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CLARA LESLIE.

A TALE OF OUR OWN TIMES.

CHAPTER VI.—Continued.

Clara was soon busying herself with the usual appendages to a wedding; and she was equally astonished and delighted when Mr. Wingfield came near the table to offer his assistance...

tation before Holy Communion, and when she desired that the names of such as are about to communicate shall be certified to the curate the day before celebration.

Clara here gave an eager penetrating glance into Mr. Wingfield's face, and then beat down again over her work. Mr. Wingfield observed her without looking towards her; she greatly interested him for reasons that she little knew.

Clara, on her side, seemed to have found some one who fully comprehended her. She had often heard Mildred speak in raptures of the happy days she had spent with him and Mrs. Wingfield at his parish, and described with delight the model of a parsonage they possessed.

And there she sat, deeply buried in her own thoughts, certain ideas floating in her mind, and little by little taking a shape so real and consistent, that they brought the color to her cheeks.

CHAPTER VII.—A VISIT TO OXFORD.

"Still the calm shade o'er sacred Oxford throws The holy mantle of a dead repose, Nursing whatever of good doth yet remain."

The 11th of October was fixed for Alan's departure; and Clara, all life and hope, prepared to accompany him during the few days that intervened.

The morning came. Clara embraced her father for the last time, and full of spirits, stepped into the railway train that came puffing up to station. Alan followed; and Clara felt for the first time her heart sink; as she gazed out of the window at her father's tall figure looking sadly after her, and kissed her hand as they were whirled out of sight.

"Have you heard the great news, Melville?" said the last arrived. "I suppose you mean the grand perversion?" replied his companion. "Yes; here is a long article about it in this paper. I suppose there can be no doubt about it now?"

how short time ago was it since Newman was writing against what he has now embraced?"

"I suppose a great many will follow," said Melville. "Any of our friends, Walker?"

"None," replied he. "I heartily wish the curate of our parish would take into his head to follow his master, instead of staying to hear all the confessions in the village."

"I declare I should like to hear some of those confessions myself," replied Melville, with a sneer. "By the way, did you know that poor fellow, De Grey?" asked Walker suddenly.

"O you mean the convert of two months ago," replied Melville; "the long, lanky fellow who used always to be walking about with that silly boy Leslie, of —. What has become of him?"

"They say he is gone to enter some dreadful Order in London, a degree worse than the Trappists," replied Walker; "and his bosom friend, Leslie, is on the point of imitating his example."

"What a fool!" exclaimed Melville. "I thought he had no common sense; he looked just like it, with his constant walks to Littlemore and his milk-and-water face. Depend upon it, there is some hidden motive in this step."

He was going on, when Alan, who had seemed to be roused out of a reverie by the mention of De Grey's name, quickly put his head through the window, and said gently,

"I think you had better not talk so loud; for there may be those near whom you might not like to overhear your conversation."

There was a dead silence; and Alan, with a slight smile and a polite bow, pulled up the glass and turned to Clara, who, with cheeks glowing with excitement and eyes filled with tears, could scarcely command words wherewith to speak her feelings.

"O Alan!" said she at last, "are these Oxford men?"

Alan smiled. "I think I know one of them; he is very bitter against anything like Catholicity. He is only a specimen of a certain class." He sighed. "Poor De Grey?—he could not go on."

Clara was silent some time; then said hurriedly, "Alan, did you hear the first part of their conversation?"

"No," he replied earnestly; "what brought on this foolish talk?"

"Something they said about Mr. Newman," said she, anxiously eyeing him. "Have you heard it, Alan? Can it be true?"

Alan turned pale. "It is true, Clara. I wished to keep it from you as long as possible; for I am afraid it will spoil your pleasure in Oxford."

"Oh, when did it happen, Alan? How was it done?"

"My friend writes me, that at ten o'clock in the evening of the 21st—that is, three days ago,—the Superior of the Order of the Passionists arrived at Littlemore; and there Mr. Newman threw himself at his feet and asked him to admit him into the bosom of the Church. The night was spent in the preparation; and yesterday morning he was received into the communion of the Roman Church."

"And what does Mr. De Grey advise you to do?" she asked.

"Nothing," he would not offer advice. He merely tells me that he is happy; that he has found the one great reality; that he has not been disappointed.

"And he bids you follow him?" said she, her voice quivering. "O Alan, think what you are doing! Do not—do not be rash. You will try it, and then you will return—you must return. Mr. Newman will find out there is nothing like the Anglican Church; he cannot remain in the Church of Rome; he will come back again."

