

Tyborne.

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

PART THE SECOND.

CHAPTER XIV.—(Continued.)

Beside Rachel's grave there was another, unmarked, save by a little cross; and the good nuns of the convent often prayed beside it, and mingled tears with their prayers, for they said that though she who rested there had been unable to speak their language, they knew assuredly her fervent penance had won favour with God, and if they prayed for her according to her last earnest message to them, she would plead for them before God's face.

Shortly after Rachel's death, Rose entered the convent, and received the habit of the order, and in due time was professed. She was, however, constantly sent, as well as other of the Religious, to assist Constance in the care of Lady Beauville. But latterly Isabel's strength had suddenly given way, without any apparent cause, and the physician declared death was at hand, and, with an intensity of anxiety, the watchers waited for some sign of reason, and fervent were the prayers that went up that this boon might be granted.

On each side of the bed knelt a nun, and a physician was standing near, while in one corner knelt Father Louis, the almoner of the hospital. There was a change on the sufferer's face, and she turned restlessly from side to side. She fixed her eyes on Constance as she entered.

"Constance, is it you?"

Constance bent over her. "Dearest, I am here."

"I see all, I know all," she murmured. "Forgive me, ere I die."

And Father Louis came near, and she said—"Father, bless me, for I have sinned deeply. Is there hope for me, father?"

And Father Louis answered—"He that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out."

And the watchers withdrew, and the room was closed to all save the priest and the dying penitent. And then they were recalled, and the last rites of the Church took place, and Isabel made her last communion. After that she spoke but little, but those words were treasured up afterwards, for in them lay hid a depth of penitence, and of self-abasement, and of the childlike faith that clung to forgiveness in the Precious Blood.

She looked at Constance, and she blessed her for long years of patient devotion. "Thou hast comforted me, my sister, and God will comfort thee in thy last hour." The night came, she fell into a gentle sleep, and awoke in her death-agony. It was not long, but sharp; but the prayers of the Holy Church went up with might, and at last peace came.

"Mother!" she cried, looking upwards, "do I see you at last? Mother and Walter—how beautiful, oh, how glorious!"

And Constance's eyes also looked upward, for she, too, almost fancied she saw angelic forms, and for a moment she murmured, "Lord, take me home also." But only for a moment, and then the humble, patient spirit turned again to her task on earth, to watch, to wait, to pray.

Within a year of their arrival in Belgium, Lord Beauville procured a divorce, and immediately afterwards married again. The next news that came to Constance was, that her darling boy, the little Marquis of Moreton, was dead. In the midst of his childish glee, while riding on a pony in the park of Bertram Castle, the pony stumbled, threw the child, his head struck against the root of a tree, and he was taken up dead. Poor Constance, when the first burst of the mother's agony was over, while she pictured to herself those golden curls lying stiff in the coldness of death, and those merry blue eyes closed for ever, became comforted, and thanked God for thus taking one of her darlings safe in his innocence to the country where there are no more partings; but her anxiety for her remaining child grew keener, and increased when she received the news of her own divorce, which the Duke, after the death of his heir was induced to seek, and afterwards of his marriage to Mistress Elizabeth Fortescue, a woman of the same nature as her mother,—stern, implacable, and bigoted. But there was no help on earth, and Constance prayed on. Years passed from the time of Isabel's death, and Constance spent her time between prayer and good deeds. From the feet of the Mother of Sorrows, where she poured out her aching heart, she went to comfort the afflicted, to bind up the broken-hearted. All in sorrow, all in distress, all in suffering, knew her well. "The pale English lady," was the title the Belgians gave her. She was kind to all; but when, as it sometimes happened, refugees from England came for shelter, her sympathy poured itself forth upon them with infinite tenderness. The sick valued the touch of her cool hand, and the sound of her soft voice. The sorrowful raised their heads as they looked at her, bearing her bitter trials so meekly; priests, who were venturing on the English mission came to see her to beseech her prayers; for in their might, before God's throne, they had great faith. The Religious, also, of the convent, when in trouble or distress, were wont to ask their superior's leave to beg the English lady to pray for them; but of all who loved her, and she loved, the dearest were the little children.

They flocked round her when she went forth; and she could enter into their gambols, and soothe their childish sorrows with a mother's care. She was not wont to say much, but her few words of counsel sank into their hearts, and checked many a hasty word or foolish action. In such deeds her calm life passed away; and gradually her step grew feebler, and a hollow cough shook her frame, and Sister Mary of the Cross (which was Rose Ford's name in region) saw plainly that for her, too, rest was coming.

At last she could not go beyond the convent walls, and then she grew weaker still, and could no longer leave her chamber. It was a peaceful room that of Constance's; the windows looked into the convent garden, with its bright flowers and shady trees, and one transept

of the church was in view; and Constance lay on her couch, and gazed on the fair things His hand had made, and thought of the time when she, too, had played among the flowers; blithe as the birds that flew past the window; and she remembered what she was, stricken and suffering, with death near, and she rejoiced.

