

Family Department.

KEEP IN THE RIGHT.

We scatter seeds with a careless hand,
And dream we ne'er shall see them more;
But for a thousand years
Their fruit appears,
In weeds that mar the land
Or healthful store.

The deeds we do, the words we say,
Into still air they seem to fleet;
We count them ever past;
But they shall last—
In the dread judgment they
And we shall meet.

I charge thee by the years gone by,
For the love of brethren dear,
Keep, then, the one true way
In work and play,
Lest in the world their cry
Of woe thou hear.—KEBLE.

CLAIRE.

(Written for the Church Guardian.)

Concluded.

"Why, where do you come from, Citoyen?" said the landlord, who was lounging at the door, and concluded that all questions should be addressed to himself. "It must be a good many years since you were in these parts. Duval, *le bon homme* Duval! did you not know that the night when the Chateau was burned down the *bon homme* met with his death? He had been the friend of the people all along and the enemy of the aristocrats, but, at the last, it seemed that he wanted to prevent the citizens from destroying that accursed Chateau, where the tyrants had housed so long. *Ma foi*," said the landlord, with righteous indignation, "were the people to be stopped in the work of justice when he had urged them on to take the law into their own hands? Anyhow, that night when the Chateau was fired, Duval met with his death; it was not known exactly how. Some said that one of the *villagers* had struck him with a club; some that a burning rafter had fallen upon him, *je n'en sais rien*," concluded the landlord with a shrug.

A sickening feeling of horror swept over Felix as the man spoke; he felt himself grow pale as ashes, but with a violent effort controlled himself and did not speak until his voice was steady and calm. "Where did they bury him?" he asked. "Well," said the landlord, "we were not very particular in those days, but I think they put him alongside of his wife—perhaps you knew her—she was a quiet woman, was the Citoyenne Duval."

Fainting fatigue, Felix pulled his hat over his eyes and, leaning back in his seat, seemed presently to fall into a sleep. Then he roused himself, asked for his horse and paid his reckoning. "And who lives in the Duval's old house?" he asked, his eyes resting on it as he spoke. "Who inherited the property?" "Well, after a while the State confiscated it, (no one claimed it, you see,) as it did the Du Plessis land. The people have not got their rights yet, but *attendez* our time will come. Then one Duclos, a wine grower from Provence, bought it all up; his agent lives in the Duval's house, but they say the Citoyen Duclos is going to build a new Chateau on the site of the old one—*en fin*—we shall see." "And, by the bye," said Felix, "could you tell me, *Citoyen*, what became of the old nurse, Ursule, who lived up yonder?" "She is living still for aught, I know," replied the landlord, "with her nephew, Pierrot, over at Plessis-les-tours, beyond the forest. The *Demoiselle* fled, perhaps it was as well for her, for the people's blood was up that night they fired the Chateau, though some might have been willing to take her part."

Felix was in his saddle by this time; repressing the words of bitter scorn which rose to his lips, he briefly thanked his informant and rode away, while the landlord and the peasants watched him out of sight. "Seems to have been mixed up with the aristocrats himself," said the host, with a sagacious nod.

At the church-yard Felix dismounted. In the shade of a huge ilex he found his mother's grave, all overgrown with weeds and brambles; beside it,

he thought, he distinguished another mound. With an aching heart he stood beside them; then gathering a few leaves from the ilex, he continued his way up the hill in the shade of the ancient beeches. Yes, of the Chateau Du Plessis, scarcely one stone remained upon another; it had been a work of thorough destruction. A frightful scene must have ensued that night—a scene of drunken fury and diabolical rage, which happily had had only the lifeless stones on which to vent itself; or had some of the ruffians indeed at the last turned upon their leader? had this spot been the scene of his father's murder, or was it an apparent accident which had put an end to his mistaken life? Felix wandered round the heaps of blackened rubbish, while memory conjured up the grey, stately Chateau, for generations the home of the ancient family, whose solitary descendant was the lonely girl, deprived of her just inheritance and thrown upon the world. Thoughts crowded in upon him as he stood there gazing upon the spot where the little postern had stood, through which they had passed so many times together; even the outer walls had, for the most part, been cast down. A stray sheep was grazing on the turf which had overgrown what had been Claire's little flower-garden under the windows of the amber boudoir. Among a few disjointed stones a wall-flower had sprung up, scenting the air with its fragrance. Felix gathered it for Claire. Then with one more look of melancholy farewell, he turned away. At that moment he abandoned the thought which he had hitherto cherished of returning to spend his life in his native country. The memories attaching to it were too bitter, too degrading. His future would be dedicated to the land of his adoption.

