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LIFE IN THE CLOISTER;

OR,
FAITHFUL AND TRUE.

By the Author of "The World and the Cloister,"
&c., &c., &c.

CHAPTER VI.—POVERTY AND DEATH—A FRIEND IN NEED.

'What is to be done, Catherine? see if your woman's wit can help me in this dilemma,' said Herbert to his sister, some two months after the return of Lillian and her sister to Bowden;—'this bill must be met, and that immediately; and if I carry four of my paintings to the auction-room, the price at which they would be knocked down will scarcely suffice to pay for the funeral of our poor mother.'

Poverty and death, what can be worse? yet these united trials had visited the humble dwelling of the Leslies.

Immediately on the return of Catherine from Preston, she had been attacked by typhus fever, but her strong constitution had not succumbed beneath the stroke. She had recovered; but, whilst still languishing under the effects of this severe illness, her mother had caught the fever in its most virulent form, and died in the midst of very distressing circumstances.

Herbert Leslie was a clever, talented man;—but it is not always the most clever and talented people that get on the best, for, you see, my dear miss or master, sometimes a very mediocre talent will carry all before it, if there be interest or influence in the background, whilst brighter stars shine unnoticed. Now Herbert had no patronage, you see, so that he worked away during the livelong day in that gloomy studio in Newman Street; and one after another his ideals of the beautiful grew upon the canvas before him and were then consigned to the walls of the Painting Academy, the hanging committee taking especial care to hang them where they would not be seen, or else they grew dim and dusty in his own studio, to be finally sold at auction at a price certainly very far from remunerative.

Herbert had been led to imagine, from the interest which Lillian's father had taken in his pursuits when he had become acquainted with him in Manchester some three years since, that he would overlook his own poverty and be content to receive as a son-in-law one whom he had treated as a friend, inviting him to his house, treating him on terms of the closest intimacy;—and the sanguine temperament of the young artist had led him to forget the vast disparity existing between riches and poverty. The fact that Mr. Craig, a great connoisseur in works of art, merely patronised him because he had a reverence for talent had never entered the head of this romantic young artist; and he thus presumed to raise his eyes to the beautiful daughter of his host. Visiting at the Laurels frequently, he had been received as one of the family, forgetting that the time would come, and that very shortly, when these day dreams might be all roughly dispelled.

Is it not a pity that talented people live in such a little world of romance of their own creation as really often to be wanting in common sense? Why should Herbert have ventured to suppose that the wealthy millionaire would bestow the hand of his beautiful daughter on a man who had nothing beyond the meagre pittance which his genius could obtain? Lillian had written to him only once after her removal from Lytham; she had shown Mr. Craig the letter, had asked his approval of its contents; it was blustered with her tears, for it informed Herbert that, in obedience to her father's will, all intercourse must cease between them.

The father kissed away her tears, and thanked Heaven that he had two model daughters. Why, the youngest resigns the veil, the holy habit of a religious, the life which shall surely prepare her for an eternity of happiness; the other, one to whom she had given the affections of her heart, with whom she believes she could tread the thorny path of life happily. Ah, she has her idol, and yet she drags it thence and hurls it from her at your behest.

'Oh, truly, Archibald Craig, your are model daughters!'

'Yes, mine are model daughters, friend Gilmour; I repeat the words,' said Craig one day, as himself and his friend sat over the wine after those two languid, listless young women had left the table for their own private room. 'They have now no will but mine: Lillian—well you know what Lillian was when I first brought her back to Manchester—how she flung defiance in my face, yet how meekly submitted after a little more useless rebellion; and also how her sister has given up her most absurd fancy to become a nun. Trust me, friend Gilmour, if we husbands and fathers had but the moral courage to stand out more firmly, the female part of our households would be better ordered and better governed

than they are. See now, had I followed your advice, I had lost both these girls; and how?—the one married to a beggarly artist like young Leslie: the other confined, caged up in one of those horrid nunneries, of which?'