It was on such a day that two persons might be seen passing through the streets, and inquiring anxiously for the Augustinian Convent. One was a tall and handsome Frenchman, and he bent with tender care over a young lady, whose fair complexion and sunny hair marked her at once as having English blood. They paused before the door of the convent, and the lady cast an eager glance on the grey walls.

"Does an English lady reside here?" said the gentleman to the portress.

The woman answered him by bursting into tears.

"Oh, is she dead?" cried the lady, in a tone of agony

"No, no, Madame; but near to death. You had better see Mother Prioress."

They were shown into the parlour, and an aged nun, the Prioress of the convent entered,

"You ask for the Duchess of Bertram," she said; "she is very ill; and few, indeed, are they whom we can allow to see her;" but she glanced at the lady: "You are English, and that has ever a claim upon her." And then the nun started. "Madame is a kinswoman of our dear and noble lady?"

"Reverend mother," said the lady, going forward, "I am her child."

Sister Mary of the Cross went gently into Constance's room; she sat, as we have said, gazing on the fair scene, and then on a crucifix she held in her hand. The nun knelt down by her side.

"Has she come, my sister?" said Constance, gently. "Yes, I know all; that Mother's Heart has heard my prayer, and I shall see my child ere I die."

And for the last few days in Constance's life, she was watched and tended by a daughter's love.

Mary Bertram's was a strange history; her childhood had been an unhappy one; her stepmother was stern and unloving, and treated the child with undue severity. It tended, however, to keep alive in her mind a tender remembrance of the mother's fondness she dimly remembered. She never forgot the prayer she had been taught, and she cherished an intense desire to know more of the religion for which her mother was banished. When she grew up and made her appearance in the world, she was taken notice of by the French ambassador who remembered Constance, and who, from political reasons, was high in favour at court. By her Mary was instructed in the faith, and by her means a marriage was arranged with the Marquis de Coucy, who had been attached to the embassy, but who, on his marriage would return to France. Mary was one to inspire ardent affection, and he was as eager to grant as she was to ask, that their first act should be to visit Belgium, and see the mother from whom she had been so long parted.

So thus it came to pass that Constance first saw her beloved child received into the Catholic Church, and left her the wife of a Catholic. All earthly sorrows and cares were over; and leaning on Mary's bosom and holding Rose's hand, she not long after passed to her home.

At the same hour, in a royal palace, there was another death-scene and the sufferer sat upon the ground in sullen despair, and "dared not" die in her bed.*

Long ere this Basil Travers and Arthur Leslie (who became a priest) had gained the martyr's crown, and in their turn, "gone to Tyborne."

And Thoresby Hall. We must not forget one look at that and its inhabitants, and what they have been doing these long fifteen years. Good Sir Robert sleeps with his father, and Sir Henry Thoresby rules the hall. Blanche, too, has long since gone to her reward; and Mary and Clinton reside at their manor of Northwolds, near Colechester. Sir Henry has married, and little merry voices wake the echoes in Northwolds and in Thoresby Hall, and childish feet patter up and down the stairs, and childish minds wonder much why the large tapestry chamber at Thoresby is kept so sacred, and never used except by the priests.

Three hundred years are past and gone! The last of the Tudors and the last of the Stuarts alike crumble into dust. A new dynasty holds the sceptre of England, and a queen, with many a woman's virtues, sits upon the throne. The rack and the torture-chamber are things of the past, and the savage laws of Elizabeth can be found only in some obsolete statute-book. Men walk abroad in safety, for England is free!

Still do we fondly linger over the traces where our martyrs suffered and our confessors endured. Still stands Thoresby Hall: its walls are gray and the ivy clings lovingly to them. Though still the property, it is no longer the habitation of the noble line. The pressure of fines removed, they have grown wealthy, and a more stately house has arisen for their home, and their honoured name is on the rolls of England's nobility. There has been no stain on the history of their house. No apostate has ever been reckoned among their ancestry; and in Thoresby Hall, though the daily sacrifice was oft suspended, and the faithful worshipped in fear, still, never through these long three hundred years has the sound of alien worship, of mutilated rites, or of false doctrine been heard within its walls. The chapel now was the chapel then; small and not richly adorned, yet breathing the odour of a changeless faith, of an abiding presence, and the lime-trees send forth their sweet fragrance in the moonlight, while other lovers perchance plight their vows; and on the grassy slopes the sunlight shines. Go visit Thoresby Hall, as we erewhile did, on some summer day, when the scorching glare of the sun is almost blinding, and yet around Thoresby there breathes the air of coolness and repose. Go and look at the "hiding-hole" where Walter de Lisle once lay and prayed. Look round the garden and mark the rose-trees bending to the earth with their luxuriant weight, and feel as we did, that over Thoresby Hall there breathes a "perpetual benediction."