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HAWTHORNDEN

A STORY OF EVERY DAY LIFE

BY MRS. CLARA M. THOMPSON

CHAPTER XX.—CONTINUED

Sister Agnes was called away by the imperative duties of her vocation, and the young people were left together. Laura poured out her whole soul to her young friend; reproached herself, and no one else, for all that had befallen her; re-lived the long story of her illness, the many times she had longed to die, if only if she could assure Aleck of her sorrow for the past, and of her unchanging love for him through all. She convinced Rosine that she had no earthly wish but to be at peace with her husband, and rid of that terrible Le Compte, whom she sometimes thought must be the arch-fiend himself.

Rosine's heart, so cold and bitter toward Laura in the morning, was warm and glowing with love and pity when she returned at night. The trusting, confiding, unsuspecting spirit of uncorrupted youth! Is it not a treasure we may cherish to old age with us, if we would cherish the spirit of our dear Lord, in forgiving to the "seventy times seven"? Rosine found the family dispersed in various directions; Mrs. Hartland gone to a meeting of a charitable society, of which she was president; the Colonel not returned since a call to business in the morning; Dr. Hartland still at his office. She threw herself in the large arm-chair near the library fire without even unhooking, and gave her mind up to reflection, as to what she could do for Laura. The story of Le Compte and his dreaded influence made her unshaken soul tremble, and she could not prevent sensation a shivering of fear, when she recalled Laura's description of his appearance at her Aunt's and the fearful proposition he had made. It was grievous that so young and fresh a mind should be tortured with the knowledge that such things are. Rosine trembled and wept alternately, starting at the least sound, now wishing somebody would come, and anon hoping they would not, till she had recovered her usual calmness. In the midst of her bewildered reverie came the Colonel, the room was indifferently lighted with one drop-light, the gas partially turned off, and he did not see Rosine till he came close upon her. She arose immediately to give him the comfortable chair.

"Where are you going, daughter?" he inquired, "or have you just come in?"

"No, father," she replied, "I have been home some time. I was only thinking." Her tone was strangely sad, and the Colonel drew her down upon his knee, and tried to look into her face.

"What troubles you, my dear?" he inquired, anxiously. "Aren't you well?"

"Perfectly well," she replied, then hesitated.

"Out with it, my child," he said, affectionately.

"I have been to see poor Laura, and I was thinking of her," she answered, quite simply.

"Pshaw! Rosa," he replied hastily, "don't give her a thought; she'll take care of herself, she's used to it."

"O, please don't say so; she is dreadfully persecuted, tormented, and so troubled and sorry every way." She then related, unfortunately perhaps, the fight Laura had experienced in the morning, from the near approach of her tormentor.

"This is all moonshine, my child," he replied, with all the assurance of cautious age; "she imposes upon you. I can't let you go where she is, if she entertains you with such stuff as this."

"But, father," she said, entreatingly, "I saw her fight; it could not be feigned; and she is so penitent. I do wish—" she hesitated, then paused.

"Wish what, my darling?" he inquired, caressingly.

"I don't like to say it, for fear you will be angry with me; but I do wish you would be her protector."

"My dear little innocent girl, she has deluded you with the idea that she wants a protector."

"O, I do wish Aleck would come home!" she exclaimed, finding she was making no progress in convincing the Colonel. "I know he would forgive her, if nobody else will."

"Indeed, Rosa," he replied, gravely, "he has the most to forgive. If Laura had behaved respectably, she would not be as she now is; she must suffer, such conduct brings its own punishment, even if she were ever so penitent. I could have received her into my family, though I abhor her course, but I find her conduct has been more scandalous than I thought; no woman is talked about as she has been, without reason."

"Yes," replied Rosine, slowly, a little abashed; "but then Laura hates her past conduct, and wants to do right now, and ought we not to forgive her if she is really truly sorry, and resolved to do so no more."