"Never, Clara," said Alan energetically; "he will never return. If he changes now, it will be to become an infidel; there is but one system contrived, and if that be false, then Christianity itself is a lie. Forgive me, Clara," he added, in a softer manner, for the color had vanished from her cheek, and she looked quite terrified; "we must not speak on these subjects; I shock you, and we can do no good. Remember," he continued still more tenderly, "dearest Clara, I have not said that my mind is made up."

Clara burst into tears. "Oh, but it is, Alan; I see it too plainly. Those young men said truly,—you will never remain now that Mr. Newman is gone, you loved him too well. I, who knew nothing of him, could almost find it in my heart to follow him blindly at once; and you, Alan,—do I not know how you loved him?" and, regardless of every thing around her, she hid her face and sobbed without restraint.

Alan's feelings were wrought up to the last pitch; his eye kindled, and his knit brows betrayed the conflicting agony within.

"Clara," said he, in low and tremulous but deeply solemn tones, "hear me, while I solemnly declare that, as far as I know my own heart, and

as far as it is in the power of man, I have endeavored, and will still endeavor, not to allow any personal feeling, any human affection, to bias me in the decision I am about to make. I know that the safety of my immortal soul is at stake; and neither Mr. Newman, nor Mr. De Grey, nor any other human being, shall induce me to barter its eternal weal for the sake of their affection; so help me God!"

Clara suddenly became perfectly still; the burst of sorrow was checked in its course.

"Forgive me, Alan," said she faintly; "but I so fear the force of affection."

"And there is no force of affection on the other side, Clara?" he replied, in a voice of deep emotion.

Clara was deeply struck by this simple appeal. She had looked at only one side of the question; and, as she glanced timidly at his speaking countenance, and saw by the closed eyelids, and the expression of awe that was stealing over it, that he was absorbed in asking counsel and aid from Him Who could alone guide and direct him, she almost reproached herself for even allowing a doubt of the perfect purity of his motives to cross her mind. She sank back in the carriage, and fell into a deep reverie. A thousand broken images floated before his mind. There was nothing connected; all seemed a bewildered chaos. She could only brood over the sorrow that sat deep in her soul, scarcely defining what that sorrow was.

The shrill whistle of the driver seemed to awake both brother and sister. Alan roused himself, and with a doubly tender manner, which seemed to ask pardon for anything harsh he had said, and to betray a full consciousness of having spoken excitedly, he busied himself with arrangements for getting out, saying,—

"We must change carriages here, Clara." "Didcot! Didcot!" shouted the guard, passing rapidly along the train. "Any passengers for Oxford?"

"Here," said Alan, putting his head out of the window; and in a moment the door was unlocked, and they were standing on the platform with their luggage around them.

The transit was quickly made; one train whirled off, the other approached; people hurried in, and Clara soon found herself, in another carriage, puffing off full-speed to Oxford.

"We shall soon be there now, Clara," said Alan, with a smile and a tone that evidently meant to cheer her up. "Look, do you see the spire of St. Mary's in the distance?"—and now we are just passing Littlemore."

Clara gazed from the window as he pointed out each well-known object, and gradually her spirits rose. She asked question after question. When the train stopped at the well-known station, she superintended the gathering together of her luggage, and was ready to return the look of her two companions, whom she recognised in the crowd, with a drawing up of her long neck, and look of cold hauteur that she could well assume when she liked it. The trunks were tumbled on to the top of the omnibus; the man, who seemed to know Alan well, touched his hat with a civil "Yes, sir; we'll take care of them, sir; and Alan offering his arm to his sister, they walked off towards the town. The bells of the Cathedral were ringing for evening service. A calm sunset light was shed over the old towers of Christ's Church, and caps and gowns were rapidly making their way up the street. They crossed Folly Bridge, and Clara bent over the side, asking questions about the beautiful little boats that were clustered beneath. They passed along the street, teeming with life, and were soon beneath the old walls of Christ Church. Young men were hurrying in at Tom Gate, as the great deep-toned bell struck four.

"Do you hear old Tom?" said Alan smiling. Clara was in enchantment; she seemed to have forgotten for the moment that the light of Oxford was extinguished in her.

"O Alan," said she, as the double bell of the Cathedral changed to the last toll, "let us go in, we are just in time."

Alan smiled and acquiesced. "But," added he, "there is still five minutes, and I have a sight to show you, Clara. We shall be sure to be in time."

