THE CHILDREN'S TREASURY

NEW STORIES

BY

A·L·O·E

No. 3.

THE DIAMOND LOCKET.

T·NELSON·AND·SONS
LONDON·EDINBURGH·AND·NEW·YORK

To Dear little Irene
with Grandpa Marquett's
best love

Christmas 1876

PACKET B.

A MOTHER'S LOVE.

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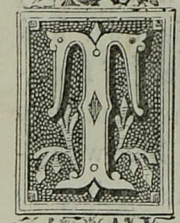
THE DIAMOND LOCKET.

BY

A. L. O. E.



"THROW you into prison for debt!—a debt brought on by sickness, a debt which he knows that you would pay if you could—oh, no, even Mr. Lowe would not have the heart to do it!" exclaimed poor Jessy Stewart to her husband as they stood together in what had been their little coffee-shop, but which was now a place utterly bare; for everything of their own which they could possibly part with had

He that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise

already been sold to pay rent, and meet the heavy expenses of long sickness.

"Nay, Jessy, he will do it. He's a hard man; God forgive him!" replied Duncan with a deep sigh. Trial was pressing sorely on the brave-hearted Scot. His little shop had entirely failed; it had not paid its own expenses; first his wife's illness and then his own had obliged him to part with one article of furniture after the other, and now another quarter's rent was due, and he had not a shilling wherewith to pay it. His landlord was going to throw his unfortunate tenant into a debtor's prison, as was too often done in those days, and turn out his young wife and babe in the depth of winter, to seek shelter wherever they might find it.

"Can nothing save us from this misery?" cried Jessy.

"We must submit, and trust in God," replied Duncan.

Jessy looked doubtfully, anxiously into the thin face of her husband, as if she had something that she wished, yet feared to say. At last she timidly spoke. "You know it's nigh a year since the gentleman who came here for

a cup of coffee dropped that locket in a case, which we did not find till after he had left the shop. We did all that we could to find him out; we put up a paper, we spoke to the minister and the constable about the locket, but no one ever came to claim it. Tim Muir told us at the time that all the diamonds round it were real, and that it was worth—oh, a deal of money! Duncan—Duncan—would it be wrong, now that so many months have passed, and we're in such great, such terrible distress, would it be wrong to sell—"

"Dinna ye tempt me, wife!" cried Duncan. "Dinna ye think that Satan has whispered the same thing to me? Has he not said, 'Why go to a debtor's prison? why see your wife turned out o' house and hame, when ye've a diamond locket beside ye, and naebody comes to claim it?' But, Jessy, I've an answer ready. The locket *isna mine;* to sell it wad be to steal it; better is it to suffer than to sin."

Duncan was interrupted by the entrance of an old companion of his, Tim Muir. This man had known Duncan Stewart from boyhood, so, though the two had scarcely a thought in common, and no great liking for each other

long acquaintance had made Tim a familiar guest. He took a pipe from his mouth as he entered, nodded a familiar "good morning" to Jessy, then seated himself on the counter for lack of a chair, and addressed himself thus to Duncan :—

"I hope that what all the town's saying is not true, old fellow. All the world knows that Lowe has no more heart than that board, but surely he won't have the face to send you to prison, when you're in debt by no fault of your own ?"

Duncan's sad silence was sufficient reply.

"Why, what will become of Jessy and the babe ?"

"Thank God, there will be a hame for Jessy and the bairn," said poor Duncan. "Her cousin at Runside Farm has offered to receive them if the warst comes to the warst."

"Well, it's a bad look out for both of ye," cried Tim, kicking the side of the counter. "And ye were always trusting to Providence, and fancying that all things must turn out right. I hope that you are cured of that sort of weakness for the future."

"Tim Muir," said the ruined man sternly,

"I suffer no sic light talk under this roof. I *do* look to Providence still; I *do* believe that all will come right; I mind me o' the words of old Job, *Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.*"

Tim shrugged his shoulders, and turned towards Jessy. "Of course you've sold everything that can be turned into money," said he.

Sadly Jessy glanced around her bare walls.

"And how much did ye get for the di'mond locket?" asked Tim Muir, bending forward with a look of curiosity on his face. "Ye should have got me to do the job of selling it; the locket is worth twenty guineas if 'tis worth a penny."

