

CHAPTER XLII.

Mary Trevelyan's first step in her difficult undertaking was to visit in succession the various hospitals of Paris, all of which had ambulance attached to them for the succour of the wounded; and one and all were filled to overflowing. It would not be easy to describe how much it cost Mary, with her peculiarly retiring and quiet nature, to go thus alone from place to place searching the ranks of the sick for the one face she so pined to see. But, in the disorganised state of the capital, there was nothing remarkable in a young girl presenting herself, either at the barracks or on the ramparts, in search of a missing friend; and thither Mary fully meant to go, at least to make inquiries, if her search through the hospitals proved of no avail.

Nearly a week was thus occupied in going from one scene of suffering to another, and still she found not a trace of her lost love to cheer her in her painful pilgrimage. At last she came, in the course of her search, to the hospital of Notre Dame de Pitié, where she had herself worked so long in the early part of the siege; and here she was brightened by the warm welcome which her little friend Marthe bestowed upon her the moment she saw her.

"Ah, Mademoiselle Marie!" she exclaimed; "I have so often wished for you, and wondered why you did not come back to us. I thought perhaps you had gone home to paradise; for you are a little saint, you know! Where have you been?"

"I have been very ill, dear Marthe, and in great trouble, or I would have come to see you."

"Ah, you do look ill—so thin and pale; but, for the matter, we shall all soon be walking skeletons, if this terrible siege goes on much longer. We live on corn and rice, and have very little else to give even our patients, now we have eaten up all our cats."

"What! even the pretty tabby that you were so fond of!" said Mary, with a sad smile, "Surely, you did not arrive at making her serve for your dinner!"

"Ah, but I did! She was a charming cat, and most caressing in her ways; but I ate her myself, my dear friend. I am stout, and I require nourishment." And, truth to tell, Marthe's appearance strongly conveyed the impression that either the cats or some other condiments had nourished her frame very satisfactorily. "Are you coming to work with us again, my dear?" she continued.

"Some day, perhaps, I may," answered Mary; "but for the present I must devote myself entirely to the search for a friend of mine who has been missing some weeks. I fear he is lying ill somewhere; and I thought he might have been brought to your ambulance."

"Come and see," exclaimed Marthe, catching her by the hand, and drawing her on to the sheds where the sick were lying; and once more she made her sad inspection from bed to bed, but with the usual result: Bertrand Lisle was not amongst the sufferers there. Mary felt more than usually desponding when she found that it was so; for this was the last hospital on her list, and even her strong faith in her own sympathetic instincts could not altogether save her from the terrible misgiving that she should never find her Bertrand, unless she could look through the graves in Pere la Chaise or Montmartre. This thought brought silent tears to her eyes, as she sat down to rest for a few minutes on a seat in the courtyard, and her distress was quickly noticed by the shrewd Marthe.

"Tell me all about him, my dear child," she said, taking a seat beside Mary; "and perhaps I shall be able to help you. Who

and what was he? and how did he disappear?"

Mary was thankful to catch at any advice or assistance that could be given her; and she at once told the quick-witted little woman all the circumstances of Bertrand's stay in Paris, so far as she knew them, and of his flight, under the pressure of a sudden shock, from the Church of the Trinity.

"You mean that he was quite delirious when he made his way into the streets that night?" asked Marthe.

"Yes, quite; there could be no doubt of it. He was quite in high fever, and had been light-headed through the day."

"Then, tell me, have you sought him at the Salpetriere?" said the nun.

"No," said Mary, eagerly; "I did not know anything about it. Is it a hospital?"

"At the present moment it is, because they have an ambulance attached to the institution, like the rest of us; but at ordinary times it is simply a refuge for the aged and the poor, and also—mark this—for the insane. It seems to me more than likely that whoever met your poor friend wandering about that night in a state of delirium would conclude he was insane, and consign him at once to the Salpetriere. Probably the police took him there."

"Oh, Marthe, let me go!" exclaimed Mary, starting to her feet; "I feel sure you are right; I believe I shall find him at last. Oh, how can I thank you enough!"

Mary was moved quite out of her usual calmness, and seemed hardly to know what she was saying, as, with trembling hands, she tried to tie on her hat, and hastened to the gate.

"Well, well!" said Marthe, with a comical smile, "it seems these quiet English people can excite themselves sometimes. This monsieur will not come back to life for nothing, if he is found."

