

Tyborne.

By the author of "Eastern Hospitals and English Nurses."

PART THE SECOND.

CHAPTER XII.—(Continued.)

"Ralph," answered Walter, "we are going together to death, let us go together to heaven."

"Alas, good master, art thou distraught? Did I not tell thee I have served the devil well, and am to be hung for my crimes, as I deserve?"

"You have served Satan in life," said Walter, "and it suffices; serve him not in death. Thou hast not forgotten thy mother, and thy childhood, when thou knelt by her side, and heard the holy Mass. She is dead long since, you say, and is with God; I too had a mother who died praying for me; perchance from that sky above us they, with God's chosen ones, are leaning to see us die! Oh, how mightily they pray for us!" and as he spoke he raised his eyes with a look of such rapt faith and devotion, that one might almost dream, like St Stephen, he saw heaven open. "And another mother prays for you, Ralph," he continued; "*Sancta Maria Mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, nunc et in hora mortis nostrae.*"

The words struck on Ralph's ear with a strange appealing sound. The tears were falling down his rough hard face. "Alas! father, I am too great a sinner; there is no repentance for me, a wretch, a villain! No, no, hell gapes for me! I saw it last night in my sleep, and for the first time in my life I knew what fear was; but there is no hope for me."

"Thou art not a greater sinner," the priest replied, "than he who hung on the cross by the side of JESUS, or she that washed His feet; thou canst recollect the time when, at thy mother's knees thou hearest the tale of mercy? He has said, if thy sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow. Ralph, thou believest in God, in Christ the Saviour, and that in His Church He hath left pardon for sins?"

"I believe," sobbed Ralph; the hard heart was broken in the anguish of that hour, and on that rude death-bed the work of reconciliation went on. The mob pelt them still, and jest them, as they pass. The hurdle shakes and jolts along the rough road, and up the long Holborn Hill; but they heed not the one, feel not the other—that sinner who sobs out his sins and his repentance; that priest, who, for the last time on earth, absolves his Master's sheep. Soon, very soon, he must stand before that Master to render his account, and he is winning one more soul to lay before those Feet.

And now they have reached the top of the hill, and the houses, which have been getting gradually few and straggling, have ceased altogether, and they have reached the Hospital of St Giles in the Fields, and there, according to an old custom, a cup of wine or ale was offered to the prisoners, "their last refreshment in this life!"* Then, for the first time, did Walter betray some emotion. He gazed on the full cup of good red wine, and the tears came into his eyes, and he refused to drink. Ralph, parched with thirst, drank eagerly, and urged Walter to do the same, but he would not, and Arthur Leslie knew that his thoughts were of the "gall and vinegar" of his Lord's last cup on earth. A crowd having collected at this place of stoppage Walter began to speak to them. "Good people, ye know for what cause I am about to die:" but he was rudely checked by the guards, and the hurdle again put in motion.

There will not be any more houses till they reach the little village of Tyborne. On each side of the road now spread the wide green fields, and the tall trees made a pleasant shade. It was a lovely day; one of these cloudless days in summer, when hardly a fleecy cloud can be seen in the clear intensely blue sky. The birds carolled gaily past, unmindful and unknowing of cruelty and wrong on earth, in the fields the little flowers England's own meadow flowers, rejoiced in their beauty, and sent up their worship to their Creator. And so the long procession reached Tyborne.

It was a sight, in very truth; the fields immediately surrounding the place of execution were filled with people: it was one dense mass of heads. Nearer the gallows and scaffold, which were on the edge of the road, were numerous coaches and horsemen. It was roughly computed, afterwards, that of these there were from six to seven hundred, and the crowd of people on foot about twenty thousand. However many people had gone to see the queen step into her royal barge, there were enough left to be a more numerous body than Elizabeth would have desired. Among the horsemen, there was one mounted on a dark gray horse, who was determined in his efforts to place himself in good sight of the gallows, and by great perseverance, and many winning words, he succeeded in his purpose. Arthur Leslie, on foot, was close beside the scaffold, he had struggled through the crowd with the strength love ever gives to be near the loved and suffering. The tall gallows rose grim and dark before the spectator's eyes, but loving hands had endeavoured to rob it of some of its horrors, for it was twined with wreaths of green and summer flowers, and the ground directly around was strewn with green leaves and sweet-smelling herbs. The affectionate hearts who had prepared these tokens were rewarded when they heard of the smile of pleasure which lit up the martyr's face when he perceived them. Close to the gallows stood the scaffold, raised some feet above the ground and formed of rough planks. The hangman's two assistants were there, holding in their hands the cords for binding the victims, and the long knives for the inhuman butchery which was to ensue. The hangman himself was busy at the gallows. On one side of the scaffold was the sheriff of the county and some of his officers, together with three or four Protestant ministers, who had come thither with the hope of winning a recantation from Walter, or of preventing any dying words of his having weight with the people. The hurdle stopped: the prisoners were released and led to the scaffold. There was a great hum among

the crowd when Walter made his appearance. Despite all he had gone through, there was a majesty and a patrician grace about his tall and noble figure, and, though torture and suffering had done their work, there lingered much of that manly beauty which had gladdened his mother's eye long years before.

