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Volume I.

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WHAT'S LIFE?

What's life?—a transient bubble born
Amidst the sea, waves onward press,
Which less one moment to the light—
Beats on, and sinks in nothingness.
Why's life?—the meteor's fading flash
Which dances in the midnight sky;
A moment parted blaze and crash—
The brief boon to be born—and die.
What's life?—a brief and passing tone;
The echo of a music-sound—
The mystery of a hidden lore;
Forever sought, but never found.
What's life?—a rose with many a thorn
Begint to-day, to fade to-morrow—
One hour of gladness for its morn,
A noon of clouds, an eve of sorrow.

Secret Tale.

From the Columbian Magazine.
LIGHT AND DARKNESS.

BOOK I.

"Into my heart a silent look
Flashed from thy careless eyes,
And what before was shadow, took
The light of summer skies.
The first born love was in that look;
The Venus rose from out the deep
Of those inspiring eyes!"—BULWER.

FLORENCE WARNER.

A story of light and darkness, for these are life. And they change in the heaven of the human heart when we least expect it, and are least prepared for it. But there are stars for the sudden darkness, although many perceive them not—stars, which bring warmth and light and beauty back to us again. And he who finds them does not heed the gloom; for they burn in the inner chamber of the soul—those stars of hope and faith!

II.

"No," replied Cecil, "I am tired of parties, with their rows of young ladies, and their files of young gentlemen; their thirteen cotillions and two waltzes; their liquid ice creams and their flat champagne. I'll have none of them."

"Don't abuse parties, Cecil; for Jupiter used to give them to expiate evil—or Horace says so at least."

"The deuce he does—where, Tom?"

"Why, in that ode which begins with Jam satis terribis, &c."

"Can debet partes seculi expandi Jupiter?"

"But you must go to this affair. You'll see Florence Warner."

"And who may Florence Warner be? A sweetly-spoken, prettily-behaved inanity like the rest of them? fair and insipid as the blanchmange she eats?"

"Do you remember the eyes you praised en passant yesterday?"

"With refreshing distinctness," said Cecil.

"Well, they belong to Miss Warner."

"Ah! I'll go to the Burke concern. Call for me at nine."

"That I won't I go with Miss Warner."

"You do! I wish that I did; but good by. I'll find the way myself."

III.

So, at nine o'clock Gray presented himself at the residence of the Burkes, who, being merely good people, neither admirable nor ridiculous, will fill but little of our story. And there he saw, oh, what rows of nice young women sitting on a sofa or a line of chairs, chattering most volubly, and whenever a male creature approached, drawing up primly, and saying, "yes sir" and "no sir" with intense gravity. And there were groups of young men, talking of horses and dogs and themselves. And there were one or two sensible people, amusing themselves and each other.

Gray saluted his host and hostess, and then strolled through the rooms. A knot of young men were loitering near the fireplace. "Good evening, Mr. Gray," and "good evening, gentlemen," drew Cecil within their circle.

"Very pleasant here to-night," suggested Mr. Joseph Berg; "such an array of beauty; quite a galaxy"—and he smiled at the fearful attempt, for he had very white teeth.

"Quite brilliant," said Cecil; and where we find people like Mr. Berg, a wit must always be pleasant."

"Thank you," said Joseph Berg; "but I see Miss Warner has dropped a

glove; I must go and pick it up for her, and away she darted.

"I wish supper were ready," said Mr. Gurley; the first time he opened his mouth, which he seldom did except to put something into it.

But Cecil turned to look at Miss Warner. He saw a girl, taller than most around her, with a full and round form, cast in a mould of magnificent beauty. Her dress was simple, but every fold spoke of taste. The rich chestnut hair was swept from a spiritual forehead, and a single ringlet curled behind the small ear. Her complexion dark but clear, and her eyes such as few could look upon without loving. To what shall I liken those eyes? so full of purity and beauty, of intellect and passion—so large, so dark, so lustrous? Just such a pair haunts all my dreams. Gray kept his gaze closely fixed upon her as she conversed gaily with the gentleman on whose arm she leaned.