"Well, my dear, we may forgive her if we will, but it does not follow that we must give her the same confidence we did before. But you are very young to know anything about these matters, it was an unlucky day when Laura Marten chose you for her intimate friend. One thing at least she is old enough to know, that a woman's honor has

been wounded in the person of his wife, you touch him, and through him all his family, in the tenderest point. You must treat me to do right in this matter, little one," he added, speaking very tenderly, "and not worry your over sensitive conscience about one who is not worthy of your anxiety. I shall be guided entirely by Aleck's reply to several letters written him from home on this subject; till then matters must go on as they are."

Rosine was not at all relieved by this conversation; she feared she had not taken the best way of speaking about Laura, and yet she had the assurance that her motives were right in the effort she had made. She could not reconcile the opinions of good Sister Agnes and her dear Colonel, so she went about her daily life as usual, sorrowful for her friend, but never speaking her name; hoping each day that something would come from Lieutenant Hartland that would bring about a change in Laura's position. Sister Agnes had impressed upon Laura the duty of returning Mrs. Hartland's call, which she did after some delay, but finding the family out and a strange servant at the door, she was reluctant to leave her card as "Mrs. Hartland," and the family were left in ignorance of the call. Since her last meeting with Le Compte, she had not ventured into the street alone; but when accompanied by one of the Sisters, she drew down her thick veil, scarcely daring to look either to the right or to the left. Thus she who had once been remarked for her bold, venturesome, daring spirit and manner, was completely cowed. It is not always that by coquetry and deceit, even a married woman brings such immediate suffering upon herself as Laura had done, but it comes in time, and they invariably leave a sting that pierces the heart sooner or later—it may come in the life of a beloved daughter or son, for the sins of the mothers are visited upon their children.

Le Compte met Dr. Hartland occasionally in the way of their duty, and he would sometimes amuse himself with hints of his intimacy with his brother's wife, hoping thereby to widen the family breach, or lead the other to some retort which would bring on a quarrel; but he did not understand the spirit with which he had to deal. High tempered and easily excited, Dr. Hartland looked down now so thoroughly upon both Laura and Le Compte, that all he said passed by him as beneath his notice. After much anxious waiting, a letter, only one, came from Lieutenant Hartland, and that written to his father.

"On board the X—, off Cadiz, Jan. 18—

"My Dear Father: I am in the receipt of various epistles from home, filled with sundry inquiries and criticisms on my private affairs. I will answer them all through you."

"Laura Marten was made my lawful wife on the 20th of April last; she has the certificate of our marriage. I am sorry this step does not please you and my mother; of Ned's caustic severity upon the same, I shall take no notice; written by any other man, I would call him out. With regard to the scandal abroad, if it were not dishonorable in me to throw up my commission on the eve of war, I would do it, for the satisfaction of chastising those who have made themselves busy with what is none of their business. I have been on the sick list for the last month, or you would have heard from me before; I am now just able to crawl about, and bound for the Gulf of Mexico; God knows when, if ever, I shall see home again. You will do as you please about noticing Laura, but it strikes me all this scandal might have been nipped in the bud, if when the marriage was made public, you had made her like one of the family. I have received a long letter from my wife, written since her fearful illness, explaining every thing; and I have also Rosine's last letter, which I keep by me as a comfort in much weakness, and a reminder to those dreadful nervous attacks to which of late I have been subjected."

"Believe me, my honored father, this step you deem so unparadiseable, though taken hastily perhaps, under the excitement of the moment, was not done with any intended disrespect to either yourself or my mother. In haste, Your affectionate son, ALEX. HARTLAND."

The manly tone of this epistle had great effect upon the family; it brought home to their hearts the truth, that the pet of the household, the youngest born, was on his way to the seat of war, perhaps to waste away with disease in an unhealthy climate, perhaps to sacrifice his life on the field of battle. The letter served to quiet the Doctor, and prevent his oft-recurring reference to the "new member of the family."

