moral and physical, as well as mental, needs for the duties of wife, mother and the entire home circle over which she may be called to preside. Such ignorance and want of efficiency lead constantly to most deplorable results in children improperly cared for.

Mother love is the strongest instinct in the human heart. Therefore, it is expected that mothers will appreciate the value of this movement to enlighten the women of our beloved country as how best to fulfill their most important obligation in the right training of their children. It is proposed to encourage the formation of mothers' clubs and to suggest the best and most profitable means of conducting them. To disseminate helpful literature (the product of the brains of earnest thinking men and women) upon the sacred claims of children to receive the best training and thus develop fine characters. We are told that "To cure is the voice of the past, to prevent the divine whisper of the present."

This coming "Congress of Mothers" is the first national movement with the declared purpose of unitedly considering the better education of mothers and thus accomplishing the improvement mentally, morally and physically of the whole nation.

HARRIETT L. W. HILL.



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1877. THE SUN. 1897

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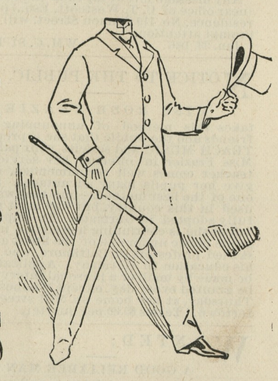
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Jan. 2, 1897. Chestertown Laundry.

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