

STILL AND DEEP.

BY F. M. F. SKENE, AUTHOR OF "TRIED,"
"ONE LIFE ONLY," ETC.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

The promise made by John Pemberton to Mary Trevelyan seemed to lift a mountain-load from her anxious heart. During the long hours which she spent by day at the sick-bed of the sufferers, she was ever listening for the sound of his step, coming to tell her he had found her Bertrand; and through the dark night, when she took her turn to watch with Marthe—a stout elderly woman, who seemed to have not a care in the world—Mary was always glancing out eagerly for the tokens of the dawn, in the hope that the new morning would bring her tidings of him. But night followed night, and day succeeded day, and she seemed no nearer to a termination of her cruel anxiety than she had been at the first.

This much Pemberton ascertained—that Bertrand had certainly been in Paris, and that, in spite of his disabled arm, he had gone to take part in the defence of one of the forts; but beyond that point all trace of him was lost. With some difficulty John Pemberton succeeded in ascertaining that he was no longer in any part of the fortifications; but no one could give him any tidings whatever of his fate. His own private opinion was, that he had fallen, like so many other brave men in those fatal days, and been flung, along with hundreds of others, into some of the deep trenches which were dug as burial-places for the countless dead; but when he cautiously and tenderly hinted this opinion to Mary, she calmly said that she knew certainly it was not so. She might never be permitted to see him any more in this world; but she felt assured that his spirit had not passed from the realms of sense, or hers would have been cognisant of its departure.

John Pemberton deferred to her opinion, in so far as to continue his search for the missing man, but he quite despaired of success. In fact, he began to feel very desponding at the state of matters altogether, for the siege had by this time been many weeks protracted, the bitter frost of that terrible winter had already set in, and the scarcity of provisions was becoming so great that even the most large-hearted charity could not ensure the poorer classes from an absolute famine. The young man, whose whole heart was given up to the desire of proving to his Divine Master that now, at least, he was true to Him, worked with an energy which, to those who witnessed it, seemed quite superhuman. He no longer restricted himself to the task of conveying food to the starving people, but toiled to relieve the suffering all around him, in whatever shape he met it. He grew thin and gaunt, and his eyes seemed to become larger and blacker, in contrast with his haggard face; but still he never rested, or relaxed his efforts, till those who saw him marvelled what could be the secret of his strength.

Many a sickly fancy tormented Mary, in her uncertainty as to Bertrand's fate; and sometimes she would imagine that while she was wearing out her life in anxiety for him it was possible that he might be perfectly safe and happy in England, with Lurline for his wife, as there had been some few cases of escape from Paris, in disguise and otherwise; and it seemed to her that if he were still in the beleaguered city Pemberton must have found him. If he had escaped, it was to Laura, surely, that he would go; and in spite of all that Charlie Davenant had told her, it

was utterly impossible for Mary to believe that any one could be false to that dear Bertrand, for whom she would gladly have given her life. When she mentioned this idea as to Bertrand's escape to John Pemberton, he told her at once he felt convinced it was impossible, and he still adhered to the impression that there was a darker solution to the problem than she could be induced to admit.

However, there came a day when the question, so far as Laura Wyndham was concerned, was thoroughly set at rest. One evening, when Mary had gone to the Brunots', with the portion of her own scanty meals which she often saved for the hungry children, she was met by little Valerie in an unwonted state of excitement, which had quite roused the child out of her usual sedate womanliness. She had been watching from the window for Mary's arrival, and came flying down the stairs to meet her.

"Oh, Miss Trevelyan," she exclaimed, "if you had not come soon I should have gone to the hospital to you all by myself, for there has been such a wonderful thing. A letter has come for you from England, and the *commissionnaire* who brought it said it came in a balloon; do you really believe it? Did the letter come flying through the air?"

"I think very likely it did, Valerie; letters come only by balloons or carrier pigeons now; but where is it? Let me have it, dear; it makes me anxious to hear there is a letter;" and the little girl felt that the hand she held was trembling.

"It is here," she said, drawing her into the little salon: "I hope it will be a happy letter!"

