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CLARA LESLIE.

A TALE OF OUR OWN TIMES.

CHAPTER III.—CLARA'S SANCTUM.

"Oh, for a love like Daniel's now! To wing to heaven but one strong prayer For God's new Israel."—Keeble.

We will not attempt to describe Douglas and Alan Leslie's arrival at their childhood's home; it would only be an old-told tale of embracing and joy. We will leave our readers to imagine Mr. Leslie's paternal blessing, and Clara's almost childish joy; nor will we speak of a more retired figure, that stood little apart, with glowing cheeks and eyes, that singled out Douglas Leslie in a moment from the group, as he hastily approached, and returned the half-timid welcome with a lover-like devotion; but our readers will perhaps kindly accompany Alan the next morning to the door of Clara's sanctum, and hear her merry voice say, more pensively than usual, 'Come in,' as she recognised his well-known knock.

She was seated at a table, in one corner of the rather large apartment which was entirely dedicated to her studies, and had in former days been the playroom, where old Mrs. Wallis had once born undivided sway. Her long dark hair was plaited rather negligently at the back of her head and yet in its disorder rather added to the loveliness of the countenance that was bending over a painting, which was growing in beauty every instant beneath the little delicate white fingers that guided the brush, or shook it carefully in the water, as she drew herself a little back every now and then to survey her almost finished work.

Alan gently opened the door, cast his eyes round the rather disordered apartment, then came and stood silently behind Clara, watching the progress of her drawing. There was evident talent in the boldly-sketched interior of a Gothic quadrangle, that formed the principal feature of the scene. Its low buttressed walls and Gothic archways terminated in a beautifully-modelled doorway, through which a troop of something very romantic, in the shape of some young girls in black dresses, and long thin black veils on their heads, were two and two winding. The whole scene was viewed through the tall outer doorway, whose gratings were apparently thrown open for the occasion. The sky was brilliantly coloured, and a red glow was lighting up the whole scene. Clara's brush passed two or three times more over the prettily finished foreground, gave a few touches to the group within the quadrangle, then, almost as if she was still unconscious of Alan's presence, she took up her pen, and traced the following lines beneath it:

"Within these walls each fluttering guest Is safely lured to one safe rest; Without, 'tis moaning and unrest."

And then Clara Leslie actually heaved a long soft sigh.

Alan put out his hand from behind her, and placing his fingers on the drawing she had for an instant left to itself, dexterously whipped it off, saying playfully, 'Bravo, Clara; now this is mine!'

"O Alan, no!" she exclaimed, starting up in an instant, with the tell-tale colour rushing in full tides to her cheeks and neck; 'you mischievous creature, give me my drawing; that is not for you, indeed.'

The whole room was an index of Clara's mind. A large round deal table, in the middle of the room, was covered with her writing materials and books. One portfolio lay on one side, with stray letters peeping out of it, and near it was lying a volume laid open upon another. A little farther on was a pile of Italian books, in which a beautiful little edition of Tasso was predominant. Her bonnet and shawl covered the confusion of the other part of the table. Escorted inside the latter, with his forepaws extended lazily over the soft shawl, which she was busily employed in brooding, lay a splendid tortoise-shell cat, purring aloud. On another small table near this stood a range of glass bottles, and an apparatus for weighing-out medicines. One corner of the room was occupied by a piano, and the chairs near it were filled with loose music books; Callcott's glees, Handel, Porcell, and chant books of all kinds, chiefly forming the collection. On another chair was a heap of rough-cloth for the poor, half cut-out, or half-made; and a large wardrobe, which had been left ajar, and displayed a frock of Clara's within, filled up the other side of the apartment. One large, old-fashioned arm-chair was the only vacant seat, and to this Alan escaped, playfully refusing to give up the drawing.

"Oh, no, Clara, I must have it. I want it for my rooms at Oxford, and that fellow to it, which I see there, too."