As Mr. Berg presented the glove, she thanked him, with a smile; he ventured to make a remark, but she drew herself up, looked at him magnificently, and continued her conversation. Cecil's lip curled.

"Well, Gray, what think you of our beauty?" asked Marchmont, joining him.

"She seems made to be admired, but never to be loved," said Cecil; "she seems to me to have that most contemptible of all ambitions, the desire of being the ball-room belle, and queening it sublimely over empty fools."

In an instant he saw that she had overheard him, for the blood rushed to her face and neck, and her eyes flashed steadily upon him. Marchmont saw the look, and with his usual recklessness exclaimed, "Miss Warner, Mr. Gray! the loveliest face that ever yet upon the world hath shone, and the greatest genius, and all that sort of thing."

And thus the introduction was completed. Cecil exhibited his best politeness, and he for his part, habitually moved to another room. Afterward, in the dance, or wherever she moved, Cecil would detect himself following her steps. He could not keep his eyes from her.

And so, at length, the dancing was over; and the signal for supper, so longed-for by Mr. Gurley, was given, and great was the rush to the supper room. Alas! for the oysters and champagne! alas for the chicken salad and the fruit; the time of their destruction was at hand!

Cecil turned from the omnivorous crowd, and left alone, went to look at some prints which lay on a table near him. He heard a step beside him, and turning, saw Florence Warner.

"And so," she said abruptly, "Mr. Gray's loftiness scorns the 'queen of the ball room.'"

"I hope that Miss Warner will pardon my rudeness. Let her remember that I had not then spoken to her."

"Yes," she said bitterly, "yes, you are a true man, and think that a woman may always be soothed by a little flattery."

"You will not, then, forgive my rudeness?"

"I do not care for the rudeness, Mr. Gray, but for the injustice. And yet, why is it so contemptible to aspire to rule—even in a ball room? Is it not all that you allow us? I am convinced that you would be the first to snare down her who sought a higher ambition."

"It is your turn to judge harshly now, Miss Warner. None assign to woman loftier or better aims than I. To her is given up the best of ambitions, the ambition of affection!"

"And who, sir, has taken from her the right to rule? Hitherto, in the history of the world, have the days of her empire over men been unfortunate? Semiramis, Zenobia, Catherine de Medicis, and Elizabeth; did they govern less worthily than men have done?"

"Add to your list," said Cecil, "Cleopatra, Joanna of Naples, and Mary of Scotland, and see that queens have woman-hearts."

"The heart!" she said; "better, far better for a woman to forget that she has a heart! The mind's kingdom is serene and happier than the affection's."

"You talk strangely for one so young, so beautiful and so idolized."

"Youth and beauty! And what can they do for a woman? Nothing more than to make her the idol of the ball-room; and the scorn of such as Cecil Gray."

Cecil began to feel hurt,

"Miss Warner," he said, "you do not treat me fairly. I thought the desire contemptible, and ignorant of yourself, expressed my opinion. But in justice to you, I must furnish you with power to forget it. I belong to a class of men whose opinions are to be unnoticed, whose remarks meet with contempt. I am poor, lady, and therefore unworthy of farther thought from you."

"Ah! the scholar's pride is galled," she said. "I would not have noticed your remark, Mr. Gray, had I not heard much and often of you. But why should poverty be contemptible? God did not make the poor for scorn. And you, with the spell of genius glowing on your brow, and living beautiful in your mind—you with gifts of song and eloquence, I wonder that you dare say it! It is impious to say that you are poor. Have you no high desires, no faine dreams, no hopes?"

He looked upon her face so filled with the beauty of her soul, and thrilled. But as he thought of her question, his heart died within him, and he answered sadly—

"No; I have thought all dreams away. I have suffered too much to hope, and I can only echo Byron's wishes:

"To vain to struggle; let me perish young;
'Live as I lived, and love as I have loved;
To dust if I return, from dust I spring,
And then at least my heart shall ne'er be moved."

No, lady, I am too poor to hope, to dream or to aspire; and I presume not when I say so; for the poor have at least the privilege of being sad."

When he raised his eyes he saw that hers were full of tears. The sight was too much for him—he lost his freedom—his breath ceased—his hands trembled, and he felt that the poison of human love was in his heart!

