

STILL AND DEEP.

BY F. M. F. SKENE, AUTHOR OF "TRIED,"
"ONE LIFE ONLY," ETC.

CHAPTER XLVII.

The terrible days of the Commune were over. The fatal 24th of May which witnessed the massacre of the Archbishop of Paris and his fellow-hostages, had come and gone; the flames that had threatened the total destruction of the fair city were extinguished, and the troops of Versailles were in full possession of the capital. The storm that had broken over ill-fated France had finally subsided, and it was marvellous with what rapidity all traces of it were swept away, while the light-hearted people went back composedly to their ordinary occupations. Already the bright June sun lit up each day the Champs Elysees, thronged, as of old, with pleasure-seekers, and merry groups, who were seated talking and laughing under the trees; while never in this world will it be known how much of pain and anguish and terror the walls of the city had enclosed through the weeks that preceded the sudden calm. It had in truth been a dreadful time, when the darkest of human passions had been let loose without restraint, and death and destruction had been in the very air.

Yet all through that memorable period there had been one little spot within the sad tormented city, where, despite the deep sympathy felt for the sufferers outside, an intense happiness, such as this earth rarely sees, filled the two thankful hearts that had met in perfect love and confidence after such long severance and unrest. Since that first joyful evening, when all the barriers that had been raised between them had been suddenly broken down, the young Comte de L'Isle and his future bride had had ample time to sound the depths of each other's thoughts, and see how hopelessly forlorn and desolate this life would have been for both of them, had they failed to find its only completeness and satisfaction in each other's love. Each day that he lived, Bertrand found more reason to rejoice that he had indeed won Mary's priceless love; for with him, who was to her almost a second self, her great reserve melted away, and he learned to understand as he had never done before the tenderness and truth of her noble nature.

He carried out his plans of maintaining absolute silence on his succession to the titles and estates of his family; and he took an almost boyish delight in planning the mode in which he would bring Mary as his wife to Chateau de L'Isle, still in total ignorance of the truth, and reveal it to her there. Meanwhile it was a great source of pleasure to him to hear Mary talking with such earnestness of the means she would adopt to make his life comfortable, on the very small income she believed him to possess. Although he had quite regained the use of his limbs, he was not strong or robust as he used to be, and she would ask him, with the prettiest, softest entreaty, to promise her that he would not attempt to take any employment, but let her earn the needful means for his support, which she was sure she could accomplish by teaching French and music, as she naturally assumed they were to live in England. To all this Bertrand would listen with the utmost gravity, and tell her that her plans were extremely sensible, but that it was not necessary they should come to any definite arrangement till after their marriage, as he had money enough in his possession to carry them over at least the time of their honeymoon.

It had been arranged, by Bertrand's special wish, that the wedding should take

place as soon as Paris was restored to peace and calm; there was indeed no reason for delay, and he knew that his presence was greatly required at Chateau de L'Isle. It was also necessary that he should go back for a short period to the Italian town where he had held his diplomatic post, to wind up his affairs, which, in his haste to fly to the succour of France, had been left somewhat in confusion. He told Mary that they must proceed to this place immediately after their marriage, and that he meant to travel towards it by a route through France which was not quite direct, but which would enable them to spend a few days at a house where he had been very hospitably received when on his way to Paris with the despatches from the army. Mary was quite ready to go there, or anywhere else he liked, and she asked very few questions as to their journey; it was enough for her that she would be with Bertrand, that her bitter separation from him was now but a memory of pain, and the long aching of her heart for ever stilled in sweetest rapture of content; to hear his voice, to see his kind eyes turned smilingly on her, to feel the touch of his dear hand, was a joy so exquisite, so all-sufficient, that had he told her they were to spend their lives in the wilds of Siberia, it would have been to her a matter of indifference. The poverty and privation to which she looked forward with Bertrand were her own deliberate choice in marrying him, for she had had various opportunities, ever since she had been in Paris, of attaining to brilliant positions, both in England and France, had she so willed it. There were many men of wealth and influence associated with her in the great Society for the relief of the sufferers, and her beautiful character, her gentle sweetness, her pure lovely face, had caused more than one to seek most earnestly to win her love, in vain. The true heart never wavered, even in its despair; and now, in its deep bliss of happy union, the outward accessories of life seemed absolutely nothing.

