

## STILL AND DEEP.

BY F. M. F. SKENE, AUTHOR OF "TRIED,"

"ONE LIFE ONLY," ETC.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

In a quiet corner of the church, lighted only by a lamp which hung before a little side altar, Mary Trevelyan found him she had sought so long—her Bertrand—her one love dearer than ever in his helplessness and poverty. He lay on a heap of straw, with his knapsack for a pillow and his military cloak thrown over him as a covering, and he was still wearing a uniform torn and scorched in several places. He was asleep in the attitude of a tired child, with one arm round his head; as he lay on his back the lamplight shone full on his face, showing the change that had taken place in the once brilliant, handsome *charge d'affaires*. The rich brown hair which used to be so soft and silky was matted and lustreless, the beard untrimmed, the features seemingly almost too strongly marked, from the hollowness of the sunken cheeks; but it was still the dear face that had haunted her dreams and lived in her thoughts, and there was no reason now why she should not let her eyes dwell on it with all the tenderness that filled her heart, for he was no longer bound to any other, even though she no longer believed that he had ever loved herself.

John Pemberton, whispering to her that he would see her in the morning, disappeared among the motley crowd which thronged around, and Mary sank on her knees by the rough couch, murmuring, "Oh, my darling, my darling, have I lived to see you again!" and then she poured out her whole heart in thankfulness for her unexpected joy.

It was perfect bliss to Mary Trevelyan to remain there by his side, letting her hand rest with a caressing touch on his long thin fingers, as they lay listlessly across his breast. There were sighs and sounds of anguish all round her, yet she could not still the ceaseless song of praise within her soul, for all the love her heart could feel was lavished on the wasted form stretched out before her, and that was breathing, palpitating with the life on which her own depended. One thought of sadness only she had, and that was in the certainty of the pain which the Lorelei's letter would give him, although she could no longer doubt that she had never really loved him, and therefore that he was well quit of what would have been but a mockery of happiness, almost in her estimation a sacrilegious union; yet it did grieve her to know that she herself must be the instrument of his sorrow, and that from her hand he must take the letter which would give his trust in Lureline's affection such a rude awakening. Mary determined that she would, if possible, prevent him finding out who she was until he had passed through the shock of Laura's faithlessness, and could disconnect her from any share in bringing him such evil tidings.

The evening wore on while Bertrand slept. Hour after hour passed; it was near midnight, but there was little rest or silence within the great church. Some of the sufferers, like her own charge found a temporary relief in slumber, and one by one a few sank into the surer sleep of death, and were borne away by the attendants to await their burial on the morrow; but for many there was no ease from pain, nor could those rest who had come to succor them.

Gradually Mary noticed from Bertrand's restless movements that the effect of the opiate was beginning to wear off. He turned from side to side, stretched out his

arms, muttered a few indistinct words, and at last opened wide the bright blue eyes she had scarce hoped to see again, and, raising himself on his elbow he looked round eagerly.

The moment she saw any sign of his awakening, Mary had drawn the hood of her mantle over her head, and she sat beside him, bending down her face so that he could not see it. He took her, no doubt, for one of the kind women who habitually nursed the wounded, and asked her in French if she knew where Mr. Pemberton, the Englishman was?

She answered in the same language, thinking it might prevent him recognizing her voice, but he started visibly as the low soft tone met his ear, as she said, "He is gone away for the night, but he will come to you in the morning."

"Whose voice was that? who spoke," said Bertrand, sharply in English.

Mary did not answer, but held to his lips a glass of some restorative she had been preparing for him. He drank it and then leant back with a sigh.

"My mind is wandering back to those I loved of old," he said, speaking again in French. "I thought I heard the voice that once was sweetest to me in all the world, but no doubt it was yours, kind nurse. Tell me—did the Englishman give you no message for me? Did he not leave with you a letter? He has belonging to me a letter from England. He promised I should certainly have it to-night."

"Yes, and it is here," whispered Mary; "I have it quite safe for you."

"Ah, give it me!" he exclaimed with feverish excitement. "Why do you delay, nurse? It is mine; let me have it at once!"