'Of which, my good sir, you know absolutely nothing,' replied Gilmour; 'but I would ask you one question—Have you never counted on the cost of the forced obedience of your children? do you not see that there is a forced constraint on each of them? Why, man, maid Marion is no more the girl she was, nor Lillian either, than black is like to white; you'll have them both in a decline before long, if you persist in your resolve. Let your girl Lillian have the partner she likes, and my pretty god-daughter the veil; I should wonder what she could have better. I tell you, as I told you before you sent them to Lytham, that evil will come of it if you thwart them thus—treating grown young women like children indeed.'

'Tut, tut, Gilmour, as I told you before, so I tell you again, leave me to manage my girls my own way. Lillian must and shall have a rich mate, and Marion the same. I know what is best for them; better than they know themselves.'

Overawed by the violence of their father, utterly dependent on him, Mr. Craig had indeed had his own way with both of them: and after many fruitless entreaties, and a tearful night, and the destruction by Lillian of some half-dozen epistles, in which affection had peeped out in spite of her fears of him, she had at length penned one which had given him satisfaction. He posted it with his own hands; met Lillian with a smiling face; loaded her with presents and caresses; and dreamed not of the volcano which lay smothering within the depths of her woman's heart.

Nor was Marion less painfully tortured.—Neither herself nor Lillian was suffered to lead a retired life, every night beholding them absent from their home. Wherever there was a gay reunion, there Mr. Craig's fair daughters were sure specifically to be put up to the highest bidder. The particular reason for which will be given in our next chapter.

But *reventons a nos moutons*. Times were, you see, very hard with the Leslies; and I should like to know who they are not hard with, when people have their bread to earn by their talents, save, as we have already said, to the happy few who get to the top of the ladder quickly by the help of influence and interest rather than by genius. Never were times surely darker than those in which the brother and sister sat talking of the *dismal thing* above. No longer of themselves, for the casket, with its still face, alone remained; they were conversing of those sad topics, always sad, far more sad, too, if the survivors are poor. They have but a solitary five-shilling-piece in the house; how shall they pay the undertaker? how shall they pay for their mourning? or for the last quiet home with the remains of her husband in the cemetery at Norwood? Yet there are many who would gladly comply with this work of mercy, and bury the dead, did they know of that distressing case.

The Leslies, however, knew but few persons, and to these they could not apply; for if they had the will, they lacked the power to help them.

Catherine had sat for some moments weeping silently, and Herbert still pursued his walk, with folded arms and moody brow, up and down that little parlor, when his sister suddenly arose, and with a feeble step approached him. She had resolved to mention a name he had forbidden her to utter—a name the faithful friend had not breathed, save in her prayers, for many a weary month—a name which Herbert, she well knew, fondly cherished still.

She was so weak that she had to hold by the table as she attempted to cross the room; but her brother, utterly lost in his gloomy reverie, noticed her not till her light touch fell upon his arm.

'Catherine, my love,' he said, 'why do you leave the coach?'

She fixed her big dark eyes on his face, and uttered the one word, 'Lillian.'

'Lillian! what of her, Catherine? Don't rake up old sorrows, dear; we have enough, Heaven knows, to bear without that.'

'Lillian would help us, Herbert,' still pleaded the fair speaker.

'No more of this, Catherine; I cannot bear it,' he exclaimed, darting from her as if stung by a viper. 'Lillian! the false Lillian, help to put my poor mother in the grave! Never, never! Catherine, I'll sell half the house contains first.'

Catherine tottered to the couch, but she still pleaded for the absent Lillian.

'Lillian is true as ever. Lillian is forced to do the will of her despotic old father. I would pledge my life upon her truth.'

'Why has she ceased to correspond with you?'

'Why? because she dare not; do you not think

her letters would be intercepted? Lillian false! Lillian untrue! Never, never! As soon would I believe the moon would fall from the heavens, as waver for one moment in my faith in Lillian's truth.'

