

told me I cannot live longer. If you are good enough to let me linger out my days, in a corner of your house, I will accept your kindness with gratitude; but all shall be made over to you before the day is many hours old to-morrow, and if you leave me here you leave me as your guest."

Armand de L'Isle carried his point; and when Bertrand rode away from the chateau the next day, his title to the estate was safe in the notary's hands.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Mary Trevelyan and her associates reached Paris (not without great difficulty, from the distracted state of the country) in the first week of September, 1870; and the events of that month so fatal to France, are matters of history with which our readers are well acquainted. The news of the terrible disaster of Sedan and the fall of the Empire, took place the day after their arrival, and within ten days from that time Paris was encircled as with an iron ring by the irresistible force of the Prussian army, and the siege had commenced. Ingress and egress became alike impossible, and Mary knew that she, and all those who, like herself, were devoted to the relief of the sick and wounded, were finally shut in, and must needs go through all the hardship and horrors of the siege, however protracted it might be. She was well content with this fiat, so far as she herself was concerned; she had come there to help the suffering, and was prepared herself to suffer in doing so, and a very few weeks passed in the capital (fitly called in those days the "bleeding heart of France") sufficed to show her that there was more than work enough for hundreds like herself, could they have been found, to devote themselves to the never-ending task. Ambulances were at first established in connection with the hospitals, for the greater convenience of surgeons and nurses, who had thus everything that was required at hand, and into these, day after day, were poured the wounded soldiers from the ramparts, or those who had succumbed to fever from exposure and hardship, along with numbers of men women and children who were stricken down in the streets by the shot and shell of the ceaseless bombardment. Very soon, too, the want of provisions began to tell on the poor, and never in this world will it be known how fearful an amount of misery was endured within the wall of Paris during those awful winter months; soon the hospitals, even with their supernumerary ambulance, no longer sufficed to hold all the sufferers, and different places were utilized for the purpose, until at last the very churches were put in requisition, and turned into receptacles for the sick and wounded.

In the first commencement of the long trying siege Mary Trevelyan was appointed chief nurse to the ambulance attached to the Hospital of Notre Dame de Pitie, where wooden sheds and tents erected in the courtyard were filled with sufferers, after all the wards had been crowded to overflowing; but in agreeing to remain there, chiefly, she had stipulated that she was to be replaced by some other person, if at any time it happened that she found her services suddenly required elsewhere; for the one thought that lay ever at her heart, and filled her with anxiety night and day, was the conviction she had that Bertrand Lisle was somewhere, even now, within the beleaguered city, wounded, it might be, or dying, and in sore need of the succour which she longed beyond all words to give him; she had calculated, from what he had said as to his movement in the letter to Laura, of which Charlie Davenant had

spoken to her, that he must have arrived in Paris with his despatches a day or two before she herself had reached the city, and she knew that if this had been the case, it must be impossible for him to leave Paris again—a French officer was the last person who would be allowed to pass the ranks of the Prussian army: where, then, was he? and how could she know whether, disabled as he already was, he might not be in some great suffering or danger? This was the question that seemed to wear her very heart out, as night and day she laboured among the sick and dying; but she spoke no word of her dreadful anxiety to Mrs. Parry, when she snatched a moment to go and see her. Poor nurse Parry had enough on her hands already, without having to share Mary's cruel suspense.

Madame Brunot, the wife of the colporteur, was in the greatest distress; nothing had been heard of her husband, and it was certain that if he were alive at all he could not return to his family till the siege was over. She was herself in a very delicate state of health, entirely confined to bed, and she had no money with which to pay the exorbitant price to which provisions were already rising. Her seven children and herself depended entirely on the charity of others, and though Mary and Mrs. Parry gave all they had, it was far from sufficient for their wants.