"Ah!" cried Tom Marchmont, coming into the room, "you two all alone! Pray, Miss Warner, what have you been saying to my friend Cecil?"

said Florence, blushing a little.

"But you, Mr. Marchmont, how have you amused yourself?"

"Oh," replied Tom, "in a great variety of ways. First, in watching the road down Mr. Gurley's throat. Queer companionship the travellers that way have."

"How so?" queried the lady.

"Why?" said Tom, "first I saw two oysters go down with one swallow; then followed an ice, and a bit of a chicken slipped down on that. I stumbled over Berg's foot, and when he said I was heavy, I said I could not help it, for I had been eating pound cake. Then Miss Sedleigh asked me for some oysters, and as I presented them, 'observe,' said I, 'how being st(he)lth(f)ish gets one into a pickle.' And finally, when some wicked body asked me to say good, I thought of you and murmured 'Florence Warner!'"

BOOK II.

"But first the signal pass they elbim;
Ask who they are and whence they came;
Their home, their purpose, and their name."
SCOTT.

I.

EXPLANATORY.

Alas, that readers cannot understand all about one's characters without being told. To think of setting off the affluents, to describe who's & what's. Nathless:

Florence Warner was an orphan. She had seen her parents dying with broken hearts of poverty. And Florence had resolved to crush the woman in her heart, and be any thing, no matter what; cold, heartless, the coquette, the wife without love—any thing rather than be poor.

Her mother's only sister, long resident in Europe, had returned home in time to gaze upon the last struggle and to save the orphan. With this aunt, Mrs. Langley, Florence now lived, and to the time of our history, believed that she had forgotten to be a woman, and fancied that she would escape a woman's destiny—to love and to suffer.

And Gray, too, was alone in the world. One by one,

—the gems from his household crown
To the grave had dropped away.

He was a man whose intellectual power, although of the loftiest order, was surpassed by his feelings. The heart in him was stronger than the mind. There is but one way of guiding this kind of constitution. Affection, passion and feeling must become enslaved by one object; and it by its mastery over these, has power to incite and direct the intellect. And now his heart was filled by an abiding love for

Florence Warner. They had met very early, since their introduction, and Cecil Gray had become her slave. He dared not ask her to love him, the darkness of love without hope was upon him—the darkness of poverty upon her—and torn which would there was no light.

And Tom Marchmont, there was no harm in it. He was

"One of those light-headed fellows whose glances are as much to be feared as their words. They are always on your side, and those light-headed fellows on the same; and the goddess of the Grecian family, the gods may riot, or horrors may fall, Gray will still joust through all."

Poor Tom! Kate Sedleigh made a new plan to him; whereat he, amazed, fell to his feet and swore eternal love. And they were married. The last I heard of them was an occasion of choosing a name for their boy.

"Call him, dear," said Tom, "call him William; and then we'll always have a bill in the house for market days."

"Ah!" said his wife, "I'll make a note of it!"

BOOK III.

"To sit in cold and measured phrase
We have our passion name
Scorning such tedious eloquence,
The heart's fond flame
And long imprisoned feeling fast
In deep sobs come.—MOTHEWELL.

Her heart is round her lover now,
His lip's cheek to hers he presses.—MOORE.

I.

DARKNESS.

A summer party were gathered at Mrs. Langley's country seat a few miles from the Hudson; and Cecil Gray was among them. Here he wandered through the old woods and thought of Florence Warner; carved her name upon the trees and dreamed himself to madden for her.

One evening a riding party had been formed, and Cecil, sad and spiritless, alone on a saddle and was permitted to remain at home. When they had left the room and air had become quiet again, he went down to the library, and for lack of better employment arranged his thoughts into a story—a story in which he strove to show the necessity and use of a wife to the author—in which he endeavored to show that energy is best incited by love, and the mind best guided through the heart. Yet his hero died; for in his own sadness he could not give the creature of his fancy a happy lot.

Just as he finished, the door opened, and Florence Warner entered.

"Mr. Gray?" she said, stopping and growing crimson and then very pale; "I thought you had gone with the riding party."

