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CLARA LESLIE.

A TALE OF OUR OWN TIMES.

CHAPTER XIII.—Continued.

When the Catholic world had anticipated the resurrection, they were still lingering beside the tomb; and Clara went to Catherine's oratory, and there, in the firm faith of her heart laid down the burden of her sins at the feet of him she thought authorised to give her absolution in the name of God; and as she threw herself into Catherine's arms, when she came out with flushed cheeks, one could read in that sweet countenance that God had seen she was truly penitent, and given peace, though far different indeed to that rest of the soul after a real absolution, of which Clara was as yet ignorant. And are there not many hearts who will still remember the throng that evening brought round the door of a certain nursery of Catholic truth—i.e., Margaret Chapel—and the bright garlands of sweet flowers that fair hands had twined round the corona and would-be chancel; the beautiful camellias that decked the altar; the rich white altar-cover, with its three cherubims; the range of wax-lights; the white-robed choir and clergy,—will they not remember the thrilling chorus of 'Jesus Christ is risen to-day!' bursting from that band of earnest hearts? Will they not think of all this, and strange to an Anglican mind still wrapped up in all this imitation, bless God with bursting heart that all this now is lost for ever, and they were now revelling in the reality they were then dreaming of and yearning after? And Clara? She felt like one in a dream; her voice swelled in the old Gregorian chant, which, by the way she could not help feeling was not quite exulting enough (as there did not happen to be especial psalms for such a service); joined again in the prayers more intoned, and the last hymn, and the Hallelujah Chorus; and then, as she passed out of the door, there were happy groups congratulating one another, and shaking hands with tearful eyes; and Mr. Wingfield came out from the other side-door, and his smile was peculiarly sweet as he gave her his hand across the railing en passant, and said, 'A happy Easter!' Then Catherine came, and Elizabeth, radiant with delight; and there were words and looks such as Easter-eve, and the excitement and the excitement and mystery of an Anglican first confession, ever produce. Little by little the crowd dispersed; the carriages drove off: parties by two and three still sauntered along the street; and at last the doors were closed, and Clara breached home. Mildred's Easter was only to begin the next day; but there was plenty of preparation in the shape of greens and flowers going on, and she did damp Clara's happy looks, for she sympathised with them. Shall we tell, as the finale, how Clara knelt at the altar the next morning early, with the two candles on the altar actually lit, and, mid figures bending quite to earth in their prostrate adoration, communicated from the hands of Mr. Morris, and then repaired to Catherine's oratory for the thanksgiving? She stayed through the long morning service at Douglas's church, and then fainted on the sofa the moment she reached the room.—Pretty nearly all those glad forty days, which she had looked forward to, were spent in-doors. Ascension-day she ventured out for the first time.—Whit-Sunday she was again allowed to see the festive preparations she so much loved. But her health was broken, and a long winter of cough and weakness was before her. Poor Clara!

CHAPTER XIV.—ECCENTRICITIES.

"Poor wanderers! ye are sore distrust To find the path which Christ has blest Tracked by His saintly throng!" Lyra Apostolica. Summer came on; July passed away; the 12th of August arrived. There was to be a dinner-party in Osnaburgh Terrace, and Mrs. Temple came to spend the afternoon with Clara, for she knew she was not that day in a fit state to venture out to church, being confined to the house with a bad foot. She rung at the door, and at once made her way into Clara's room.—It was at the very top of the house—a large garret, rather different from her former 'den' at the Rectory. Every thing was as simple as possible. A small uncurtained bed, at the head of which was fastened a picture of St. Francis d'Assisi, a little strip of bedside carpet, two or three plain chairs, and a number of tables scattered about the room,—these formed the whole furniture. Up in one corner was her oratory, this time full in sight, as 'the tiny screen' was drawn aside. It was covered with green, the Trinity color; and the only thing to be seen upon it was a very beautiful crucifix, surmounted by a picture of the 'Ecce Homo.' Raphael's 'Virgin and Child' had been placed over the chimney-piece, and beneath it hung a picture of St. Clara, which was crowned with a fresh garland of flowers. Cosin's 'Hours of Prayer' and Sherlock's 'Practical Christian' had been banished to a bookcase in one corner of the room,