Duncan answered instead of his wife. "What it may be worth is nae business of ours; we're not the owners, Tim Muir."

"You don't mean to say that you're acting such a blockhead's part as to go to ruin—you and yours—with a diamond locket in your possession?"

"Na in my possession, Tim, but in my keeping. I am a ruined man; but, God helping me, I'll never be a dishonest one. 'Tis better to suffer than to sin."

Tim saw in the countenance of Duncan that his resolution was fixed, and that there was no use in attempting to shake it. Muir thought his old acquaintance little better than a madman, and he muttered something of the sort as he quitted the shop. For Tim Muir was one of those who choose their portion in this life. To eat and drink plenty, to smoke and make money, this was all that he cared for; seldom did he think of God, seldom of heaven or of hell. The deadened conscience of Muir had never been disturbed by those most solemn words of the Lord: *What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul; or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

Not many hours passed before poor Duncan was carried off to a debtor's prison, and his weeping, desolate wife, with her babe in her arms, set out on her dreary walk across snow-covered wastes, to the farm of her cousin, which lay at nearly four miles' distance. Jessy had nothing left but the clothes and wedding-ring which she wore, with a few linens tied up in a bundle with her Bible, in the very centre of which bundle the diamond locket

had been carefully placed, to be kept till its rightful owner should appear.

Icy chill blew the wind, but a more painful chill lay at the heart of poor Jessy; life to her was wintry indeed. At every step that she took her feet sank deep into the snow; at the end of three miles the poor woman stopped to rest for a few moments, she was so utterly exhausted. As she did so, she was startled by feeling a heavy grasp on her arm, and half turning round, beheld Tim Muir, whose steps she had not heard on account of the snow.

"I say, Jessy Stewart, you're not carrying off that there locket with you?" said Tim. There was something in his manner which alarmed the lonely woman.

"What is that to you?" she replied; her voice trembled as she spoke, but perhaps that was from the cold.

"You've too much to carry; I'll ease you of your bundle;" Tim Muir laid his grasp upon it.

Jessy looked anxiously round to see if help were near. The place was very desolate; not a single dwelling was in sight.

"Thank you, I'd rather carry my bundle

myself," faltered the poor woman; but in a moment it was twitched out of her hold, and Tim darted away with it as fast as he could rush over the snow. Jessy was in dreadful distress; she had not strength to follow the thief, she had hardly enough left to enable her to crawl along to the farm, the first place where she could give notice of the robbery. Heavy clouds were gathering above—a storm would soon burst on her and her poor little child.

"Oh, did my poor husband endure everything rather than sell that locket, only that it should fall into the hands of a heartless thief!" exclaimed Jessy, almost in despair.

Her attention was diverted for a while from her loss by the wail of her poor little babe. Jessy pressed it closer and closer to her aching heart; then, to protect it better from the piercing blast, she took off her own warm shawl, and wrapped it tenderly round and round her child.

"Weary as I am, I must hurry on, or the storm will overtake us. God enable me to reach the farm!" faltered Jessy, again pressing on her way. Very thankful was she when, at last, she tottered rather than walked up to her

cousin's door, just as the whole air was beginning to be filled with great flakes of falling snow.

A kind welcome was given to the exhausted woman. Fresh logs were heaped on the blazing fire, a warm meal was instantly prepared, which greatly revived poor Jessy. She gave instant information of the robbery, and a ploughboy was at once sent off to the town, that Tim Muir might be arrested before he could escape with his ill gotten spoils. But search was made for him in vain. Tim had at once made his way to a port, where a vessel was just about to start for America. He offered to work out his way in her; the captain being short of hands, his offer was accepted, and he was soon far away from the scene of his crime.

The day which to Jessy had begun in such woe, and which had brought such heavy trials, was to close more serenely than she could have dared to hope. While talking over the robbery with her hospitable cousin and his wife, Jessy was startled by the sound of a well-known voice outside, and, running to the door, met her husband—covered indeed with snow, and

looking dreadfully weary, but with an expression of thankful joy on his face.

"Didna I tell ye that Providence wad never forsake us?" was the only sentence that Duncan could utter at first. But when he had been brought a fresh garment, and a hot drink, and had warmed his half-frozen limbs by the fire, he was able to listen to his wife's story, and then to tell her his own.