With trembling hands she took it from her pocket and put it into his eager fingers. He almost snatched it from her in his anxiety, and as he saw the peculiar handwriting, which any one who had once seen Laura write could never mistake, a flush of eager pleasure glowed over his pale face, and he pressed the letter to his lips, as he murmured, "My poor Lureline!"

The lamp hung on the other side from that on which Mary was sitting, and he turned completely round to get its full light upon the paper as he tore open the envelope.

Then Mary rose very softly and moved away, saying gently, "I will come back to you when you have read your letter."

Her sensitive nature shrank from witnessing the first moments of his bitter humiliation and disenchantment. He took no heed of her; he was already absorbed in the lines he was reading, and she went along through the rows of prostrate forms, towards a peaceful spot some little way removed from all that confused mass of suffering, and there sunk on her knees in prayer.

After a time she rose to go back to Bertrand, and as she turned to walk through the ranks of the sick she involuntarily looked down towards the entrance door, and saw a dark figure in the act of passing out behind the curtain which hung over the opening. How or why it was she could not tell, but a sudden chill and terror struck into her very soul, and she hurried breathlessly to the spot where she had left Bertrand. Was she blind, or dreaming, or could it be true that she saw the straw couch where he had lain, the knapsack which had formed his hard pillow, the cloak flung on one side which had covered him? but he—her Bertrand, her one love—so long lost, so lately found—he was no longer there, he was gone! Her senses seemed abandoning her; she flung herself down by the bed; she passed her hands over the straw, as if to satisfy herself that his form rested there no more—then

she started up, and appealed almost frantically to those lying around.

"Where is he? did you see him go? what has become of him? oh, tell me!"

Some were asleep, some too weak and ill to answer her; she got no response. But suddenly a lithe little figure rose up from behind a pillar near her and came bounding towards her. It was Pierron, who, after wandering about the church for some hours to extract what morsels he could from the provisions of the sick, was preparing to take his night's rest among them.

"If you want the monsieur who was lying in that bed," he said, "I can tell you all about him, for you left a piece of chocolate beside him which he did not eat, and I had it."

"Oh, tell me, Pierron! where is he? only tell me, and you shall have all the chocolate I have left."

"Yes, that is right," he said, taking hold of her hand; "come, he is gone out."

"Out! but he is ill, feeble!"

"He was in a fever, madame, like a madman; he read a letter he had over and over again, and his eyes grew wilder, and his breath came short, and he flung himself about, and at last he looked at the words on the paper again, and sprang upon his feet. He seemed quite strong, but I think he was mad, for he laughed and he crushed the letter in his hands and I flung it away."

"Where is he then, Pierron? where is he now?"

"Do I know? I can only tell you he went out when he had thrown the letter away. He said words which sounded like 'I will go home, I will go home.'"

Through Pierron's curious pronunciation of the English words, Mary could detect what they had been.

"And then," the boy went on, "he rushed away down the church as if he were quite strong, with his eyes blazing, and his lips laughing, and he lifted up the curtain over the door, and went out into the street, and I saw him no more."

"No more! no more! Oh, my Bertrand!" said Mary, with an almost unconscious wail; "but I will seek him! I will never rest till I find him!" and hastily putting the food she had promised into the hands of the child, she in her turn rushed down through the crowded church, and went out into the bitter cold night.

The stars were shining bright as diamonds in the clear expanse of heaven, the snow lay deep and hard all round, no human being was in sight in the deserted streets. Mary drew her cloak over her shoulders, and hurried on she scarce knew whither.

"I will find him she said or die!"

## CHAPTER XL.

John Pemberton was greatly distressed and alarmed when he returned to the church ambulance next morning and heard from Pierron of the disappearance of Bertrand Lisle, and of Mary Trevelyan's rashness in having gone out alone into the disturbed city to seek him. He guessed rightly enough what had happened as regarded Bertrand. The shock he had received from Laura's letter, in his feverish state, had brought on delirium, under the influence of which he had been seized with some delusive idea that he could at once start for England. The condition of high fever in which he was, might to a certain extent have preserved him from suffering by the bitter cold which had prevailed through the night; but Pemberton thought with dismay of Mary's delicate frame having been exposed to it, and he could only hope that she had long since found her way home, either to the hospital or to Madame Brunot's house. He could not

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