So, even while still the murderous cannon were thundering over their heads, those two inhabitants of Madame Brunot's little house were happy beyond all words, and their joyousness seemed to infect the other members of the family, who had not the same cause for satisfaction. One of Bertrand's first proceedings after his marriage was finally fixed, was to draw little Jacques into his room, where he could be alone with him, and having set him standing on the top of the table, he sat down in front of him, folded his arms, and, looking at the astonished little boy with laughing eyes, he asked him to be so good as to state what he most desired to possess in the world, in order that he, Bertrand, might have the pleasure of presenting it to him, in recognition of his enormous service the young gentleman had unconsciously done him. When Jacques had thoroughly understood the nature of the large-handed long bearded man's offer, he at once demanded an unlimited supply of bon-bons, and was informed that a about a cart-load would be at his disposal that evening; but bonbons could not fill up the measure of Bertrand's gratitude, so he requested Jacques to name some more lasting tribute which he might offer him in memory of his great benefaction. Whereupon Jacques solemnly ordered him to endow him with a drum, a helmet, a sword, and a few other warlike instruments, with which Bertrand immediately promised to supply him, not taking at all into consideration the martyrdom which poor Nurse Parry would have to undergo from the music of the drum, and the terror with which she would see Jacques, who shared her room, possessed of implements capable of inflict-

ing any amount of serious wounds on his own chubby little person.

Mrs. Parry was, however, almost as much delighted as Bertrand himself at the prospect of the wedding. She knew she was to see her darling Mary happy at last. Valerie, and her next little sister, Dorette, were looking forward with much ecstatic importance to the grand occasion when they were to officiate as bridesmaids at their dear Mary's wedding, and when they were to be attired in charming costumes presented to them by Mr. Lisle in preparation for the event.

Finally it came to pass that poor Madame Brunot herself could heartily wish Mary joy, without having any longer the fearful recollections of the missing colporteur, which made her feel it a sort of unfaithfulness to him to be happy, even in the bright prospects of others—for one evening in June there came a grey-haired travel-stained man to the door of their house, who asked the porter, in a very trembling voice, if Madame Brunot still lived there, and if she and her children had survived the siege; but he had scarcely received the answer, and clasped his hands in thankfulness, when Valerie, coming down the stairs to go out, suddenly saw him, and then her cry resounded through the house, "Father, father is come back!" and, bounding from the steps, she flew into his arms, and nearly strangled him with her close embrace.

Yes it was indeed the husband and father, so long lamented, who had had a variety of unpleasant adventures, out of which it was somewhat amazing that he had escaped scot-free, and who, the moment Paris was opened again to the world, had hurried back, with very little hopes of finding, as he did, his whole family alive and safe, if not actually well. He attributed this great result in great measure to the kindness shown to them by Miss Trevelyan and Mrs. Parry, and was proportionally grateful; and, as Madame Brunot soon began to recover from her nervous maladies, when her anxiety and suspense were over, there seemed indeed to be no longer any cloud on the enjoyment of the whole party.

One person outside the house did, however, object strongly to Mary's marriage, and this was Marthe, who did not at all admire losing her services at the hospital. Bertrand consoled her, however, by a secret donation of alms for her poor people.

The last occupation to which Mary Trevelyan devoted her time and attention during the brief period which preceded her wedding, was the preparation of a design for a monument to be erected over the grave of John Pemberton in the cemetery of Pierre la Chaise, and Bertrand trusted the execution of it to one of the first sculptors in Paris, with the promise to Mary that after their marriage he would bring her back to the capital, to see it completed and fixed in its place.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

At last there came a morning when all the world seemed radiant with the glory and beauty of a lovely summer day—a day in sunny June, when the sky was clear and bright, and the birds were singing, and the flowerets blooming, while in the happy hearts of those with whom we have journeyed so long in the tortuous paths of human existence, there woke the dawn of a new life of joy and peace, where the trials and sorrows that might yet await them would be robbed of all their sting, because henceforth they would be met and borne together.

Bertrand Lisle stood waiting at the door of the English chapel where the marriage ceremony was to be performed after the civil contract had been performed else-