whilst in their place lay the Breviary, whole and entire (it was only the 'Hora' that lived in Clara's pocket) Dr. Pusey's version of the 'Paradise of the Christian Soul, a Garden of the Soul,' and two or three other similar Catholic books of devotion. Clara was sitting at a table near this oratory, close to the window, absorbed once more in painting. Well as she had always drawn, she was evidently improved; and there was a devotional, almost saintly expression in the features of the old man over whom her paint-brush was wandering, which she would in vain have tried to produce some years before. 'Why, Clara, this is wonderful,' said Catherine playfully, as she examined her drawing.—'You condescending to paint on paper! I think I have never seen you succeed in a saint so well before.' 'I wonder whether Alan will be ever like that?' said Clara, sighing, as she pensively gave the finishing touches to the little collar and black habit that forms the dress of the Oratory Fathers. 'He will have a glorious saint for his patron,' said Catherine, 'if St. Philip Neri is to be his aursing father.' 'I thought he would have become a Passionist,' said Clara; 'and I know not what has seemed to attract me irresistibly towards the history of St. Philip Neri lately; and then, all of a sudden, I find Alan has entered his novitiate long ago in the Oratory. Strange things happen sometimes.' 'How does the window get on?' said Catherine; for she never seemed to like Clara to talk of Alan. 'One medallion is finished,' replied Clara, rising and joining her at the window; 'but this does not get on. I think I must wait for one moment of inspiration to impart a saint-like expression to St. Mary Magdalene's face. But will you let me dress myself while you examine it and the progress of my work, and then we will have a long talk undisturbed before the company arrives. Oh, what a torment it is to dress for a party, and wear finery, and all that nonsense.' 'You do not like wearing finery,' replied Catherine. 'O Clara! one mortification of our own will, one obedience, be sure, is more acceptable to God than a hundred self-willed sacrifices.' Clara was silent; she slowly raised her eyes and glanced at herself. 'Perhaps you are right. I certainly do not like wearing all this; and yet I feel my old love of display alive within me, which does like it. O Catherine! when will this self be conquered? when will this war cease?—How can such a soul as mine be fit for the presence of God? I struggle on, but my mind seems a chaos; I seem to make no way. Oh, surely some mighty change must pass over the soul before it appears before God! Death's work must be wonderful in the whole atmosphere of the soul to fit it for Heaven—for an eternal contemplation of God in His awful purity and loveliness.' 'In other words, it must pass through a state of purgation,' replied Catherine, 'or what the Roman Church calls Purgatory.' 'O Catherine, I long to believe in Purgatory,' said Clara earnestly; 'but I suppose I must not.' 'Why not?' said Catherine. 'I thought that, and the Invocation of Saints,' replied Clara, 'were the two doctrines so completely forbidden in the Articles, we could not get out of the difficulty. Not that I do not very often most earnestly repeat that touching conversation, 'Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis, peccatoribus, nunc et in hora mortis nostrae,' though I know Mr. Wingfield would scold if he knew it.' 'You seem a most obstreperous child,' said Catherine. 'And yet, Catherine, this is another thing in which I cannot feel I am doing wrong. I feel I am wrong in disobeying him in other things, but not in this. But to return to the doctrines of Purgatory, Catherine; there is one thing in it I cannot get over. How can it be that the state of the soul is not decided at the moment of death?' 'That is not the doctrine of the Roman Church, Clara,' replied Catherine; 'that is some Protestant misunderstanding.' 'How?' said Clara, surprised. 'Is it not a kind of second state of trial, like this world?—So I have always been taught.' 'Catholics believe,' replied Catherine, 'that at the moment of death the soul appears in the presence of God, and there its good and evil actions are examined; judgment is pronounced, and if it is condemned to hell, the demons take possession of it; if it is saved, it for the most part has to expiate smaller faults in the fire of Purgatory, before it passes into the regions of the blest.' Clara sat musing. 'Its good and evil actions examined—ah!—weighed in the balance! O Catherine, how