Mrs. Hartland was visibly softened by it, and called upon Laura with the Colonel, leaving behind a cool, ceremonious invitation for Laura to tea the next day. She begged Sister Agnes to say it was not her duty to accept this overture, but the good Sister could see only a positive duty in according to this first way that had been opened toward peace and harmony with her husband's relations. When she came, Rosine exerted herself to make the time pass pleasantly, the Colonel and his lady were politely cool, while Ned spent the evening at his office. There was no nearer approach to

intimacy than this chilling civility, during the winter, though Laura, in obedience to a request from her husband, removed her quarters to a fashionable boarding-house. Here the terrible dread of Le Compte, which still continued, so affected her nervous system, that every card brought to her room gave her a paroxysm of fear; and there was also a sharp misgiving in her mind whenever a letter came to her from her husband, for although their tone was affectionate and confiding, they wholly ignored Le Compte and the past, and with something of the Doctor's peremptory tone, requested that Le Compte's name might never be mentioned between them. Laura would have felt more secure, had he sometimes reproached her a little for her unfaithfulness. For some reason her tormentor seemed for awhile to have ceased to follow his victim with persecution, perhaps the publication of the marriage may have led him to defer his plans—perhaps to renounce them, perhaps to change them—we shall see.

CHAPTER XXI.

HARRY GREENWOOD IN SEARCH OF A PROFESSOR

When the Athenian, the man of war to which Lieutenant Greenwood belonged, was ordered to the Gulf of Mexico, and the chief officer proposed a ball on ship-board to inaugurate her departure, the Lieutenant had not heard of the acceptance of his resignation. Commodore Greenwood insisted that both Harry and Dora should accept their invitations. "It would look well," he said, "for the first Lieutenant and all the Commodore's family to refuse Captain Jones' civility." The stern mandate of parental authority prevailed over his children's dislike of the whole thing, under the circumstances. It was to be almost exclusively a naval and military ball. Colonel Hartland and family were among the invited, and to him was sent under cover a card to Mrs. Alexander Hartland. This was the signal for a warm discussion as to what should be done; the Colonel declaring he should send a carriage for Aleck's wife—it would be best for all, if she went under his protection; the Doctor stoutly insisting that he would not appear with her, and so risk Rosine's good name as to have her ushered in with such a—he was about to say something very wicked, but his father's one stern look, which he kept for great occasions, and Rosine's affectionate "Don't Ned," silenced him. The card was sent with the Colonel's expressed wish, that she would be ready at eight on the night of the ball, when he would call for her. Laura unhesitatingly took the note and card at once to her mentor, Sister Agnes, her only counsellor, one might almost say her only friend. She was quite secure as to her advice, she could not tell her she ought to go. She became pale with astonishment when the good Sister said, "You will go, of course."

"O," she replied, with almost a scream of terror, "don't tell me that I must!"

"Not if it were your duty, my dear," she inquired. "I can conceive of a case in which it might be one's duty to enter into such an arrangement, and this looks very like a painful self-denying duty," she added, as Laura's face suffused with crimson and the tears fell upon her burning cheek.

"Don't, Sister, please don't tell me it is my duty," she said, pleadingly.

"Not if it is the truth," replied Sister Agnes. "You see by this note the Colonel and his lady wish to introduce you as their daughter; should you refuse? How would your husband wish you to act under the circumstances? These are the questions you must answer for yourself. I own it is rather anomalous to hear a religious advocate balking," she said playfully, "but in this case I can see no excuse you can give for not complying with Colonel Hartland's request; your conscience would not keep you away, only your own will, your own dislike to meet those with whom your husband has been associated; you must break away from this feeling some time, and why not now?" While she was persuading Laura, Lieutenant Greenwood and sister were announced; they had called in behalf of a large family of orphans lately brought under their notice. The card of invitation was in Laura's hand, and the Lieutenant laughingly remarked that she had the same "bitter-pill" with themselves.

"Yes," said the Sister, playfully, "and I, a nun, an advising her to take the poison pressed upon her by Colonel Hartland."

