

Lady Cecily again lay prostrate behind the altar. These thoughts had been so rapid that the domestic congregation were still singing the same hymn, the closing lines of which came distinctly thus:

"What rapture will it be,  
Prostrate before Thy throne to lie,  
And gaze, and gaze on Thee!"

"I gaze on God! Oh! never. I am unworthy to lie crouching down here behind the hidden Presence in the tabernacle. Oh! what a long life of penance mine ought to be, before I could sing those lines!"

The now real penitent, concealed in her self-condemnation from herself; ignorant of the progress she was truly making in the expiatory career that career so dreaded—worn and exhausted, fell asleep at the back of the altar.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## BENEFICIAL ARRANGEMENTS.

The long prostration of Lady Cecily, prolonged beyond the intentions of the prostrator, had a softening and beneficial effect on the worthy and somewhat sternly-virtuous Miss Dellet, who, to oblige her aunt, and the reverend chaplain, had entered the rooms of one who, "in pride of power and beauty's bloom," had ruthlessly destroyed the happiness and at length the life of the lovely young creature whom she had venerated as a saint, and mourned with deep affection. On the death of this young lady at Pisa Miss Dellet returned to her kindred in England, by whose powerful interest in their own line she commenced business as a milliner, under the requested patronage of the Marchioness of Perzance, first lady of the bed-chamber. Miss Dellet consequently became the fashion, and took pains to preserve her renown. She now stood watching the prostrate form of Lady Cecily, who, at length roused by the departing footsteps of the family congregation and the locking the great door of the chapel, arose and re-entered the room, where stood her temporary attendant.

"Miss Dellet, I believe?"

"Yes, Lady Cecily."

"A thunder-bolt fell this evening."

"So I understand, my lady."

"You are a second thunder-bolt to me, Miss Dellet; but if you are willing to assist a person who has caused you and your friends much sorrow I will accept your services in the spirit of humility and contrition."

Miss Dellet bowed, and the night-toilet proceeded in silence.

The following day the recluse was visited by her inexorable guardian, Dr. Rollings. The interview was long, and terminated by a promise exacted to prepare for a general confession. This mental employment, assisted by written memoranda, enabled Lady Cecily to endure the solitude of the rest of the day, enlivened in the evening by the sole presence of Miss Dellet. The veneration, and even awe, with which she regarded the Rev. Dr. Rollings was chiefly owing to the conviction that his fervent prayer, in the midst of her levity, had drawn down the thunder-bolt to within a few feet of her erring life. As Lady Cecily has revealed this conviction to but few persons, who never contradict the feeling, it remains with her beneficially through life.

Mrs. Parker informed Lady Cecily the next day of the return of the marquis, and of the expected arrival of Lord Stanmore, the affianced husband of the Lady Violet.

"This will be his lordship's last visit," added Mrs. Parker, "before he comes to take our angel from us to his own beautiful home in Westmorland."

It was from the lips of the Rev. Dr. Rollings that the marquis heard of the forced seclusion of his lively cousin, and of the combined motives for a step that every hour had rendered more imperative.

"I have now a favor to request, my lord marquis," continued the reverend chaplain: "I have, by the favor of God, obtained a wonderful power over

that hitherto reckless lady. To-morrow her widow's mourning will arrive. On the following day I have proposed that she shall depart from Marsden Park; and the favor I have to request is, that I may resign the peaceful and honorable office I hold here as domestic chaplain, and may devote myself to the labor of turning the energies of this dangerous lady into a safe and useful channel!"

"Dr. Rollings, you propose to me a great sacrifice; and one that will fall too heavily on my daughter."

"In a few months, my lord marquis, the Lady Violet will have found another home and another chaplain."

"That is true; but you promised her to perform the ceremony."

"And I will fulfil that promise. I will return, my lord, for that event; and, as the time is too short, at this first departure, to pack my library and pictures, I can do so when I return for the marriage. Let me now, therefore, only return my thanks, my lord marquis, for the truly devout and noble consideration you have always shown, in my person, to the office of the priest of God."

The marquis sighed:

"I am truly grieved, Rev. Sir. This is to me a very heavy loss. I little thought," added he, trying to smile, "that my gay cousin would have bewitched even you!"

Dr. Rollings replied:

"My lord marquis, I must own to you that I consider your cousin, Lady Cecily Dorel, to have been a most wicked woman. I doubt the stability of her repentance, without a dominant power constantly over her, such as she recognizes in me. I leave all to which my heart dare attach itself, in leaving Marsden Park, especially that angelic child, Lady Violet."

Tears stood in the eyes of the marquis, and a short silence ensued. He then said:

"Are you not giving the term 'wicked woman' to my cousin Cis, as an indignant refutation of my accusation that you, even, were bewitched by her?"

"My lord, I had known the career of Lady Cecily Dorel from painfully authentic sources, before her arrival here. She has been a wicked woman, not in the estimation of the world, that she has loved, feared and flattered, but before God. She has broken hearts, ruined family peace, led others to perdition, but has preserved her own reputation. A restless craving for admiration and excitement has been the hidden propeller of all this mischief and sin. I feel called on to turn these natural and impetuous qualities into the straight path."

"But you must not make that straight path too steep, Dr. Rollings, or she will go mad. What do you propose?"

"Lady Cecily Dorel, although a Catholic from her birth, has hitherto done nothing for the Church, or for the poor. I, therefore, propose," said Dr. Rollings, "that her expiatory life shall be so actively useful as scarcely to leave her an hour's relaxation. And as she must be amused and praised and excited, I will take care that she becomes the patroness and benefactress of schools and reformatories, and widows' almshouses, and orphanages, and poor religious congregations, with annual meetings and banquets and complimentary speeches and bands of music and processions and bonfires and fireworks, to light up, propel and recreate in the straight and narrow way."

"Admirable!" cried the marquis. "You have the gift of discernment of spirits, Rev. Sir. I fear not for the good result."

On the second morning after this conversation, the elegant equipages of Lady Cecily Dorel conveyed herself, in due widow's attire, the Rev. Dr. Rollings and the attendants to a temporary residence she had selected near Tunbridge Wells. The ecclesiastic who had succeeded as chaplain at

Marsden Park had occasionally supplied for Dr. Rollings, and had, therefore, become known to and esteemed by the family. (TO BE CONTINUED.)

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