

TYBORNE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EASTERN HOSPITALS AND ENGLISH NURSES."

CHAPTER V.—Continued.

CONSTANCE would have taken little heed of this remonstrance, had not the surprise and gravity written on Isabel's face assured her her conduct was not pleasing to her guest: she quickly disengaged herself, and stood by in silence, while Lady Anne with solemnity welcomed Mrs. de Lisle to her brother's house. Isabel received the attention with equal distance, and then presented her cousin.

During this colloquy the Earl and his train withdrew; but lingering in the doorway unobserved was Walter, who was thus spectator of the whole, and marked the loving greeting and the cold repulse. Lady Anne now proposed that the guests should retire to their apartments: this was most gladly acceded to, and Lady Anne, with Isabel, quitted the hall, followed by Mary and Lady Constance: the latter lingered behind for a moment, as if uncertain whether she should come, but Mary's sweet smile drew her to her side. Walter watched the whole, and inwardly thanked his cousin for endeavouring to repair his sister's want of courtesy.

A suite of apartments was assigned to Isabel, furnished luxuriously, as was deemed in those days. The windows looked out into the park, and the green fields in the distance beyond it; one also had a view of the courtyard, where the scene was bustling and various.

The cousins were alone, and Mary, tired with her journey, threw herself upon a couch. Isabel seemed insensible of fatigue; she paced up and down the room with impatient steps; her coil was thrown aside, and her luxuriant black hair streamed in masses upon her shoulders.

"O dear Isabel, do take a little rest; I know you are very fatigued, you look so pale; and you will fall sick—indeed you will."

"There is no rest for me," said Isabel; "I am not made for prison life, Mary; oh, how I pine already for my own mountain air! how this flat place wearies me!"

"Well," said her cousin, "in that I cannot agree with you dear cousin; it is not so flat as Essex, where I have dwelt all my life."

Isabel made no answer; but she stopped in her walk, and laying her head against the window, looked out with the wistful gaze of a caged bird.

"Isabel," began Mary, "did you ever see any one so beautiful as Constance Beauville?"

"Oh yes; many more so," said Isabel, in a quiet tone.

"Now, Isabel, surely that is impossible, for I do believe hers is the fairest form and face in all England; she is a perfect little fairy. I have heard it said that there is a look of the Queen of Scotland in her face sometimes, and that she is certainly like her."

"The Queen of Scotland is less fair than I have ever deemed her, then," said Isabel, scornfully.

Mary raised herself from the couch. "Dear cousin," she said, "I crave a favour from you: you know how truly I love you; suffer me to speak to you frankly and seriously."

"Willingly," answered Isabel, in the same scornful tone. "What have the times come to when Mary Thoresby turns preacher!"

"Well," said Mary, with unwearied sweetness. "since I am so seldom a preacher, it is but fair you should listen to me when I do hold forth. I would say then, Isabel, you who are so noble and generous in mind, I pray you not to let prejudice destroy your peace here. Why should you scorn Constance Beauville? her greeting this day was full of affection. How can you gain influence and win your way here save by conciliation?"

Isabel drew herself to her full height. "Mary Thoresby, do I hear you aright?—I win my way here! I—a prisoner!—what owe I to those who keep me here against my will? Nothing. To dwell here patiently is all you can ask of me, deprived of friends and of the exercise of my religion. I will live in these rooms with Rachel, in as retired a way as possible. I do not want the hypocritical affection of the Beauville family, nor will I stoop to dissemble with them."

"I do not ask you to dissemble," returned Mary; "I know well how hard is your lot, how much you have to endure; but surely it is not right, nor wise, to reject the kindness that is offered, however much injustice may be mingled with it. And think of Walter also; he will not stand aloof as you do; and think how necessary it is that you and he should act in the same manner."

"Walter," burst forth Isabel, indignantly, "may choose his own path, and I pray he may not repent it; but ask me not to share it. It has well-nigh maddened me to see at De Lisle Castle how he would stoop to Lord Beauville's will. Oh, would I were a man, and the Earl should see what a De Lisle should, and should not, brook!"

"You wrong Walter," answered Mary; "he has as noble a spirit as ever breathed in his race; and I am certain it is by the advice of Father Gerard he has acted."

This name quieted Isabel. She was silent for a moment, then said, "There is enough of this, Mary; do not let us dispute just when we are about to part; you have done right to speak your mind, and now no more. I will act as appears best to me." And Isabel left the room to give directions to Rachel, and was, at all events, roused by her cousin's remonstrance from her despairing mood for the time being.

Mary felt it was indeed useless to say more, and even regretted she had gone so far. Her admiration for her cousin was so great that, though it did not prevent her from seeing her faults, it gave her great faith that the noble spirit and sense of right would in time triumph over prejudice.