It was a small thin envelope, such as alone was allowed to be conveyed by balloon, and it had been laid in state on the table while the children stood round, gazing on it as if it were something strange and wonderful; Mary saw at a glance that the handwriting was not that of Bertrand Lisle, and at once she grew calm and almost indifferent; but when she had opened it there fell out from it another note, enclosed in her own, which bore the name that always was in her heart and thoughts, and she saw that both were from Lurline. When she opened her own note, which was written on a half sheet of paper only, to meet the requirements of the balloon-post as to weight, her eye caught sight of the signature, and she started uncontrollably, for the name, written in the Lorelei's strong decided characters, was, "*Laura Brant*." The note dropped from her hand. "Married, actually married!" thought Mary; "false to Bertrand! can it be possible? Oh, how will he bear it, my poor Bertrand!" All her thought was for him, and, gentle as she was, her indignation against Lurline was so great, that she could scarce bring herself to touch the letter which announced her faithlessness; when she did at last take it up and read it, she found it written as if the Lorelei was quite unconscious of there being anything objectionable in her conduct. She began by saying that she was sure her dearest Mary would be pleased to hear that a very great change had taken place in her fate, and that she was most happily married, and just about to start for Italy with her husband; and she was anxious that dear Bertrand Lisle, for whom she would always feel a sisterly regard, should hear the fact from herself. Of course, she said, he must have known in giving up his appointment, and becoming a poor soldier in France, he was abandoning all chance of marriage with her, and she had no doubt some reason to complain of his conduct; but she would not reproach him,

oh no, she felt too much affection for him, and for that reason she was specially desirous he should receive the letter she enclosed, in which she assured him she should always love him as a brother, and that her husband was quite prepared to receive him as such whenever he liked to visit them in their Italian home. She knew Bertrand was in Paris, she added, for he had written to her from thence a letter which she had not yet answered, and doubtless Mary must be in communication with him; she therefore entrusted her letter to her, and begged her, without fail, to transmit it to him. So ended the letter of Mr. Brant's newly-married wife; and it was long before Mary could almost realize that it was possible her Bertrand could have been so betrayed, and truly, were it not, as we have said before, that the character and history of Laura Wyndham are real and not fictitious, it might be hard to believe that any woman could be so heartless.

The next time that Mary saw John Pemberton, after she received the letter, she silently placed that written to herself in his hand; he read it slowly through, with a grave face.

"I am not surprised," he said, sadly; "poor Lurline! the day will come when she will have a terrible awakening." He sat silent for a few minutes; and then he said, "Miss Trevelyan, you may have the opportunity of seeing Laura again, which I shall never have, and therefore I want to bespeak your charity for her. She is not all evil, be sure—none of God's creatures are; her nature has been warped and perverted, but there are good qualities, I feel sure, under all that crust of worldliness and selfishness, and I should like you to know," he continued, softly, "that I pray for her continually, night and day, ever beseeching she may be brought back to God, to light and truth, by any means; and I do not doubt the merciful Father will one day grant me my petition, though in this world I may never know it, only I fear it will need some sharp discipline of sorrow to break down the barriers she has erected between herself and the blessed heaven, and if ever you can aid her in the time of her tribulation, and can help her to come out of it with her robes washed white and clean in the fountain opened for all sin, I beseech you then to take pity on her, and do all you can to bring her home to our dear Lord."

"Oh, that I will!" said Mary, fervently, "if ever it is in my power; but you are more competent for such a task than I am, and you may be able to go to her with the authority of a minister of God. Why do you think of using so weak an instrument as myself, when you could do so much more for her?"

"Because I shall never have the opportunity," he said, quietly; "I shall never be a minister of God, in the sense you mean, nor shall I ever see Laura again."

"How can you know that?" said Mary, wonderingly.

"That I cannot tell you," he answered; "but you will find that I am right." She asked no further question, with her usual quietness, but presently she said, in a low voice, "I suppose, if I ever have the opportunity, I am bound to give Bertrand the letter Laura has enclosed to me for him?"

"There can be no doubt of that, surely," said Pemberton, surprised.

"But it will be such a cruel shock to him, and one he could never have anticipated."

"Still, it is better he should know the truth at once, and it is impossible not to

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