terrible! And if the good actions do not outweigh the evil ones, that soul is lost eternally! How have I laid awake at night and thought ever this—and it is such a terrible thought! I have no good works; my evil ones are infinite. How will my good works ever outweigh my sins? O Catherine! I have passed sleepless nights over this question, and I cannot unravel it—all is so dark and intricate. So, then, only those who will one day attain Heaven are admitted to Purgatory. I must think about it; I cannot enter my mind yet. I dare say I shall lie awake to-night.' 'Are your meditations made at night, dear child?' 'It has always been my happy time,' replied Clara, 'even in my young days—my days of earthly happiness. The hours I spent at midnight out of bed in reciting Offices were the happiest of the day; and now that I cannot sleep at night, I lie in bed and muse. My windows are concocted at night, and the patterns for my embroidery, and all those little pictures, too; they pass one by one before me in the dark. If I have some new idea in my mind, I think and think, till it assumes a tangible form, or it incorporates itself in my belief. I think nearly all my Creed has been adopted, bit by bit, during those mid night hours.' Catherine stroked down the glossy locks compassionately. 'It is sad to have to work one's way to truth, to be one's own guide to the Catholic faith.' 'But God has guided me also,' replied Clara. 'How I can trace His Hand, teaching me to love Him, teaching me what His love is, from the moment He began taking from me what I was absorbed in before! I was, just what papa used to tell me I was (and I did not believe) 'absorbed in poetic imaginations about saints and angels,' thinking I knew what the love of God was; and I was quite inexorable to it, and unaware even of what it meant. No wonder he felt a lack in me, and used to think me shallow; and now I date my first learning to love Him from that terrible stroke which took everything from me at once. It has made me jealous of spending my thoughts on saints and angels.—Sometimes I scarcely dare even think of meeting dear papa himself in Heaven, I long so that my whole soul may be rapt in the thought of meeting Him, the Lord of Saints, our Love, our Joy, the Vision of Beauty and Purity.' Clara's countenance lighted up into one of her old bright, almost ecstatic, looks, and Catherine bent over it, and fondly kissed her forehead. 'I should fear all that worshipping of Saints and the Blessed Virgin that the Roman Church authorizes,' she added, 'it would be an almost insurmountable difficulty to me.' Catherine's countenance altered. 'You would not, if you had experienced the efficacy and wisdom of it, dearest Clara,' said she earnestly. 'It seems to me putting the Blessed Virgin and the Saints in the place of our Blessed Lord,' continued Clara, 'making them almost omnipresent.' 'It is not rather,' replied Catherine, 'on your part, lowering the idea of our Blessed Lord's Divinity into something of the place where Catholics put our Blessed Lady, and the other saints of God, who are ever living absorbed in Him? How can we imagine what the intercourse of the invisible world must be? Do angels converse together in words? It seems to me like a portion of the same unbelief that would assert that our Blessed Lord's glorified Humanity cannot be in Heaven and in millions of places on earth at the same time. Do you think that our guardian angels are not ever in the presence of God, ever conversing incessantly with Him, though occupied in guarding us upon earth? Do they take time to traverse the regions of immensity, like we poor mortals? Surely, surely, we have very little intercourse with the unseen world in comparison with those, our favored brethren, who are allowed all this expanding of their spiritual nature towards the wonderful world that surrounds us.' 'Why do you call them Catholics, Catherine?' said Clara. 'I am accustomed to the title,' replied Catherine evasively; 'you know they will not accept of any other, and I have constant intercourse with them.' 'Is it not very dangerous for you, Catherine?' asked Clara. Catherine paused; it seemed a painful question. At last she said: 'God will give me grace to do His Will. I could not choose. He placed me in my present situation.' 'I never could yet understand,' said Clara, 'how people can leave the English Church on any grounds but feeling. We have the Succession—even Roman Catholics themselves allowed this—therefore we have the Sacraments. I never could understand people's doubting the Sacraments of the English Church. And then nothing