All the woman's earnest soul spoke out in these few words. Herbert approached her, and said very sorrowfully—

'It is not the remains of a mere school-girl's intimacy which can make you, with your sound, clear good sense, speak and think so highly of my lost Lillian. Tell me, Catherine, why is it you steadily persevere in thinking so well of one of whom I have such just cause of complaint?'

'Because I know Lillian to be a true-hearted constant woman,' she replied; 'one whose nature is too noble to allow her to be false where she has pledged her word. There is even something to admire in her very pride, if I may dare so to speak, for it makes her shrink with horror from an untruth; and sure am I she has not broken her faith with you. Remember in the one short note I received from her at the time she intimated to you her obedience to her father's will, she implored us both to wait the result of the time, adding, "The time will come, Catherine, when you will see that I am not untrue." Let me write to her, Herbert; she will help us in our deep distress; and you will find her your own faithful Lillian still.'

It was not without considerable reluctance on the part of Herbert that he acceded to his sister's wish, and it was finally settled that the note, written by his sister, should be posted from London, Lillian having many friends in the metropolis, lest the letter, falling by chance into the hands of Mr. Craig, and bearing the Brixton postmark, should awaken his jealous fears.

Very slowly the hours passed away till the morning of the second day brought the answer.

'There is an enclosure,' said Catherine, as with trembling fingers she broke open the seal.

Three bank-notes, each for ten pounds, were folded within a sheet of notepaper. Catherine and Herbert had anxiously looked for a note.—It contained only these few words—

'From your faithful and affectionate

'LILLIAN.'

That thirty pounds was all the world to the Leslies, but the load still lay heavily at the heart of Herbert. Meanwhile, directions were given for the funeral, good mourning was purchased, and there was still money in hand.

The Leslies little knew how it fared with Lillian just then, or how she, the daughter of the wealthy Mr. Craig, had procured the thirty pounds.

Let us go back a little, and show in the next chapter how things were going on at the Laurels.

CHAPTER VII.—HOW, AND FOR WHAT PURPOSE, LILLIAN PARTED WITH HER BRACELET.

Lillian and Marion are alone.

'What a wonder to be alone! it is a relief to be one evening to ourselves,' said the younger of the two, as she bathed her fevered temples, fevered from late hours and dissipation. 'I really think I shall die under it, Lillian dear, if papa continues to drag us into company like this, and the worst of it all is that we can longer be blind to the reason why he hurries us into society. The day of strife must come after all,' she added, with a deep sigh; 'I dread it too.—Heaven grant we may not be found wanting.'

'Yes, Marion,' answered the still beautiful Lillian; 'and I dread also this most unnatural strife, this offering us as it were to the highest bidder; nor is it possible to fail at surmising the cause. The last interview with my father, when he informed me that some little time hence we might be the tenants of a very poor home, unless the wives of the rich mill-owners, Messrs Hartly and Arnold, let me into a little of the truth; but welcome poverty, with all its horrors, my Marion, rather than the gilded miseries of nuptials where hands, but not hearts, are yoked together.'

'Ay, my Lillian, you speak right well,' said Marion; 'and I say too, welcome poverty, a thousand times welcome, rather than be untrue and false to one's vocation. No; in obedience to him, I have led a dissipated life, when my heart has been far away in scenes of cloistered quiet, for I have never loved, my sister; but sure there cannot be a greater sin than to wed unloving, above all, to wed when God has called one to serve him in religion.'

'Speak low, Marion,' said her sister; 'I thought I heard some one near the door. We have both refused the addresses paid to us, and my father's violence terrifies me beyond expression; but I fancy there will soon be an end of this persecution, perhaps sooner than either of us imagine.'

As Lillian ceased speaking the door opened, and a servant appeared with a letter; he said, 'For Miss Craig.'

It was the note written by our friend Catherine. Lillian recognized the handwriting.—Lillian—faithful, loving, but misjudged Lillian—positively pressed the inanimate paper to her lips. Do not let us laugh at her for the folly, for how many of us have done the same when some dearly-loved absent friend's letter has fallen within our hands.