"Let the highwayman be put to death first," said the sheriff; "and perchance, sir, thou, by this grievous sight, may be led to crave the queen's grace even now."

"Farewell then, my son," said Walter, turning to Ralph; and he would have embraced him, had not the latter fallen at his feet, and kissed them with many tears.

And now Walter was compelled to witness the horrible spectacle of Ralph's death.

"Make him look at it all," whispered one of the ministers to the sheriff.

No need for such counsel. The priest knew his duty too well, and faltered not; he held up the crucifix before Ralph's eyes, and bade him call on his Lord for patience. The agony was fearful, and shrieks and cries burst from the dying sufferer. Walter prayed earnestly for Ralph and for himself: "Lord, give us grace unto the end."

At length one frightful cry, and then it ended. Upon the poor, panting, bleeding corpse earth could do no more.

"Now, Master de Lisle," said the sheriff, "'tis thy turn; unless indeed, thou wilt recant and go to church."

"Nay," said Walter, "better a thousand deaths than deny Christ. I desire of your favour but a short space to speak to the people."

"No, no," cried the ministers with one voice; "let him not, Master Sheriff, let him not pervert the people."

The sheriff was quite willing to forbid it; but the people were determined to hear the speech,—and the will of a great mob is generally omnipotent,—and so Walter stepped forward and began his address:—

"Good people, and dear fellow countrymen, hearken unto me. My religion is the Roman Catholic: in it I now die, and so fixedly die, that if all the good things in this world were offered me to renounce it, all should not remove me one hair's breadth from my Roman Catholic faith. A Roman Catholic I am; a Roman Catholic priest I am; a Roman Catholic priest of that religious order called the Society of JESUS I am; and I bless God who first called me, and I bless the hour in which I was first called, to these functions. Many that are here present heard my trial, and can testify that nothing was laid to my charge but priesthood: if to be a Catholic priest is to be a traitor, then indeed I am one; this is the cause for which I die, and for propagating the Catholic faith which is spread through the whole world, taught through all ages, from Christ's time, and will be taught for all ages to come. For this cause I most willingly sacrifice my life, and I look upon it as my greatest happiness that my most good God has chosen me (most unworthy) to this blessed lot, the lot of saints. I have deserved a worse death; for though I have been a faithful and true subject to my queen, I have been a grievous sinner against God. Thieves and robbers that rob on highways would have served God in a greater perfection than I have done, had they received so many favours and graces from Him as I have. But as there was never sinner who truly repented and called to JESUS for mercy, to whom He did not show mercy, so I hope by the merits of His passion, He will have mercy on me, who am heartily sorry that I ever offended Him. Whomsoever, present or absent, I have ever offended, I humbly desire them to forgive me; as for my enemies, I freely forgive them all, and singularly, and especially those who have thirsted after my blood. I wish their souls so well that, were it in my power, I would seat them seraphim in heaven. And I beg of the goodness of my God, with all the fervour I am able, and most humbly entreat Him that He would drive from you that are Protestants the darkness of error, and enlighten your minds with the rays of truth; and to you who are Catholics I say, fear God, honour your queen, be firm in your faith; avoid mortal sin by frequenting the sacraments of Holy Church; patiently bear your afflictions and persecutions; forgive your enemies. Your sufferings are great; I say, be firm in your faith to the end, yea, even to death; then shall you heap unto yourselves celestial treasures in the heavenly Jerusalem, where no thief robbeth, no moth eateth, and no rust consumeth. Bear me witness, all my hearers, that I profess all the articles of the Roman Catholic faith in that Church, one, holy, catholic and apostolic; that church which is to continue to the consummation of the world. Whatever that Church of God hath by revelation from Him, whatever that Church hath taught me and commanded me to believe, I believe it to an *iota*. And as to what is said of Catholics having dispensations for lying, perjury, killing kings, and other most enormous crimes, I declare it is a most wicked and malicious calumny cast upon us.†

"Cease, cease, Master De Lisle," said the sheriff, "time presses, and it is enough; prepare to die."

Walter turned from the edge of the scaffold and was about to pray. One of the ministers came forward—

"Good brother repent thee of thy errors, and let me pray with thee for mercy on thy misguided soul."

Walter looked at him, saying gently—

"My friend, you and I are not one in religion, wherefore I pray you content yourself. I bar none of prayer, only I desire them of the household of faith to pray with me, and in my agony to say one creed."‡

"Then," replied the minister rudely, "if thou prayest at all, pray in English, and not in an unknown tongue."

"I will pray," replied Walter gently, "in a language I well understand."

"Misguided man," said another minister, "we bid thee pray as Christ taught,"

An involuntary smile passed over Walter's face.

"What! do you think Christ taught in English?"

"Pray for the queen," said the sheriff sternly,