At this moment Mr. Leslie's voice was heard beneath the windows, and Clara bounded from the room, exclaiming, 'I will not be long, Alan. Wait for me; papa is calling me.'

Alan gave one more look at the drawing, then quietly hid it away, and approaching the table, began examining the books. If one could read his countenance, he seemed satisfied; and seeing the door of the next room open he wandered in thither. This was a small one, almost a closet, in which Clara slept. It was neatly carpeted, pretty muslin curtains shaded the window; a little couch-bed stood in one corner, and every thing was, strange to say, the picture of neatness. The walls were hung with little pictures of different sizes, and a very small screen hid up one corner near the bed. Alan's curiosity was roused, and he soon made his way behind this barrier. It only contained a small altar like table, covered with red, on which lay Cosin's Hours of Prayer, Sherlock's Practical Christian, a Christian Year, and sundry other books of that school. Above was hung a small copy of Raphael's Virgin and Child, and sundry strange looking emblems crowned the whole. Two were perfectly intelligible to Alan, — a crown formed out of some prickly plant, and plaited with great care; and a large bunch of the same plant, looking much like a birch-rod. Alan took down this last, and having tried it on his own hand, and discovered it to be a most substantial weapon, he was standing still deep in thought, contemplating it, when a slight noise made him turn round, and there stood Clara, blushing even to tears, her countenance half laughter, half indignation, perfectly unable to utter a word.

"Who taught my darling Clara the use of the discipline?" said he, in a tone of mingled affection and sorrow. "Come, Clara," he added, laying down the implement, and fondly passing his arm round her, 'you know we have no secrets, have we?'

Clara laid her head down on his shoulder, and said not a word. In vain he tried to raise her face, which she kept pertinaciously hid; and when at last he did manage to get a glimpse of it, he saw the long lashes were quite bathed with the tears that were wetting her cheek. He was half-grieved, half- vexed, and almost reproachfully told her he saw she had not kept her promise, and given him her whole confidence since he had been away. She lifted up her head at once, and fixed her large dark eyes upon him.

"And you, Alan," said she, 'have you kept yours? Have you told me all you have been doing since you have been away?'

"I could not, Clara dear; for it was impossible."

"Nor could I, then, Alan. I cannot write all I think."

"But you can speak it, Clara," said he, fondly, 'so now we will have done with secrets—and tears;' for she had laid her head down again, and put up the pocket-handkerchief. 'There, it is over now; and he took the handkerchief, kissed and wiped them away, till smiles returned, and then led her from the room.

"So you have been very busy, I see?" said he, after a moment, pointing to the books strewed about the table.

Clara did not answer. She had not quite recovered the shock that Alan's discovery of her closely-guarded precious secret had given her.—He did not seem to know exactly what to do, for her silence was infectious. He wandered to the piano, and sitting down, commenced running over the keys with that measured touch which at once betrays a long acquaintance with the organ rather than the piano. It was a soft, soothing air, and in subdued tones he began accompanying it with his mellow voice. Clara listened fixedly, and gradually drawing nearer the piano, leaned her arms upon it, and Alan soon read in her speaking features that all disagreeable recollections were passing away in the enjoyment of the moment. It was Beethoven's 'Ave Maria,' one of those exquisite melodies wherein soft music indeed speaks to her own in tones that others in vain 'in their heart of hearts would hear.'

"Alan," said Clara earnestly, as it died away in a still softer and more melodious cadence,— 'tell me, do you believe in the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin?'

Alan positively started. He had expected much from the books he had seen on Clara's table, and the articles he had discovered in the next room, but he did not expect so wide a doctrinal stride as this.

"If all is in keeping with this," thought he, 'the child is ripe for Rome.'

He looked up, and seeing her earnest eyes fixed eagerly upon him, he said, with assumed indifference.

"Why, Clara, what has put such an idea into your head?'