"Ah," said Dora, "then do go; you will find plenty of disaffected ones; I will keep you company in hating the whole thing most heartily; we only go because our father wills it."

Laura's courage revived, she saw through her reluctance, and resolved to conquer it; the note of acceptance was dispatched without further hesitancy.

Doctor Hartland at first set his face like a flint against this ball of brass buttons; he did not care to be one of a half-dozen civilians among a company of autocrats. More particularly did he sneer and scoff at the invitation to Laura. But he changed his mind, and engaged a carriage for himself and Rosine, when he found the Colonel determined, and his mother making preparations for her own and Rosine's costume. He went out and purchased a set of exquisite pearl

ornaments for arms, neck, and hair, ordered the most perfect bouquet he could procure, and began to feel quite proud, being sure, he said, of the youngest and handsomest lady on the ship.

The large man-of-war was made ready from stem to stern with much labor of time and taste, and with great expense, for the grand fête. All obstructions were cleared from the main and quarter decks, and the ship's sides lined with the flags of all nations, the stars and stripes every where prominent.

Nothing was wanting that wealth could procure to make a gorgeous display. Lights of brilliant and varied colors, with highly polished reflectors, illuminated the festive scene, and an elegant tapestry of blue and gold, looped up here and there with knots of flowers and green wreaths, formed an awning over the dancing floor. It was indeed a radiant scene, and Rosine almost believed herself transported to fairy land. In the midst of the first dance Colonel Hartland appeared, with Laura and his wife on either arm. Amber beads glittered in Laura's short black curls, amber ornaments graced her neck and arms, and an amber-colored grenadine floated about her like a sunset cloud; there were no remains of the bold, bright glance that had so nearly been her ruin; her manner was subdued, and a downcast expression had imprinted itself upon her face. Miss Greenwood and her brother came forward and greeted her upon her entrance, but Ned, who stood near by with Rosine, bowed coldly, with a countenance stern and rigid, holding Rosine back by his influence, when she would have rushed forward to her friend. She felt a sense of meanness in being held back; but too timid to carry out her purpose, she was obliged to content herself with giving Laura one of her sweet, friendly smiles. It was not long before Mrs. Lieutenant Hartland, veiled in as she had been, and looking so beautifully sad, was besieged by gentlemen friends of her husband, with pressing invitations to join in the dance, all of which she steadfastly declined; she was trembling inwardly lest she should lift her eyes and behold her enemy. Miss Greenwood watched her from a recess made by some of the ship's appointments, where she was half hidden, and pitying her most profoundly, dispatched her brother to bring her to her side.

"I thank you most heartily," said Laura, as she took the Lieutenant's offered arm to go to his sister.

From this retired nook the two ladies could survey the whole dancing-floor, unobserved themselves, for green wreaths hung in festoons over them, and green branches sheltered them from observation. Miss Greenwood had been drawn to Laura by Sister Agnes, who had said, "Dora, make her your friend; you will find material waiting there for the wand of some one to direct." She would have been glad to advance, and with her knowledge of Aleck's boyhood she soon found matter for conversation, but through much suffering to herself, for every memory of the early days of one brother who mingled with the remembrance of another, and brought back thoughts that she had striven for years to crush; nevertheless, she did her part well, and Laura did not once guess over what burning coals her companion was stepping, while she entertained her with little anecdotes of her husband.

Lieutenant Greenwood had passed over to Rosine, who was watching the company through the intricate frolic of a Virginia reel, which had been called for in honor of the Captain, who was from Virginia, and moreover, had expressed his old-fashioned notions about the round-dances, declaring "he had never been able to understand how these young heads stood so much whirling."

"I need not ask if you dance, Miss Brenton?" said young Greenwood, as he observed her unaffected, eager countenance.

"O, yes, I love it dearly," she replied, blushing under his earnest gaze, "but I could not possibly dance here."

"And why not?" he inquired smiling.

