

Mr. Pemberton, and when he told her you were not to be found, she fell down at his feet like a dead person; then he brought her home to us, and she was, oh! so ill for a long time after."

Bertrand shaded his eyes with his hand; he was deeply moved.

"Surely this was love," he said to himself—"true devoted love!"

Yet when he remembered how Mary had toiled at the hospital for the wounded, as Mrs. Parry had described to him, he thought with a heavy sigh, that she would perhaps have done as much for any strange soldier whom it had been her lot to tend.

CHAPTER XLIV.

For many minutes Bertrand pondered over the child's words before he spoke again. At last he looked up.

"Tell me more about Mary," he said to Valerie—"everything you can think of."

"Well, she was ill a long time, and when she was feverish she used to call out your name, and cry bitterly—so that Nurse Parry said it broke her heart to hear her; and before, she was nearly well again she began once more to look for you, because my dear Mr. Pemberton had been killed." And Valerie began to sob as she thought of him.

But Bertrand's impatience made him somewhat unfeeling. "I know about Mr. Pemberton, my dear child, and I am very sorry; but I want to hear how Mary looked for me. Are you sure it was me she wanted to find?"

"Of course it was!" said Valerie looking surprised; "and she has been very unhappy indeed about you ever since she has been Paris. We all saw she was dreadfully miserable, but we could not find out the reason, for Mary does not speak much you know; so then I got my poor Mr. Pemberton to ask her, and he found it was because she thought you were lying ill or wounded somewhere, with no one to take care of you, and she begged him to look for you, because he was a man, and could go to places where she could not; and to please her he did, but he thought you were dead himself; only Mary said she was certain you were not, or she should have known it."

"How could she have known it," asked Bertrand.

"That I don't know," said Valerie; "she seemed to think something in her own spirit would tell her. Mr. Pemberton tried hard to find you, but he never did till that dreadful day when he was shot."

"Yes—do not speak of him," said Bertrand, hastily, as Valerie's lips again began to quiver. "After that what did Mary do?"

"She went out every day, so weak and ill, to look for you: and in such horrible places too—in the Morgue, and the hospitals, and the Hall of the Dead at the Hotel Dieu. She used to come back half dead herself night after night."

"Oh, Valerie! is it possible?" said Bertrand; and, brave soldier as he was, the child saw tears glistening in his eyes.

"Yes; and now that she has found you I thought she was to be so happy, and always to be sitting beside you, looking at you, and taking care of you. Instead of that, the very first thing she does is to go right away from you, and go back to live at the hospital, when we are all so fond of her here; and I think it is very provoking of her."

Bertrand was inclined to think so too. "But tell me, Valerie," he said, "do you think Mary has gone back to the hospital because I have come to live here?"

"I am quite sure of it," said the child.

"How do you know?" he asked.

"Because she said so. I went to her

yesterday, and held her tight, and said I would not let her go, and begged and prayed of her to stay; and I asked her what we had done that she should desert us, and she said she would never desert us, and should come and see us, but that now Mr. Lisle was come to live with us, she could not possibly stay."

"It looks as if she did not like me very much, does it not Valerie?" said Bertrand, with an uneasy laugh, but watching the child's face keenly as he spoke.

"I think it does," said Valerie; "I used to think that she liked you dreadfully, more than any one else in the world; but, of course, since she told me she could not bear to stay in the house with you I have changed my mind."

Bertrand turned himself round in the chair, and buried his face in the cushions. Not another word did he speak that evening, good or bad, to any one. Valerie Brunot had certainly given him food for reflection. For many days to come the conversation filled all his heart and mind.