remains but the superior privileges to be obtained in the Church of Rome; and surely this is no ground wherefore we are to leave a situation in which God has placed us.' 'Certainly not,' said Catherine; 'but for truth's sake, dearest Clara, I cannot let you continue so much in error. Catholics do not allow we have orders; their theologians say it is very doubtful—all but certain that we have not; and whenever a clergyman like Newman, and others who become Roman Catholics, wish to be priests, they are re-ordained, although it is a doctrine of the Church that Holy Orders cannot be given twice without sacrifice. Besides this, there is the question of jurisdiction, the effect of which is to prove that, even if we had the Succession, our priests would have no power to absolve. I say all this, dear child, because I don't see that it helps us in trying to do the Will of God to take false interpretations of Catholic doctrine. I think we ought to know exactly what they say they believe, and then answer it; now our controversial contents itself with stating our views of their faith, and then replying, and this is an easy victory.' 'But, then, it seems to me,' continued Clara, 'as if it were not our business to judge. God has placed guides over one. I stay in the Anglican Church on Mr. Wingfield's authority.' 'And what would you do if Mr. Wingfield were to die? I do not think he will,' she added, perceiving that Clara winced at the very word; 'I only make the supposition.' 'I don't know,' said Clara; 'perhaps I should get another who thinks exactly like him—whom I thought he would approve.' Catherine was silent. She was sitting at Clara's frame, going on with her embroidery, while Clara sat on a footstool at her feet—her favorite place,—and she bent over the work. At last she said, in her quiet, sublime tones,— 'I think we must all beware, our personal love to our directors blind our eyes to the truth. A Catholic's guide must not be one man,—that were a sectarian spirit indeed,—but the Church.' Clara answered not. Catherine had awakened up a train of thoughts which haunted her night after night, and roused suspicions which every word of her friend now served to strengthen.—Things which passed unheeded before now seemed a confirmation of her thoughts, and never could that speech be effaced from her memory. Catherine sat silent too; and at last, looking at her watch, asked Clara whether she had said Vespers. 'St. Clara's second Vespers,' said Clara, smiling. 'Never mind its not being in the Anglican Calendar. I must say the Vespers of my own saint. Besides the 'Commune Virginum' is so beautiful; and she clasped her pet Hora between her hands, exclaiming, 'Veni, electa mea, et popum in te thorum meam, Alleluia!—Alleluia!—Alleluia!' she repeated, going towards the oratory, lighting the candles beside the crucifix and pulling down the blinds, so as to throw a double light on the beautifully modelled crucifix. Catherine watched her round the room. She, too, had passed through the furnace of affliction, and there been sternly taught Catholic truth: she, too, had had her idols shattered in a day; and she felt in her inmost heart that the day wherein Clara's confidence in her Anglican position would be shaken to its foundations was near at hand; and when she thanked God that she was, as it were, placed near her, to help the frail, tender plant through the storm of doubt that awaited her. And then their two sweet voices alternately recited psalm, antiphon, and versicle; and Clara's face lighted up into an expression of radiant happiness, and Catherine's became more calmly trusting, though still worn and sad. They had scarcely finished when Mildred's voice at the door, in its sweet, joyous accents, was heard summoning Clara into the drawing-room. CHAPTER XV.—A DINNER-PARTY. 'Oh that they knew what faith can work, What Sacraments can do! What simple love is like, on fire, In hearts absolved and true!' Father Faber. Clara and Mrs. Temple had hardly entered the room before there was a knock at the door, and the Honorable Mr. Courtney was announced.—A minute after, Mr. Wingfield and Mr. Morris made their appearance, and Clara ran out to welcome Elizabeth Dalton. They had just uncloaked, and were entering the drawing-room, when the last guests arrived in the shape of a Mr. Merville and his sister, the former apparently one of the nicest-looking young clergymen Clara had ever set her eyes on. He turned out, however, to be older than he looked, and that before dinner was over Clara found out that Mrs. Merville was abroad for health, and he was obliged very shortly to follow her. Miss Merville was an old friend of Mildred's, and Mr. Courtney was a young man whom Clara also soon found out had met Mr. Merville abroad. There was much talk during dinner about public affairs, the general topic of the day; and Mr. Merville won Clara's heart at once by mentioning that a letter he had received from Paris said that