But Mary was too much agitated to heed her playful sarcasm. She had quickly embraced the good woman in French fashion, on both cheeks, and was already at the outer entrance, telling Pierron, whom she had enlisted in her service, and who was waiting for her there, to call a cab for her as quickly as possible. She was soon driving away, while Marthe waved her adieux; and Mary went on with a glow of hope at her heart, which she felt had at last a foundation in reason. At length she had reached the outer lodge of the vast building, the Salpetriere, which shelters within its walls hundreds of those who are suffering from almost every form of earthly misery. The porter admitted her, but she found, as she had expected, that it would be necessary for her to see the director before she could ascertain if any one answering to the description of Bertrand Lisle had been admitted into the institution. She had to wait some time before he was at liberty, and she walked up and down the gravel walk in front of the door, looking up with longing eyes at the stout old walls. At last the tedious delay was over, and she was ushered into the director's room. He soon became interested in her simple quiet account of the long search for Bertrand Lisle; and the hope she now felt that he might have found shelter in the Salpetriere, and the unmistakable emotion and anxiety which showed itself even through her self-controlled manner, touched the business-like official so much that he was ready to spare no pains to ascertain if indeed the friend she sought was numbered among the thousand inmates of this hospital refuge.

"I am nearly sure that we have had such a case as you describe," he said; "but I can ascertain on referring to our books. I am not certain that he is still with us." "Mary's heart had almost ceased to beat.

Could it be that she was about to lose the trace of him once again, when she had seemed so near success? She sat white and breathless, but still as ever, while the director ran his finger down column after column of the official book. Suddenly he clapped his hands.

"Ah! here we have him, I do believe." And he read out from the page: "No. 724; officer; brought by the police; supposed to be insane; found to be suffering from brain fever; attended by Dr. Cruvilliers for eight weeks; convalescent; gives his name as Bertrand de L'Isle, but speaks with a British accent, and looks like an Englishman."

"Look at this case, monsieur," said the director to the doctor, pointing to the entry in the book—"what can you tell this lady about it? is the patient still here?"

"Yes; he has quite recovered from his attack of brain fever, but it has left a weakness of the lower limbs which renders him perfectly helpless for the present, though it is a mere temporary result of his illness. I have kept him here because he seemed to have no friends to whom he could go; and in the present state of Paris he is likely to get better nourishment with us than he could elsewhere; but a change would do him good; he is very melancholy."

"Perhaps the visit of this lady will make an improvement in that respect," said the director, glancing with a smile at Mary, who had started to her feet, and was standing with heaving chest and trembling lips, and eyes full of joyous light. "Will you conduct her to him at once, monsieur?" he added.

"Willingly," said the doctor. "This way, mademoiselle." And with quick, short steps he hastened down a long passage; while she followed, hardly able to bear the tumultuous throbbing of her heart in its intense thankfulness.

"Monsieur de L'Isle is not able to walk," said the doctor, "but I have had him carried into a small private garden we have for our own use, where he can enjoy the air and sunshine undisturbed by the other patients. It is here you will find him," he continued, opening a door in the corridor, which led out into a small enclosure; "but I will not intrude upon your happy meeting, mademoiselle." And standing aside to let Mary pass out, he made her an elaborate bow, closed the door behind her, and departed. Mary advanced a few steps, and then caught hold of the branch of a tree to support herself, as the strong tide of feeling swept over her, and made her trembling knees bend under her.

Bertrand was reclining in a wheel-chair, with his face turned in the opposite direction from where she stood; he was gazing at the flight of a bird that was winging its way high up over the smoke of the cannonading, as if it sought to leave the beleaguered city far behind it. The wistful sadness of his look seemed to show how gladly he too would have escaped from the spot to which his weakness confined him; but although he was pale and thin, and the sunny brightness of his face seemed dimmed, there was little change in the familiar countenance which had haunted Mary's thoughts by night and day for so many dreary months. She stood there trembling, seized with a sudden timidity. Now that the goal of all her hopes was won, perhaps Bertrand would not wish to see her, she thought; he did not love her; he had left her for Lurline. Though Lurline was false, it did not make herself more dear; might he not mistake her motive in seeking him? The courage failed her altogether to move a step nearer to him. How long she might have stood there it were hard to say; but fortunately the bird which Bertrand was watching soared finally out of sight. He