

Rachel, who feared it was but a token of the utter exhaustion to which her lady was reduced.

"Go you to bed, Rachel," whispered Isabel; "I will watch beside my mother to-night."

Rachel was unwilling to go; but a look from her young mistress speedily reminded her that there was no gainsaying the will of Isabel de Lisle; and Rachel went to lie down, but not to rest, for she dreaded the effects of all she had that day gone through, on the feeble frame of her lady.

The castle grew gradually quiet, steps and voices died away, and all was hushed. Midnight rang out its chimes; and the day, so full of events and of strong emotions, was past.

Isabel was used to watching; she regularly shared with Rachel the task of waiting on the baroness at night, when her illness was unusually severe. As the night wore on, she felt surprised at her mother's long continued sleep—so different from her usual restless starts and sudden wakings. Generally she required frequent nourishment during the night; now the wine stood untouched.

As the morning began to dawn, Isabel felt drowsy; and to shake it off, she stole to the window and looked out. The mist that precedes the sunrise veiled the landscape, but as she watched, it began to disperse; streaks of pink scattered over the sky and gathered in more brilliant hues towards the east; the first notes of the birds were heard; and soon gloriously arose the sun over the broad lands and fair woods of the De Lisles; far as her eye could reach over that wide landscape of wood and water, hill and dale, luxuriant and beautiful, spread the heritage of her fathers.

"And is it thus," she mused, "that the heir of these lands, the lord of these possessions, has returned to his home—to ride at the rein of a Beauville, to be marshaled by him into his own castle, to be ordered hither and thither as he lists? What indignity. Oh, if I were but a man, the blood of De Lisle in my veins, would I not set myself free from this thralldom, and reign baron in my own castle?"

A slight sound in the room startled her; in an instant she was at her mother's side. Lady de Lisle still slept, but she turned on her side, and murmured something to herself. Isabel bent her ear close to her mother's mouth; she heard breathed in half-conscious whisper: "Aeterna fac cum sanctis in gloria numerari."

There was a strange sort of shadow on her mother's face; Isabel sprang to the door of the adjoining room; Rachel was awake, and in a moment was at her lady's bedside. They knelt in silence.

"She will wake," whispered Isabel; but there was no more waking to earth for Alice de Lisle; there was no agony, no death-struggle,—without a sigh she slept into death. The gray shade gathered now over that fair face, and the soul stood before its Judge.

Bright streamed the sun over wood and field; the sounds of waking life, of earthly toil, and struggle and pleasure, were to be heard; but to Isabel's ears all sounds were dulled, save one everlasting chime that rang— "Aeterna fac cum sanctis tuis in gloria numerari."

(Grant that she may be numbered with your saints in everlasting glory.)

CHAPTER IV.

Mourn, therefore, no true lover's death;

Life only him annoys;
And when he taketh leave of life,
Then love begins his joys."

Poems by Father Southwell.

Deep was the gloom that now fell over the Castle de Lisle, and few have there been who were so deeply mourned as the gentle baroness. Many of the servants and tenants remembered her arrival as a bride, or in the first glow of her short married happiness. They remembered too, how a few years after his marriage, when Isabel was still a child, the sun of her life had suddenly gone down, and left her alone and widowed; they remembered how sorrows had followed quickly on that greatest one,

and how meekly all had been borne, how she had lived a life of retirement, of constant prayer, of frequent almsgiving; they had watched her steadfastness in resisting the temptations of worldly success, that would have drawn her from her faith; they knew that her death had been caused more by the pressure of mental anguish on a delicate frame, than by actual disease; and deep, though not loud, were the murmurs uttered by the servants and peasantry against Lord Beauville.

Isabel shed no tears for her loss. In silence and composure she performed the last sacred offices, and arrayed the wasted body in its last earthly clothing, and crossed the thin hands upon the breast, and sealed down the eyes, whose glance had been sunlight to her. She passed hours kneeling by the corpse, and gazing on the marble face, so lovely in its repose. She did not want sympathy, and she seemed to shrink from the sight of her brother, while all felt that the presence of Lord Beauville was more than she could brook; but to this trial she was not exposed. The Earl was deeply moved by the death of Alice de Lisle. His first sensation was one of horror at the part himself had had in the sudden snapping of the life of the gentle baroness, but this faded away. His heart was incrustated too thickly with worldliness for such emotions to do more than float on the surface. He turned from sad thoughts to occupation. He began to look narrowly into the state of the De Lisle estates, so that he could put them under charge of a trusty steward of his own, as he now designed to close the castle, retaining only a few servants to keep it in safety, and to convey his wards to his own home.

It will be readily supposed that the shock to Walter has been most severe; the cup of happiness had been placed to his lips, that he might taste all its sweetness, and then dashed away. The fond visions of his boyhood were now never to be realized. In his dreams for many years past he had pictured to himself the fair face of his mother smiling upon him. Many a secret grief and joy had been treasured up to pour forth to her. The thought of seeing again his mother and sister had been far dearer to him than that of returning to his possessions, for the strongest passion in Walter's nature was human love.

The first night spent in his castle he had gone to rest with no proud ambitious thoughts, but with the memory of his mother's kiss and blessing lingering with him like a spell. He awoke full of bright anticipations of the hours he would spend with her, of the comfort he would be to her—he awoke and found her dead.

The second day after the death of Lady de Lisle, Mary Thoresby went into the castle gardens. There, flung on the ground, beneath a wide-spreading elm tree, she found Walter; his head was resting on his arm, and his whole aspect was one of the deepest despondency. Mary knelt down beside him, saying:

"Oh, Walter, how I grieve to see you thus. Would that I could comfort you!"

"Oh! there is no comfort, Mary," said he, wearily, "no comfort left on earth."

"If we could only have Father Gerard here," sighed Mary. "I suppose it would not be safe to go to him."

"Go to him—where is he then?" inquired Walter.

Mary told him, and proceeded to relate all the incidents of the day of his arrival. Walter was aroused and interested, and when he heard that his dear mother had partaken of all the consolations of the Church for the dying, he shed tears.

"Oh! thanks be to God, a thousand times, for that, Mary; that she died not as many do, without priest or sacrament."

"Yes, indeed," answered she; "and surely in such evil days we may rejoice that one so good, and so patient, should be taken from them. Surely her bitter trials purified her even on earth, and now she has entered into the fullness of rest and joy. Oh! Walter, we would not wish her back on this weary earth, when now she can see His face."

(To be continued.)

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