Large tears fell from the eyes of the sisters as they perused Catherine's letter.

'Not a word about Herbert,' sighed Lillian; 'but Catherine is right—discreet, prudent Catherine.'

'What is to be done, Lillian?' said Marion. 'Papa keeps us cruelly short of money; and the worst of it is the idea we now have that his resources are really cramped make it impossible for us to ask him; besides, he would want to know what we require it for; and I don't think less than ten pounds would be of any service; do you, Lillian?'

'Ten pounds, Marion! I cannot send a farthing less than twenty, love; nay, I would send fifty if I had it. There will be poor Mrs. Leslie's funeral to pay for, and mourning for Catherine and dear Herbert—Herbert I mean,' she said, as if the use of that little epithet had broken the compact she had made with her own heart. 'Come with me, Marion, love; let me see how I can manage.'

Lillian entered her bed-room, locked the door, and then opened her jewel box; she looked wistfully at a diamond necklace, took it up, then replaced it, saying, 'Papa would miss that, should he drag us out to-morrow night.' The she took a diamond bracelet, carefully rapped it up, and laid it aside. 'That will do,' she said; 'papa gave eighty guineas for it. I shall wrap myself in a large mantle, and as soon as he has taken his afternoon's nap, I shall find my way to Silver the jeweller's, a little way out of Manchester, and see if I cannot get, or raise, twenty pounds on it.'

'O Lillian, Lillian, take care,' responded Marion. 'What a scene my father will make, if he finds you are parting with your trinkets; besides, Lillian, you may be seen, and a pretty thing it will be to get abroad that Mr. Craig's daughters are raising money on their jewels.'

'Nonsense, Marion, you shall help me to dress up,' said her sister. 'Come, help me at once,' she said, opening a press, from which she took a dark dress and a large mantle, the folds of which enveloped and thoroughly disguised her stately and elegant form: then she put on a close cottage bonnet, with a veil of black lisse gauze, and the disguise of Lillian to any but a close observer was complete.

Vainly did Marion beg her sister to allow her to accompany her—Lillian was obstinate; and seizing the opportunity when the servants were out in the way, and amid the twilight of the lovely autumnal evening, Lillian sallied from her home.

Arrived in Manchester, the daughter of the man who was deemed worth thousands of pounds stole like some guilty thing down a street in which she knew a rich jeweller and money lender resided, and passing the open shop she entered a doorway on which was the inscription—'Private office for reception of valuable property.'

Overcoming the natural repugnance she felt to the task she had so nobly taken on herself, Lillian pushed open the door, which gave ingress to a small and well-lighted room at the back of the shop. Her heart beat violently at the novelty of her position; the previous night she had been the belle at a ball given by one of the principal families in the county; that evening she stood humbly attired in the office of a pawnbroker, waiting to raise money on the bracelet which so very lately had glistened on her arm—quietly awaiting the pleasure of the jeweller to serve her. She was engaged in an act of mercy; and, verily, brave-hearted Lillian, thou shalt not lose thy reward. After the lapse of a few minutes the master of the shop approached, requested her to be seated, and attentively examined the precious bauble she placed in his hand.

'Thirty guineas you require, madam, on this bracelet,' he said. 'The wife or daughter of one of our millocrats is the owner, I'll be bound, some extravagant bill to pay, I suppose, which father or husband must not know of.' Such were his thoughts as he minutely examined the trinket.

'Can you lend me the sum required?' stammered forth Lillian.

'Oh yes, certainly,' replied Mr. Silver. 'The name, if you please,' he added, drawing out a sheet of card-board, from which he tore off two tickets, intending one to be attached to the bracelet and the duplicate for the disguised lady before him. Now Lillian was, we need hardly say, entirely a stranger to the mode of proceeding adopted by those who are driven to so painful an expedient as to raise money on their property.