Little Valerie was perhaps not far wrong when she said she thought Mr. Lisle was very stupid; for although he kept his meditations to himself, so that neither she nor any one else knew the course his thoughts were taking, he was making himself very unhappy indeed under the impression that he had lost all chance of ever winning Mary Trevelyan to be his wife. It might have been expected that all he had heard of her anxiety respecting him, and the devotion and utter disregard of self even to the jeopardy of her own life, with which she had sought him, would have sufficed to prove to him that he and none other had her own true love; but unfortunately he attributed this to her large-hearted charity, which he knew, stopped short of no self-denial when she could benefit her fellow creatures; while the fact that she had left Madame Brunot's house with the deliberate purpose of avoiding him appeared to him to point unmistakably to the conclusion that she wished to have nothing more to do with him. It did not surprise him that this should be the case, even if she was too truthful to have said she loved him formerly only to please his father; for since all this unhappy episode with Laura Wyndham had taken place, he felt so utterly humiliated at having ever imagined he could care for such a character as she had proved to be, that he could not wonder if it had wholly altered Mary's opinion of him, and caused her to feel for him only as much contempt and dislike as the gentleness of her nature would allow. He could not help being aware, too, that he had not acted fairly by Mary in turning from her to another woman, when he had most distinctly led her to believe that he wished to win her to himself. Knowing as he now did, how thoroughly false Laura had been, he thought it more than likely, as such was indeed the case, that she had so misrepresented him to Mary as to cause her to set him free when they met in the garden at Chiverley, with that generous delicacy which he now remembered in shame and regret. But even if she had in part misjudged him then, his subsequent conduct must surely have alienated her from him altogether, for it seemed but too evident that the man who could be content to ally himself for life to one so false and frivolous as Laura Wyndham must be wholly unsuited to come in contact with the pure, true nature of Mary Trevelyan.

These painful thoughts rendered poor Bertrand sufficiently desponding; but there still remained to him one ground of hope, on which he was resolved to found a course of ceaseless and untiring efforts to gain even yet the priceless gift of her affec-

tion. He felt perfectly certain that whatever might be the present state of her feelings towards himself, at least she loved no one else, for he had been dear to her once. She had owned it to his father in those never forgotten words, and he was thoroughly convinced that her steadfast unchanging character was quite incapable of turning to any new affection, even if that to which her heart had first been given had both betrayed and estranged her. He had therefore no dread of an earthly rival, but he did fear that, like John Pemberton, having proved the weakness and insufficiency of human love, she might resolve to give herself up wholly to that which, in its heavenly and eternal strength and purity, alone could never fail her. If it were so Bertrand felt it would be but a just punishment for his folly and blindness in having yielded to Laura's fascinations. But at least he was most deeply determined that it should not be his own fault if Mary were now finally lost to him; he would make it the one object of his life at present, to draw back her pure heart to himself, and he would never consent to be separated from her any more in this world, unless her own fiat most absolutely forbade him to hope that she would ever link her fate with his.

As the days wore on, and Bertrand's health rapidly improved under the favourable influences which now surrounded him, he was thankful to find that no call of duty was likely to interfere as regarded Mary; for the terrible siege was already at an end, and the Prussians were preparing for their triumphal entry into Paris. There was no longer any call to fight for France, so far as the foreign foe was concerned; and when a few weeks later the appalling reign of the Commune was brought to a close, after a dreadful and prolonged struggle, by the troops of Versailles, Bertrand was only too thankful that his physical weakness was still too great to admit of his taking any part in a conflict which compelled the soldiers of France to fight one with another, and to shed the blood of those whose nationality made them brethren.

A duty of a very different description did seem to lie before Bertrand Lisle, but it was one in which Mary's assistance would be most valuable, if only he could induce her to share his responsibilities with him—he had promised his old uncle, the Comte de Lisle, when he left him after the night he spent at the chateau, that if he survived the war he would as soon as it was over, return to the old home of his forefathers, and take up his abode there, in anticipation of its passing altogether into his possession on the old man's death. Fain would Armand have kept him there even then; but that was of course, impossible, as he was on duty under the orders of the commanding officer of his regiment; and he gave his uncle an address in Paris to which he might send any communication for him; while he pledged himself to obtain his discharge from the army so soon as the establishment of peace would enable him to do so with honour. When the conclusion of the siege opened Paris once more to intercourse with the outside world, Bertrand sent to the address he had indicated to know whether any letter had arrived for him there from the Comte de L'Isle.

He was sitting alone when his messenger returned, bringing with him a letter with a deep black border, directed to the "Comte Bertrand de L'Isle." It proved to be from the notary before whom his uncle had identified him as his rightful heir, on the occasion of his visit to the chateau, and it contained the intelligence that the Comte Armand de L'Isle had died somewhat