"O, there are so many people looking on, and somehow I don't fancy dancing with strangers. But you have not danced?" she said, inquiringly.

"No; I seldom dance except as a lay figure to make up a set. My brain must be very obtuse, for I could never set the ins and outs of the figures; and when my friends get me on the floor, they are generally glad to let me slip quietly away again. It seems a strange, odd way, he added, after a pause, "to celebrate the departure of this brave ship's company to the field of carnage."

"It does, indeed," she replied, her face gathering gravity from the reflection of his; "one would think they would rather go to church in a body, and pray for protection in battle."

"TO BE CONTINUED"

Jesus Christ dwells in our tabernacles today as surely as He dwelt in Nazareth and in the very same Human Nature; and He dwells there, largely, for this very purpose—that He may make Himself accessible to all who know Him interiorly and desire to know Him more perfectly. It is this Presence which causes that astounding difference of atmosphere between Catholic churches and all others. . . . The actual bodily Presence of the Fairest of the children of men, drawing His friends to Himself.—Magr. Benson.

HIS SISTER'S PICTURE

For one intense moment, the silence of death reigned in the drawing-room of the London residential hotel. Then another crash as if the world had gone to pieces brought the occupants in pained consternation to their feet. There was a shuddering cry of "Zeppelin!" Lights were switched off, windows closed; while all over the city, anti-aircraft guns suddenly gave tongue to an inferno of sound never to be forgotten by those who heard.

"To the cellars!" was the next agitated cry; and immediately, from the dining-room, smoking-room and bedroom, guests came hurrying in panic. For it was the first of the long threatened air-raids over London, and even the most hardened of the pleasure-loving habitués of that London saloon tremblingly felt that the end had come.

Phil Carberry, an Irish journalist, certainly feared the worst as he lighted a cigarette in the darkened drawing-room, and unconsciously contrasted its deserted appearance with the animated scene it had presented but a few moments before. Consciously, however, he saw only his shaking hand in the flare of the match; felt only a wild desire for action, for freedom—for courage to rush into the streets or climb upon the housetop—to go anywhere, do anything rather than go down to the cellars and wait for death in the dark.

Not that he was by any means a cowardly man; his conduct during subsequent seeming emergencies in shell-swept trenches abundantly proved the contrary; but just as the pressure of a button had plunged the drawing-room into darkness, so in the death whisper of the first bomb a searchlight seemed to have been turned momentarily upon his soul, showing him precisely where he stood as a Catholic and an Irishman. In that lightning glance he saw the mispent hours, the lost ambitions, the irreligious associates, and the easy tolerance—if not acceptance—of teachings and standards which he had been brought up to regard as poisonous and unclean—teachings which imperceptibly befouled his pen, despite a dear, old-time boyish conviction that the most glorious mission on God's earth was the dissemination of Catholic truths and ideals.

No wonder he recoiled from the companionship of the other boarders in this hour of dread, preferring to meet death, if need be, alone.

By and by, professional curiosity mastered every other feeling. If the end of all things had really come, was there any reason why he should not see the shape the dread consummation was assuming? No; absolutely none. With a rapidly beating heart, he stole up the gloomy stairway, and, opening a window gently on the first landing, looked out on the troubled sky.

What he saw was a great silver-colored monster, played on by searchlights and blazed at by guns, racing across the heavens and rising as it ran. To the journalist's excited fancy, it was steering straight for the window at which he stood, and, as he looked—fascinated by a spectacle so wondrous, so novel, so terrible—an odd recollection came to him of the first Sunday he had attended Mass. Why, he could not say; but the contemplation of the pictures on the stained-glass windows of the ancient little chapel on the far-away day had produced in his child-like mind feelings of awe and rising as it ran. To the journalist's excited fancy, it was steering straight for the window at which he stood, and, as he looked—fascinated by a spectacle so wondrous, so novel, so terrible—an odd recollection came to him of the first Sunday he had attended Mass. 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