"Nothing," replied Clara;— 'my own thoughts. It is only an idea that has struck me lately. How could the humanity of our Blessed Saviour be perfectly stainless if she, from whom that humanity was taken, was not so also? It struck me when I was reading the long tirade in that disgusting book, Mosheim, about it, that it was a most natural idea to come into people's heads.'

"The Church Catholic has never decided it,"

said Alan; 'even the Church of Rome has left as a matter, not of faith, but of pious belief, to her members. It is binding on no one.'

"I never troubled my head about the decisions of the Catholic Church," said Clara, carelessly; 'those words you were singing brought up my past thoughts, that is all.'

"And so you do not admire Mosheim, Clara?" said Alan.

"Why, he was a Dutch heretic, Alan; how could I?" replied Clara; 'I have just believed the very contrary of all he says, that is all. He has given me a great deal of information, but he has not made me a better Protestant than I was before.'

Alan's countenance changed at the term Protestant. He seemed as if he winced at the very word, and changing the soft air he was all this time playing into a more animated performance, half sung, half chanted, in an inimitable comic manner, the following words:

"I am a Protestant—the son of a Protestant! My father was a Protestant, and I glory in the name of a Protestant! No Popery!—no Popery! The Bible!—the Bible!—the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible! This is the religion of Protestants! Hurrah!"—and with a flourish up and down the piano worthy of Thalberg himself, he suddenly shut it down, and then with a half-disgusted, half-laughing face, threw himself into the arm-chair, and remained perfectly silent.

Clara hardly knew what to make of this. She could scarcely at first comprehend whether he was in earnest or not, for she had never seen him indulge in such nonsense before. At last she burst out laughing; while Alan, whose fit was upon him, went on,

"Well, we'll give them some strong doses now; they wouldn't have Tract 90, but we'll give them something better for the future."

"Do you mean those lives of the Saints that are being published at Littlemore, Alan? I have read some reviews of them, and I am afraid those are too 'strong doses' even for me."

"Strong doses for you, Clara, who use the discipline, and believe in the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, which even I stuck at! I'll get you the life of St. Stephen Harding, and I am sure you will be enchanted."

He seemed half sorry for having said so much and walked to the table. Clara's book of Ms. poetry lay there; she let him take it up undisturbed, and set busily to work copying out the chant for the next day, while he turned over the leaves. Shall we look over his shoulder? The following bore the date, 'Eve of St. John Baptist, —C.L.'"

"Oh, give me a stern monastic shade, Mid cloisters dim and gray, With a chapel there, mid the ivy fair, And the Church's holy lay.

Let the bell be tolled at break of day, And the solemn Vesper-Chimes, And let prayers be said, and hours be read, At the old appointed times.

For, oh, 'twas a stern and cruel thing, In those days long past and gone, Each holy seat, each blest retreat, To take from the lonely one,—

To take the refuge of woman lone, And give it to pampered foals; And now we sigh for the days gone by, And the old monastic rules.

Then give us our own sweet cloistered shades, Once o'er our green isle strewn Ere o'er our souls His vengeance rolla, For robbing Him of His own."

"Well done Clara," said he; 'St. Stephen Harding is just the book for you. I see you give it to the reformers pretty strongly.'

"O Alan," said Clara, laying down her pen,— 'it was such a shame of that brutal Henry VIII, to destroy all the monasteries, and take their revenues for his profligate courtiers. No language can be too strong for this. Were they not 'pampered fools?' Alan, Alan, when will that glorious time come when the Church will again be one?'

Alan sighed heavily, and made no answer.

"Shall we not see it soon, Alan? So much has been done in these last few years."

Alan mournfully shook his head. "Poor Clara!" said he gently.