CHAPTER VI.

"But for my sister Isabel,
The mood of woman who can tell."

LORD OF THE ISLES.

"ARE you really going, Mary?" said Walter to his cousin, when he met her in the early morning of the following day in the gardens of Apswell Court.

"Yes, indeed I must, Walter; if the escort comes, as I think it will, this evening, I must bid you all farewell to-morrow."

"I think," said Walter, "that I will go forth and mislead the escort, tell them this is not Apswell Court."

"Ah!" laughed Mary, "trust the Thoresby wit for that, my Lord de Lisle."

Walter's smile passed away. "I shall miss you so, dear cousin," he said, tenderly.

"Well," said Mary, cheerfully, "I cannot wish that you should not miss me, for a while at least; but I trust shortly matters will look brighter, and your sojourn here less tedious."

"Why must you go so soon, Mary?"

"My father does not wish me to stay long as Earl Beauville's guest; and besides, he is able just at this moment to send an escort for me, which is not always in his power, for you know we are not the rich Thoresbys now. Walter, I have set my heart on your coming to Thoresby Hall. I feel certain you are to come some day."

"Yes," said Walter, "I will come, Mary; I promise you I will; it cannot be so difficult an undertaking but that a firm will can compass it."

"I suppose you can hardly tell me yet how you like this place."

"Yes, I can, Mary," returned he; "I am very wretched; I do not see how it can be otherwise. Lord Beauville's train is thronged by young gentlemen of good birth, who hope to win their spurs or gain advancement, from being his attendants; but to mix among them, and not to forswear the worship of God, is impossible."

Mary shuddered. "I have heard my father say that the license allowed in noble households, of those attached to the court, is fearful."

"Fearful," answered her cousin, "and loathsome! Brought up as I have been, Mary, at college, among learned and holy men, it revolts me to hear the coarse and ribald talk that met my ear last night."

"And can you not avoid it in any way?"

"Yes, in one, pluming myself on my birth, I can show that I descend not to mingle with those a step below me; but then, Mary, it will be solitude, entire and unbroken."

"Come, come, Walter," said Mary, "be like a brave knight and good Christian, and fight manfully. You want not me to preach to you, after all the lore you heard at Rheims; but I heard it once said, that when God sends trials thick on us, He treats us as a general does his most trusty soldiers,—he puts them in the dangerous parts."

"You say truly, Mary," exclaimed Walter, with brightening tone and manner, "and I will fight my best, and not be a coward in the battle. This is the last complaint I will make, and as you are going away, Mary, I shall have no opportunity."

"So you only desired my stay that you might grumble to me, most noble baron;" and both the cousins laughed merrily.

In the very midst of their mirth, turning round a corner of the walk came upon them the Lady Constance, fresh and beautiful as the roses she carried in her hand. She blushed, and curtsying with grace, almost stateliness, said "she was sorry to interrupt them," and would have passed on, but Mary prevented her.

"I depart to-morrow, Lady Constance," said she, pleasantly, "and I shall feel as if I knew nothing of one who is to be my cousin's friend."

Constance being nothing loath, the three continued their walk together, and blithely ran their tongues, as they discussed the various amusements of the day, keeping carefully away from the dangerous topics of religion or court news.

"I fear you will find Apswell Court a very dull residence," said Lady Constance to Walter; "for since my brother went abroad, and my father is so much at court, it has grown quite different from what it used to be. We had merry days when Regnier was at home."

"Viscount Regnier is your only brother, I think," said Mary. "My half-brother," replied Constance. "We are both our mother's only children." And then, quickly, as if anxious to change the subject, she exclaimed, "Miss Thoresby, I do so envy you one thing."

"What is that?" inquired Mary, with a smile.

"That sweet-looking serving-maiden of yours; I have never been able to get one I liked."

"I should be truly glad if you would have this one, then," returned Mary; and she hastened to explain that Rose did not belong to her. "I travelled without an attendant," she said, "to De Lisle castle; and as for Rose, I believe this very day Lady Anne will be besought to find a service for her, since Rachel, the elderly one, is to attend upon my cousin."

"Then it is settled at once," said Constance, eagerly. "I am so glad; will you send her to me presently, Mistress Thoresby, and I will arrange the wage with her, and other matters, and (as soon as suits Mistress de Lisle's convenience) she can enter on her attendance. But I hear sounds that announce the dinner-hour; is it indeed ten of the clock? I thought it not so late."

Lady Constance departed. Mary gazed after her for a moment, and exclaimed, "How very lovely she is!" She turned to her cousin again, but Walter's eyes were fixed on the path Constance had taken, with so riveted a gaze as startled Mary.

"Lovely!" he said; "methinks I never saw aught so fair on earth."