

Marie.

A TRUE STORY OF SUFFERING.

MARIE TURGOT had once been a bright-faced, stirring woman, bustling about her duties in the whitest of caps, happy in the possession of husband, child, and home. Before she reached the age of thirty, however, husband and child to her were represented by a black wooden cross, with white tears painted upon it, standing in the cemetery, and Marie herself was the 'Widow Marie'—a poor creature stricken with a fell disease, from which she could never hope to recover.

Ups and downs such as these in our poor world would stagger us in their incomprehensibility if we did not cling fast to the truth that 'God ruleth over all,' and to that other truth that we only see things 'in a glass, darkly,' as yet.

The Turgot home was of course broken up now, but Marie was not dependent on strangers. Her nephew, her only sister's son, took her under his roof, and there she lived and suffered the year round, time being chiefly marked by the ripening of the blue grapes on the front of the house in the hot September sun. Not that she saw them ripen, though, but it was an event to Jean Pierre Perrot of which he must needs often speak.

Indeed, it had better be confessed at once that the quaint little red-haired, shock-headed man was an incessant talker, being generally known in the neighbourhood by a most suitable nickname, 'the Little Parrot.' Chatter he must from morning till night, if only he could get a listener; and the sharp, high-pitched voice bore a wonderful resemblance to that of a parrot.

Jean Pierre was a bird-fancier, and the front room in which he slept was hung all round with cages, in which fluttered birds of many species. Linnets, bullfinches, thrushes, blackbirds, and canaries piped or sang together from dawn to dusk in one

tumultuous chorus; above all sounded at intervals the discordant tones of their little master.

People who only knew a little of Perrot would shrug their shoulders as they caught a glimpse of him talking and laughing to his birds. An able-bodied man hanging about the house all day, and content with this trivial occupation, he must need spirit. Why did he not go out and labour in the fields, or engage in a trade like the neighbours? He would never grow rich, pottering after a few field birds! Oh, what a great deal of virtuous contempt was lavished on the little red-haired, blue-bloused man! He did not know it, so it did not hurt him; the people it did hurt were better dressed than he could ever hope to be; people who forgot Who said 'Judge not,' as they passed the open door of the vine-covered hut.

Very few eyes saw beyond the bird-room, or guessed at the little chamber lying behind it—a dull, close room, where not even a 'sunbeam that had lost its way' shed a hurried gleam through the tiny window on to the mud floor.

But those who did know of this inner room knew why 'the Parrot' seldom went far from home, and rarely spent an hour of the twenty-four without darting, like one of his own birds, into the doorway of this the dullest cage that the poor house contained.

For here lay Marie Turgot, his helpless charge, huddled up in bed, moaning and writhing in agony; or, at her best, spent and hollow-eyed, waiting for the end.

At first Pierre had the poor creature all to himself. Even the good Sister at the Bureau de Charité, who knew, and cared for, and prayed for all the sufferers for miles round, even she did not find out Marie. The vine leaves, and the dancing birds, and chattering Pierre dazzled her keen eyes, and she would actually trot by the house with only a nod to the owner.