

CURDIES

I.

THE HE'RT O' A LION.

BUT for a slight smudginess of their articulation, which seemed to indicate a recent contribution to the National Exchequer by way of exciseable liquor, they appeared to be normal. Their conversation was spasmodic and did not touch a wide range of human interests. Indeed, during the ten minutes or so in which I was privileged to sit in front of them on the top of a tramcar, the words they uttered were comparatively few. And there were long but eloquent pauses between. It was not so much what they said or left unsaid as the air of dejection in which the whole proceedings were shrouded that arrested my attention. I at once concluded they must be on their way home from seeing some dear friend laid to rest in Mother Earth. The duologue proceeded like this:—

“She had the he’rt o’ a lion.”

“She had that.”

“I never seen her, what ye wad ca’, bate.”

“Naw!”

“The he’rt o’ a lion.”

“Ay! she had that.”

“They’re no’ makkin’ her kind, noo-a-days.”

“Naw!”

This gives you the gist of the conversation. No written word, however, could convey to you its melancholy, its unutterable sadness. When I tell you that this short talk occupied the time of a tramcar journey from Argyle Street to Cook Street, you will understand the depth of feeling from which it sprang.

As a remembered tune will sometimes set the mind wandering to "old unhappy far-off things, and battles long ago," so these few sad ejaculations brought before me as in a flash the heroic women of the past, and of the present as well—the lion-hearted ones.

From that tramcar window I saw not street nor tenement, but Boadicea, Helen of Troy, Joan of Arc, Grace Darling, Florence Nightingale, Nurse Cavell. More even than these, I saw the great army of heroic women whose names to-day are unknown—widowed mothers working their fingers to the bone to bring up their families, proud young wives hiding their poverty under a cloak of respectability, motherless girls in their teens taking the household helm; women—mute inglorious ones—battling with fate and circumstance and death.

"She had the he'rt o' a lion."

The phrase came to me and stung my mind into action. I saw that the real heroes of all time had been the women. Not spectacular heroism theirs; no blare of bugles, no decorations, no "mentioned in dispatches," but day-in-day-out heroism, morning-to-night heroism. In comparison with all this, the actions of men seemed as so many flashes in the pan. The thought burned in on me, and brought me very close to my unknown friends.

"She had the he'rt o' a lion."

"Ay, she had that."

I wanted to turn round and ask them to tell me of this modern *Helen*. But by this time they were in a state of semi-reverie, and I felt it would be almost indelicate to intrude on their sorrow. At last, as we were nearing Allison Street, I was rewarded with some of the facts.

"An', mind ye, if it hadna been for that catarrh she would hae been as guid the day as ever."

"Ay, it was that that knockit her oot."

"Man, it fair gruppit her."

"Ay, it did that."

"Ah, weel, it canna be helpit."

"Naw!"

"I was awfu' sorry a' the same."

"Ay, it was a big loss."

Here they rose to go, but they continued their conversation as they went.

"It wasna the loss, man; it was the disappointment."

"Ay, I ken."

"An' to see yon wee broon knock-knee'd thing winnin' the handicap—man, it was fair seeknin'; yon's no' a whippit at a', it's a rabbit; that's what I ca' it—a rabbit!"