Their condition would have been almost desperate had it not been for John Pemberton; he had been appointed by the Relief Society to the onerous task of distributing food from the English stores to the famishing population in a large district of the city, and the work taxed his energies to the utmost, from the scenes of distress in every possible shape to which it introduced him, and which he never failed to strive most earnestly to relieve without confining himself at all to his special department. The Brunots lived in the *quartier* which had been assigned to him, but he would in any case have known of their distress from Mary Trevelyan, whom he often went to see, and he soon became interested in the family. Valerie, the eldest little girl, who was about ten years old, was one of those charming unselfish children to whom sorrow and trial had given wisdom beyond her years. Now that Madame Brunot was incapacitated she acted as the little mother of the younger children, and scarcely knew what it was to be without a baby in her arms continually; she it was who consulted with John Pemberton as to the wants of the family whilst nurse Parry was attending to the sick woman, and, as he spoke French only with great difficulty, he used to take her with him as his little interpreter, that Mrs. Parry was often left in charge of the household while Valerie went with him to help in succouring families as badly off as themselves. Hand in hand they would walk through the streets of unhappy Paris, or stand in the long line of purchasers waiting at the shops of the butchers and bakers till their turn came to be supplied; and the child showed wonderful calmness and courage with the ceaseless thunder of the bombardment sounding over her innocent head, and the lurid smoke of the cannon glaring before her eye. She soon came to feel for John Pemberton that intense affection which an intelligent and warm-hearted child is so quick to cherish for the friend of mature years of whose kindness and wisdom she has had experience. She well knew that he was the benefactor of those who were dear to her, and she looked upon him as the embodiment of all that was good and noble; she would open her guileless heart to him as she trotted along by his side, and

John Pemberton soon found that the services he had rendered to her family were more than repaid by the benefit he derived from his intercourse with her, and the insight he gained into her transparent nature and simplicity of mind; for she restored to him that faith in his fellow-creatures which had been so cruelly destroyed by Lurline's artful intrigues. Valerie taught him that the world is not all evil, that God has many a holy shrine in pure unworldly hearts that seem through all their lives to retain the freshness and brightness with which they first came from His creative hand. The patience, too, with which the child, in quiet submission to the will of the Heavenly Father in whom she trusted so implicitly, endured a life of joyless privation without a murmur, made the man of riper years feel ashamed of the gloom he had allowed to overspread his whole existence, because the one love on which he had set all his hopes had failed him in such bitter fashion, and she taught him, above all, a lesson of disinterestedness in her thoughtful and observant care for others and complete forgetfulness of self.

One evening Mary was seated in the midst of Madame Brunot's children, whom she was feeding with some rice, and she smiled gently on them, as they stood round her with open mouths, like so many hungry sparrows; but when the welcome repast was over, and they had all been carried off to bed under the guardianship of Valerie, Pemberton saw how instantaneously the transient brightness faded from her face, while a long shuddering sigh seemed to shake her whole frame. She went to the window, and stood there, looking out with a sad wistful gaze so full of yearning anxiety and pain, that he no longer doubted she had indeed some heavy secret trial that was blanching her wan face, and wasting her delicate frame with far more insidious power than all her labours on behalf of the suffering.

He was always in the habit of escorting her back through the dangerous streets to the hospital, when he happened to meet her at the Brunots'; and she was soon ready to go, for she never stayed away from her duties longer than the time necessary to do anything she could for the Brunots, and to comfort Mrs. Parry with the assurance that she was quite safe and well. So the two found themselves walking, by the quietest way they could, in the direction of the hospital. It was a bright moonlight night, clear and cold, and Pemberton could study his companion's face as they went along as well as if it had been high noon.

"Valerie Brunot is a very wise little woman," he said presently.

"She is indeed a singularly thoughtful, intelligent child," answered Mary.

"She has made a discovery which I was too blind or too stupid to make," said Pemberton, "and has told me she is certain you have some great grief or anxiety which you are bearing unaided and in silence. If this is true, Miss Trevelyan, I should be so thankful if you would let me try to help you."

"It is true," she said, in her soft pathetic voice.

"Then do I entreat of you, tell me what it is—if at least it is at all possible for me to be of use to you with regard to it."

She held down her head, and did not speak.

They were crossing one of the bridges over the Seine, and Pemberton resolutely stopped, and looked at her while he repeated, "Miss Trevelyan, can I help you? You must tell me. These are not days for conventionalities."

"I think you could," she answered;