'Name! what name?' said Lillian, meechan-

cally; she really knew not what she said. 'You are not used to raise money in such a way madam,' said the pawnbroker, in a more respectful tone of voice than that which he had previously used, 'or you would be aware that the name and address of the person to whom the property belongs is by law obliged to be given to him who lends the money.'

Lillian's cheeks glowed like a coal of fire as the name of Craig fell from her lips.—Mr. Silver started, but instantly recovered himself.

'Excuse me, madam, the Christian name also,' he said.

'Elizabeth,' said Lillian, promptly, remembering that Lillian was uncommon, and wishing still to preserve her incognito if possible.

'Your residence?'

'The Laurels, Altrincham.' The pawnbroker bowed, placed the duplicate in Lillian's trembling hand, and counted out ten sovereigns in gold, which he tendered to her with two ten-pound notes.

Not once had she raised the veil which had covered her beautiful, tearful face; now she gathered her mantle closely around her, and having carefully deposited the money in a portmanteau, she returned the 'good evening' of Mr. Silver, and hurried from the shop. Silver stood for perhaps the space of two or three minutes, blankly gazing at the door through which she had departed.

'Strange,' he said, 'very strange; there will surely be a hideous crash up at the Laurels. I knew the bracelet again directly—could swear to it amidst a thousand: I repaired it only a few months since, when one of the clasps was broken. Then again, a few nights back came those silver dishes; I am certain they were Craig's property. If I mistake not my late visitor was one of those beautiful daughters of his who have run away with many hearts and not lost their own. I could swear to the owner of the bracelet, even had she not involuntarily given me her name.'

Meanwhile Lillian, brave Lillian, threaded her way with rapid steps back to her father's dwelling, and also did a deed of charity ere she reached her home to one of the poor cottagers, and thus was able to avert the curiosity of the hall porter who admitted her, by asking the question—

'Has my father or sister expressed alarm at my absence, Robert? I have been to see poor widow Whiteside, and am home later than I intended.'

The men answered in the negative, and Lillian hurried up to her sister's room, threw her arms around her neck, and opening her purse displayed its contents.

'Sweet Lillian Craig, your tears of shame are now exchanged for tears of joy, for you feel the exquisite pleasure of doing good to those you love.'

Ah, Lillian and Marion, brave and true-hearted heroines of domestic life, both true to your respective vocations, but patiently biding thy time, be it mine to tell how like burnished gold thou didst both come forth from the fiery furnace of tribulation pure and unscathed, truer, far truer and more faithful than in the sunny days of prosperity.

CHAPTER VIII.—THE BANKRUPT MERCHANT— FAITHFUL AND TRUE.

The following morning Lillian and her sister sat alone in the library. They were reading; but the thoughts of Lillian were far away, for she knew that the following day was that appointed for the funeral of her good old friend Mrs. Leslie. For some time the murmur of voices in the adjoining room had been distinctly audible; but her attention had not been attracted, for she knew that her father alone used the apartment opening from the library, and was not aware that the door was ajar.

Suddenly, however, Marion rose from her chair, and with parted lips, and a countenance colorless as marble, stood beside her sister; one hand raised to her lips, to enjoin silence, and the other pointing to the door.

At a loss to comprehend her meaning, and startled at the terrible change in her sister, Lillian was about to raise, but Marion held her down, and bending forwards whispered the one word 'Listen.'

'Ruin, absolute and immediate ruin, and no hope of averting it even for a few short months is that what you mean.'

Slowly and deliberately these words had fallen from the lips of Mr. Craig, and they fell like an icebolt on the hearts of his daughters.

'Exactly so, Mr. Craig,' replied his visitor, and Lillian recognised the voice as that of her father's solicitor, whose visits had been very frequent lately, 'exactly so; your unhappy money speculations, which have turned out so miserably of themselves were sufficient to drag you into a frightful distress; and at the back of them comes this frightful panic in the cotton-market, which will in the end ruin many whose fortunes