"I had imagined the same of you," replied Cecil. "But your cheek is pale; are you not well?" and he sat a chair for her.

"No; I have some headache. But what excuse have you?"

"None, save a woman's caprice. I did not feel in the mood for gaiety, and I did not wish to cloud the mirth of others."

"Perhaps I disturbed you," said Florence, glancing at his papers.

"Oh, no! I have finished; and it would have borne interruption."

"You know," she said, "the foible of our sex, curiosity. May I be pardoned for feeling it, and asking the nature of your employment?"

"Truly a fit employment for an idle man; the framing of an idle tale."

"One more request, Mr. Gray. Read it to me—come; she added as she marked his hesitation, 'I will make all due allowance for modesty and imperfection. But we have the morning before us; and I am sure we cannot find a more pleasant employment.'"

Cecil bowed to the compliment and read the tale.

"And such was the comment of Florence, such is the effect of a poor man's marriage?"

none to sympathize with me—none whom I can show the reward of my labors, and ask her to be proud in me; and I cannot work."

"You speak feelingly, Mr. Gray; can it be possible that you, the ever gay, ever smiling, have this darkness of love at your heart? And that question awoke all the passions of his nature."

"Trust not the face," he said. "Trust not the smile, of all things! Even the pool draws his smile for a smile from the sparkling water."

From the beauty of the sunset, and chills not to think of the coming night! Love! you ask me, Perhaps you think the penniless have no right to such a luxury. But I do love; with all my power; fervently, hopelessly. You, Florence Warner! you whom I scorned as the ball room belle when I first saw you; whom I now learned to respect; whom I now live to love; Your beauty allured me; your intellect fascinated me. And now, Florence, I love you not with the heart only; not merely with affection and passion, but with mind and soul, with intellect & thought. Thus have I, the poor scholar, loved by none, dared to love you, the idol of all! I have told you that I love you, and now, farewell forever! As he rose on his feet and turned away, her cheek grew crimson and then pallid as death.

"Cecil," she murmured. He turned in astonishment. She fixed her hand upon his shoulders and fixed her dark fervent eyes upon his. "Cecil Gray!" she repeated; and with a low cry of joy he pressed her to his heart. Then sought the small, ripe lips, and pressed upon them the long—long kiss of passion.

"See, Florence," and from his bosom he drew a small locket. "Your hair is in that with my mother's. It was to be my idol; my memory of my dream of you—but you have loved me."

An hour passed on with arms twined about each other, and their hands clasped together, they gave themselves up to their young happiness. Suddenly impelled by quick thought, Florence, put her hand to her forehead, and drew her hand from his, and said, as she rose to her feet, "Cecil, this must end now."

"Florence! what can you mean?"

"I can never marry you, Cecil!"

"What ails you, dearest?" he asked fondly fearing that she was ill, so pale she grew and trembled so constantly. And he would have wound his arm about her, but she put it aside with a shudder.

"Cecil Gray, I too have a story to tell; listen to me." And she told him of the sorrows, sufferings and death of her parents; the miseries of want as she had seen them and her own resolve.

"My mother died almost of starvation; died in a garret Cecil." And her voice grew passionate and the uncontrollable tears burst from her eyes. "Do not, do not speak to me of love! and she knelt down before him. "Do not ask me to marry you! Could you bring me to this Cecil? Could you see me die of want, and know that you had done it?"

He sunk back stunned and half-senseless. It needed the strong heart of a woman to bear the agony of that hour.

"Poor Cecil!" she said, as she looked upon him. "If it will comfort you to know how truly, how devotedly I love you; if to know that my happiness is gone forever; that the light has left my heart; that my life must be sorrow—know it! and she stooped down and kissed his forehead."

As she left the room he half recovered. "Florence," he murmured, "Florence. Farewell, Cecil," she said. One look—one long, long look on the pale, beautiful face he loved so well, and then the door closed.

It was midnight darkness with them both—silent, rayless and profound.

The bright sun was extinguished and the stars did wander darkling in the eternal space, Rayless and pathless; and the icy earth Swung blind & blackening in the moonless air.