"I've not been so much as inside the door of the prison, Jessy," said he. "Afore I ever reached it, the constable and I were met by the minister—a minister of good to me and to mine, God bless and reward him! He'd been frae house to house getting up a subscription for a man wha had got into trouble from sickness, and nae from idleness or vice. The Lord, He opened all hearts. Our debt's paid, Jessy, —ay, every penny o't—and there's siller in my pocket now to gi'e us a fresh start in life. But it's wae's me for that locket, Jessy, and for the puir sinfu' man that took it. He'll never thrive on ill-gotten guids! God's aboon a', and will show before a', that it's better to suffer than to sin!"

Stewart remained with the hospitable farmer

for a while, until his strength was sufficiently restored for him to earn his own bread by labour. A situation was easily procured for a man so respectable and honest. Duncan had, indeed, to begin life again, and work hard for a scanty living; but he had a good character and a good conscience, and with the winter all his worst troubles passed away.

One day in early spring, Duncan and his wife were partaking together of their noonday meal in their humble home, when Jessy suddenly exclaimed: "Why, if there is not a carriage stopping at our gate, and there is a gentleman getting out of it. What can bring a stranger to this out-of-the-way place, I wonder, and what can he want with us?"

"He's a traveller, nae doubt, wha has lost his way, and has come to speir it," observed Duncan, rising as the stranger approached the cottage, and going to open the door.

The gentleman entered, bowing courteously to Jessy as he crossed the threshold of her little abode.

"Do you remember me, my friends?" asked the stranger, glancing first at Duncan, then at his wife.

"I canna just say that I do, sir," said Duncan; and Jessy shook her head in reply.

"Do you remember this?" said the gentleman, as with a smile he drew forth a diamond locket.

Husband and wife uttered an exclamation at the same moment. Well they knew the appearance of the locket, but they had never expected to see it again.

"I have to thank you both for keeping this safely for me so long," said the stranger. "Having had my pocket picked of handkerchief and purse in a crowd shortly after leaving your shop, I made no doubt that the thief who had taken them had taken my locket also. As I was then on the point of starting for America, and was afraid of losing my passage by delay, I never returned to make what I deemed hopeless inquiries at the place where I had taken a cup of coffee."

"Ah, sir, I remember your face now," exclaimed Jessy, "though I never saw you but once."

"But how you recovered your locket at last passes my understanding, sir," cried the as-

tonished Duncan; "or how you ever should find us out here."

"Or how you knew that we had kept the locket for you," added Jessy.

"That part of the story I had from the lips of the poor dying wretch who owned that he had stolen the locket from the faithful and honest woman who had preferred suffering hunger, cold, and distress, to taking what was not her own."

"Dying, sir! did you say *dying?*" cried Jessy.

Mr. Parr, such was the gentleman's name, took a seat which was offered to him, and then in few words gave an account to which Duncan and Jessy listened with keenest interest.

"I was not long ago in Quebec," said Mr. Parr, "and before embarking for England, visited the hospital there, in company with the chaplain of the place. As we were passing through one of the wards, the nurse addressed my companion.

"'The poor fellow in yon bed,' said she, 'has been very anxious to speak to you, sir. I think that there is something on his mind. He has lately arrived from the old country; he'll never live to return to it.'

"Following the chaplain, I walked up to the patient's bedside. What was my surprise when he drew forth a locket, which I instantly recognized as my own.

"'Oh, sir,' he gasped forth to the chaplain, 'I want you to take charge of this; and when I'm dead, send it to England, to the honest pair from whom I stole it—I have never known peace from that hour!'

"Of course the unhappy man was questioned, and thus the whole story came out. He died, I trust, a penitent, but in great anguish both of body and mind. On coming to England," continued Mr. Parr, "my first care was to find you out; everything that I heard of you confirmed the account of poor Muir. Take now, with a clear conscience, that which you have merited so well"—as the gentleman spoke he laid on the table a purse heavy with gold; "receive with it my thanks for having preserved for me a locket containing hair which no money could ever have replaced, and may your child, as she grows up, learn by your noble example that whatever temptations may beset us, *it is better to suffer than to sin!*"

SA
TUCKER C
DIAMOND

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