There was one more errand for Felix before he turned his back, perhaps forever, upon the neighbourhood of Du Plessis. Putting spurs to his horse, he rode over the brow of the hill and through the pine-woods towards Plessis-les-tours, a well-remembered hamlet. It was easy to find Pierrot, Ursule's nephew, and as Felix approached the cottage which had been pointed out to him, he saw a white-haired woman sitting in the porch, with a little child beside her. The young man instantly recognized her, but the old woman's eyes were dim, and it was only when he sat down beside her and, taking her hand in his, pronounced her name, that Ursule uttered a little cry of thankfulness. "It is Felix," she said, turning his face towards the light; "my prayer is answered; I have never doubted that I should hear about my darling." "I have come to take you to her, if you will," said Felix, after telling her all he knew about Claire.—"I shall see her, I trust, in a few days." But Ursule shook her head. "I am too old," she said softly; "I am waiting for the end, day by day. Tell my darling that I have spent my life in praying for her, and that I am going to her mother. You will love her and live for her, Felix, now that she is left alone." "That would be the greatest happiness life could bring me," answered Felix, but he did not tell Ursule that he never contemplated that Claire's life and his could pass side by side—"and shall I tell her that you are happy, and that they are kind to you here?" he asked. "Yes, Pierrot is a good boy, a good boy, and his little children love me—see, this one we call Claire," and she patted the tiny flaxen head beside her. That night Felix spent in Pierrot's cottage, partaking of their rye bread and goat's milk. By sunrise the next morning he had bidden Ursule a loving farewell, and had set forth on the way to Paris.

And now, this autumn day he had spent within reach of Claire, but the shadows were lengthening and the light growing soft and hazy, before he left the Park, and turned in the direction of the street where Claire still lived.

He stopped before a roomy, old-fashioned house, and raised the polished brass knocker. A tidy woman answered the summons. Yes, Miss Du Plessis lived here, but she was out. It was near her hour for coming home, however—would the gentleman step in and wait? Felix replied that he would, and followed her up a flight of steps to Claire's apartments. She opened a door, invited him to enter, and withdrew.

Then Felix, with a long breath, looked around him. This was her home; here she had gone in and out for all these years, since last he had looked

upon her. With tender reverence he took an open book from a table; her dear hand had held it but a few hours before. A bird cage with a gold finch hung at one of the windows, and presently it burst forth into a clamorous song. Happy bird! did she not feed and tend it? He went over and spoke to it, perhaps told it the sweet, sorrowful secret that he might never tell its mistress; and the little feathered singer held its pretty head on one side and looked at him with its shining eyes, as though it knew him and his story well. Then Felix sat down in the low window seat. Claire's work lay there—some soft, delicate, lacy mystery—and he held it in his hands and pressed his lips to it. Looking out he saw the Abbey towers, as she had described them in her letters, soaring above the world into the soft, sunset-tinted sky. There was something calming in their solemnity, and Felix leaned back and waited patiently.

"A gentleman waiting to see you, miss," said the servant, as Claire entered the house, and Claire came quietly up stairs, expecting to find some friend of her father's. The door by which she entered faced the window where Felix sat; she could but see the dark outline of his figure against the light, but to him her face was clearly visible, though the daylight was fading. Slowly he rose as she approached him, his voice well nigh failing him in his deep agitation. "Mademoiselle—Claire, have you forgotten me?"

Then happened what perhaps decided Claire's fate, though I am inclined to think it only hastened it. Claire was a little weary that evening; the day had been warm in the city streets, and she had taught for several hours in the morning, and paid many visits among her poor and sick through the afternoon. On her way homeward, that solitary home, a feeling of unutterable loneliness had taken possession of her. She had been greatly disappointed in receiving no tidings from Marthe—was it possible that they were beginning to forget her? Tired and so lonely—she entered the room, and then, who was that meeting her with outstretched hand, and a face pale with the passionate joy of again beholding her? The revulsion of feeling was too great. "Felix," she cried, "Felix," and fell fainting into his arms.

Was it wonderful that when she recovered she should find her head pillowed on his breast and her hands clasped in his?

"Ah *bien aimee*, send me from you if it must be so," he said. "I can no longer refrain. True, I am the peasant's son; my father was false to his trust, disloyal to his benefactors; but, Claire, I love you with so great a love as almost to atone for all. Tell me at least that you pity me, that you will not take from me the old affection with which I strove to be content. My father is dead, Claire—dead long since; can you forgive him?"

"And have you nothing to forgive?" she whispered. "Were there no wrongs perpetrated by our race—wrong to those who were a trust committed to them and dependent upon them? Felix, there was an account on both sides; you have not less to forgive than I on the score of others. And for you—" She paused. "Felix, do I not owe life itself to you?"

"Dare I believe in my own happiness?" said Felix presently. "You have ever seemed immeasurably removed from me, and now, dare I claim you as my own? Ah, my beloved, you will find at least that I am faithful unto death!"

"I know it, Felix—I have always known it—from the time that we played together as little children *you have been my hero and my love!*" * * *

A few months later, and Marthe, waiting in the vine-covered porch of their pretty dwelling, was listening for the sound of wheels, her eyes bright with expectation. Felix was coming home, not alone, he had said, in his brief letter—she was to prepare for another traveller. Could it—could it be Claire? she had asked herself at least a hundred times. Was it possible that such happiness awaited her?

And now at least the coach stops, and Felix, her own Felix, alights and lifts out a pale, beautiful woman. Yes, it is Claire herself who turned with eager, outstretched arms, and clasps Marthe round the neck, and tells her, with smiles and tears, that now they are sisters indeed.

THE END.