They went through the arch; it was Saturday evening, and a man was distributing surplices as they passed. Clara had never seen anything so extensive as the Old Quadrangle; she looked round her in delight. She had almost forgotten the promised sight, when Alan, who had been attentively watching one corner on the right-hand side, where a young man, in a surplice and bachelor's hood, was lingering, suddenly touched her arm.

"Now look, Clara." She turned round quickly; a middle-aged person, in a surplice and red hood, was coming out of the little doorway. He walked quickly, his eyes on the ground, his spare figure a little bent, and did not seem to see the young bachelor (who, however, instantly joined him, and seemed

addressing him in the most earnest, respectful manner) till he was at his side. Two or three other figures, in the same red hoods, were proceeding out of the different doors round the Quadrangle, and all making their way towards the same point, the gate that leads to the Cathedral.

They both reached it together; the young bachelor fell back, and the surplices and red hoods bowed to each other, and disappeared together beneath the archway.

"Oh, who is that, Alan?" said Clara. "A great friend of yours," said Alan playfully. "I'm shocked, Clara, at your want of penetration. I thought you would have smelt him out at the other end of Oxford."

Clara stood watching with such eager interest the figure crossing the Quadrangle, that she was not aware the bell had ceased to ring. They crossed the Quadrangle, lingered in the nave while the service was going on, and stood aside again while the procession of canons, headed by their vergers and his silver stick, turned severally round, saluted the altar, and swept by. From them Clara's eyes fell on the floor beneath her feet.

There was a gray stone let into the stone floor and on it her quick eye instantly discovered the words, "Dona eis requiem, Domine." The names above were well known ones; and Clara stood absorbed in thought, while the voluntary poured forth its last rich notes. They lingered on round the Cathedral, and at the shrine of St. Frigidian, where the stairs are worn with the knees of Catholic worshippers,—now replaced, alas, by whom?

The shades of evening came on; the vergers rattled her keys, and in no pleasant tone desired them to evacuate the Church. Clara gave one more look of disgust at the old bishop seated in Protestant grandeur at the door of the Latin Chapel, one more look of sad interest up the choir towards the altar, dropped a kind of furtive curtsey, and left the building with her brother. Alan led her again through the gate into Tom Quad; they passed into Peckwater; young men were standing about in groups before the door of the library, and Canterbury was still open.—Alan seemed to wish to avoid being recognised, and they quickly turned up Oriol Lane.

"Oh, what is that beautiful spire, Alan?" exclaimed Clara.

"St. Mary the Virgin's," replied Alan. Clara's pace involuntarily slackened: she seemed as if she could not take her eyes off it; and even when they had reached the High Street and were going towards the Star Hotel, she turned back once and again to catch a last glimpse of its beautiful proportions. A lady and gentleman were standing at the door as they approached; a travelling carriage had just arrived at the Star, and they quickened their pace.—Another minute, and Clara was in Mildred's arms. She looked full of life and happiness, and they were soon seated in the parlour destined for them, settling their plans for the next day.—Clara had pulled out her "Christian Year" from her pocket to aid her, as usual, the moment the first mention of the morrow had been made. It was the 21st Sunday after Trinity, and the lines so suited her state of mind, that she was obliged to be wakened by Mildred's over and over again appealing to her, before she was the least alive to what was going on.

"Clara dear," said she playfully, "there now, please give me that book;" and she placed it by her on the table. "We are talking about Saint Mary's to-morrow morning, and you do not listen."

Clara's eyes filled with tears; but she made an effort, and repressed the rising emotion the mere mention of that name brought.

"There is Holy Communion every Sunday morning there at 7 o'clock," proceeded Mildred; "you will come, will you not, Clara?"

Clara brightened. "How very nice," said she, "and then, where are we to go for the Morning Service?"

"Would you like to drive out to Littlemore?" said Douglas.

"Perhaps it would be better to go there for the Afternoon Service," said Mildred; "we can then have such a beautiful walk home."

"Have you heard what has happened there?" said Clara anxiously.

"Yes," said Mildred gently, her face clouding almost as much as Clara's; "it will be almost like visiting the grave of a friend."

Mildred's kind words overcame Clara, and in spite of her efforts the tears suddenly overflowed and made their way down her cheeks.

She dared not look up, or she would have seen Douglas's darkening brow. He rose abruptly and paced the room, his head bent and his hands in his pockets.

"A fine triumph for the Romanists," said he bitterly; "any one who did such a thing deserves to be cut by all his acquaintance. I should be ashamed to salute Newman in the streets now."

Clara glanced nervously towards Alan; his eyes