Darkness had no need Of aid from them. She was the universe."

II.

LIGHT.

Alone in her room, Florence Warner flung herself upon the bed and wept long and bitterly. Sternly had she become the iconoclast of her own idols. And she looked now into her desolate heart and saw that nothing but love would fill it. Then she thought of what he had said. He could conquer poverty and all other things if she would love him.

"I cannot lose him," she cried; "I will go to him & ask to share his lot, wherever and however God may cast it."

Gray, as soon as he recovered, went to his own room.

"Well, he thought, it is over now, and the beggar has waked from his dream. What right had I to love? How dared I? What has the poor man to do with passions and feeling?—God did not make love for him. No! let him crawl through the by-ways of life with an humble heart, and hail with a smile the common grave of the Potter's Field; but let him not presume to love."

His eye caught the small box of opium that lay upon his table. He snatched it, and swallowed a portion of its contents.

"Oblivion! oblivion!" he shouted, "they cannot rake that from the door! and as he spoke he dashed from the room. As he left the house, Florence saw him and watched him till his form was lost among the trees."

The breeze increased, and the day darkened, and signs of the summer storm were around him. He did not notice them, but flung himself at the foot of an old tree on which he had carried her initials. And now the drug began its work; the sense of pain had left him, and a confused half-pleasant sensation crept over him. He leaned back his head and closed his eyes—Then to him came visions from the spirit land of dreams, and in those visions all was beautiful. The air was fragrance, delicate but all-pervading; the breeze was music; and there were cool sounds of water fall and brook, and songs of birds and rustling of leaves. Through them moved the form of Florence, her voice enriching the music, and her smile the beauty of the day. He spoke of love to her; and she fastened with a blush, and rested her hand in his, and leaned her beautiful head upon his shoulder. He heard not the low muttering of the thunder and the plash of the first rain drops—

"For far and wide there glittered to the eye Life's only fairy land, the days to come."

But the scene began to change. The forest, the flowers, and the birds passed away, and he saw nothing but a cloud before him, and from it looked the face of his mother with a sweet but mysterious smile upon her lips. She was looking from heaven upon her son. He gazed upon the still face, and as he gazed a change passed over it; the smile faded; the features grew rigid and sharp; an expression of great pain covered them, the eyes were glaring, and the quick gasping breath was there, and the white foam upon the lips, and the face was that which he had watched when he knelt at her death bed. He strove to raise his arms and to murmur "mother!" but voice and arms were powerless. And so the face faded. Then the thunder pealed and the rain fell and demons gazed round him, and seized him and bore him down—down! Thro' the blackness of darkness he passed, and then into a space of cold twilight, which an odor pervaded like the smell of a charnel house, and myriads of cold, dead faces came round him and breathed upon him, and thrilled him with the unutterable sorrow and despair of their looks. And again it changed. Fearful shrieks rent the air, the shrieks of the lost, and a low voice hissed in his ear, "this is thine eternal home! But he shrieked and dashed aside his gaolers, and soared to the upper air. He knew again that he stood in the forest, but the rain was falling freely. Again the living thunder of God shook the sky, and the lightning struck an oak directly in front of him. He saw the high tree sliver and bend;—he heard the crash as it fell through the air;—then covered his eyes—groaned deeply, and fell.

And there Florence Warner found him, and there she called God to witness that she would never forsake him. He opened his eyes and saw her bending over him.

"Ah!" he shuddered, "I am dreaming yet."

"Not dreaming, dear Cecil—not dreaming. It is I! Then the star-beams broke upon his heart—beams of hope and faith."

"And you will love me then, forever? And for answer, she laid her face upon his heart."

"And you will inspire me to labor, and be glad in my fame; you will soothe me when I need it; you will sorrow in my sadness, rejoice in my pleasure and be proud in my pride! When I can justly claim you, you will be my own, my wife?"

He bound her by no vow. He asked no promise, for poor is the love that cannot trust. He was exultant, for he had faith in her. Once, one instant, she raised her trembling lids, and the large eyes dwelt upon him. And the smile came to his lip.

Then the sun broke forth, and the rain-drops sparkled like diamonds, and