the French expected young Louis Napoleon to be in time proclaimed Emperor, and then to see the restoration of the Bourbons in the person of Henri Cinq. He then began a description of a Benediction he had seen from the Quirinal in Rome; the people following the Pope's carriage in crowds, kneeling in his path, and almost mad with excitement, till they had got the Holy Father out into the balcony to bless them as they filled the square with their acclamations. Clara listened with glistening eyes, and even Douglas relaxed, as he went on contrasting this with the precipitate flight of 'the people's idol' behind the Bavarian minister's carriage. Mr. Wingfield seemed shocked at this, and declared it was a pusillanimous desertion of his post, which Mr. Morris seemed as shocked at his saying. Mr. Courtney, who had accompanied Clara down to dinner, in vain attempted to engage her attention and at last found himself condemned to sit in silence and listen to what was going on. The ladies soon retired to the drawing-room, and when there were loud in their praises of Mr. Merville. 'What a ringing laugh,' exclaimed Elizabeth Dalton; 'it does one's heart good to hear it.' 'I congratulate you, Emily,' said Mildred, placing her hand playfully on Miss Merville's shoulder; 'I did not know your brother was such a nice person.' 'He is a general favorite,' replied Miss Merville, smiling. 'I do not wonder at it,' observed Mrs. Temple; 'he has such a fund of anecdote and entertainment.' Clara was perfectly silent for once, but she thought she had never seen a sweeter countenance or more engaging manners. As to his voice and laugh, they were irresistible; they were so musical, and yet so merry and gentle, though quite a contrast to Mr. Wingfield's. When the gentlemen came up, they found the two young ladies seated at the table, their work thrown aside, and their heads bent over one book, while the three others were gathered round the fire in close conversation. Mr. Morris was the first to appear, and two pair of sparkling eyes were instantly turned up to him with an expression of affectionate respect, as he kindly asked what they were reading. Clara turned up the back of the book, and answered, smiling, 'From Oxford to Rome?' 'Do you like the book?' asked Mr. Morris. 'I fancy it must be just what would happen,' replied Clara; 'do you not think so, Mr. Morris?' she added, timidly. 'I should rather doubt it in some cases,' he replied. 'I was only thinking of myself,' replied Clara; 'I fancy it is just what I should do and feel were I to leave the Anglican Church.' 'But they say Mr. Newman is discontented,' observed Elizabeth appealing to Mr. Morris. 'I should not think it likely,' was the quiet reply; 'he has not acted as though he were discontented.' 'How I should like to have heard his sermon last Feast of the Circumcision,' said Clara, in an under tone, slyly looking up in Mr. Morris's face; 'but when I mentioned even a thought of it to Douglas, he told me if I went out of his house on such an errand, I should never come back to it again.' Mr. Wingfield, as my readers know, had quick ears, and Clara's mounting colour betrayed that she perceived that he had heard her speech; for he was just passing at the moment, and had turned round his head. 'Catherine went to hear it,' observed Elizabeth; 'but you know they say there is madness in his family, and that he has not escaped a touch of it.' Clara even forgot Mr. Wingfield's presence in the indignation, 'O Elizabeth!' that escaped her. Mr. Morris actually laughed outright, and Mr. Wingfield turned round and said, 'Do they say so, Miss Dalton, I really think it is very probable. Perhaps it is the only way of accounting for his leaving the Church of England.' Clara's colour mounted high, and she became serious. Her heart would not let her think Mr. Wingfield was right, and yet he was such very high authority. Meantime, Mr. Morris was examining Clara's work. It was a piece of the very finest cambric, beautifully embroidered in satin stitch. Elizabeth's was less intricate; it was merely a piece of linen with one of Pugin's Patterns in red and blue cotton commenced upon it. 'Is this a corporal you are working, Miss Leslie?' he asked. Clara seemed to wish to hide it away, but Elizabeth wickedly unfolded the delicate performance, and displayed some elegant little red crosses in the middle and corners, and round the edge a legend in Gothic letters raised upon the finest linen. 'This is Clara's 'chef d'œuvre,' cried she; 'can you read the legend?'