"Why, Alan," she replied, 'you are quite changed; you were so full of hope last year, and now instead of entering into my visions, you seem to discourage me. Surely, surely, Alan, there is reason to hope. Nothing separates us from the Eastern Churches except our want of intercourse; and Rome, when she sees this movement spreading through the whole of England, and the English Church showing an example of what the primitive Church was, surely she must give up her unjust pre-ensions and own us once more, as part with her of that one seamless robe which has been so long rent. It was her fault

\* The date at which this tale commences is supposed to be 1845. The definition of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, as an article of faith, by the Sovereign Pontiff took place in 1854.

we did not remain in communion at the Reformation. It was so for eleven years, till that troublesome old Pope Pius chose to excommunicate us, and complete the schism.'

"Her fault!" said Alan, still more mournfully; 'would to God we had no fault in the matter.'

Clara looked surprised. She shook her head with an air of perplexity.

"Alan, I could not live without this hope; 'tis the day dream of my existence. You must not sit down and mournfully shake your head, and think it is not to be. Is not everything in the world tending towards reunion? Is not England awaking, as she never did before? It not Rome shaking herself, too, from her sleep? Is not the Greek Church arousing even at our call? It will be—it will be; and we shall once more tread through foreign lands and find an altar and a home wherever we go, and all Christendom will speak the same language, and every priest and every church will be one's own, as it was in days gone by. Oh, how earnestly does one repeat the words which our own loved Archbishop Laud used, 'Heal the breaches of it, O thou only One of Israel!'

Clara's cheek glowed and her eye kindled as she spoke. Alan had not the heart to break up her beautiful dreams; and he was pondering in silence, when there was a knock, and the room was suddenly invaded by Douglas and Mildred.

CHAPTER IV.—ST. WILFRID'S.

"Days of Darkness," they assure me, "When the Mass was daily said," "Sounded light must now inure me To a wild whence prayer has fled."

"Here they are—here they are," said Mildred, entering with an unusually excited air. Clara—Alan—up with you both, and away. Mr. Leslie is waiting for you, to hold a consultation in the church; so jump up. We persuaded him to wait until we could come and fetch you; for we have been talking to him till he has nearly consented to all we wish. Why, what is the matter, Clara?" she added, as Clara silently and slowly began putting by her writing; 'you do not seem to like to come.'

"Oh, yes," said Clara, 'I like it greatly; it is only Alan, who has been croaking, and putting me out of spirits.'

"Alan croaking!" interrupted Douglas; 'is that any great wonder? He treated me to it all the time in the railway yesterday, for how many mortal hours.'

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Alan, rising, and bowing, 'I beg to inform you that this gentleman being wholly absorbed in — in lover-like dreams—I beg your pardon, Mildred,—from the time he joined me at the Dido station till we arrived at the Ashton terminus, chose to think the rational discourse in which I endeavored to engage him very *ennuyant*,—he being in that—'

"Hush!" said Mildred; 'we have no time to listen to all your long speeches. Clara, what are you looking for? here is your bonnet,—for Clara was wandering, laughing, round the room like an unquiet spirit, in search of her walking things;—how can you let this great tom-cat sleep on your bonnet?' and she displaced Miss Puss, who, with a long yawn enough to break her jaws, put up her back, and stretched herself across the table, appealed against such disturbance by a small 'Miau!' however, instantly taking refuge in Clara's workbasket, she most comfortably rolled herself round again, and was asleep in a moment. "See, how she has spoiled it!" said Mildred, who was busily repairing the damage.

"Has Dido been taking a music lesson?" at the same instant put in Douglas, pointing to the use which had toppled down on the floor during Alan's escape from the drawing.

"And has old Mrs. Wallis been installed here again?" asked Allan, in a comic tone, pointing to his turn to the pile of half cut-out work that lay in the other corner.

"Disorder reigns supreme here," answered Clara gently, who meanwhile was equipped; 'this is her den, where she and I revel together. As you do not like it, you must not come here; and away she tripped, leading the way by singing before them Mozart's famous old air, 'Andrassi, andrassi, mio bene.'

Mr. Leslie was standing at the church-door talking to Mrs. Selwyn when they came up; and a very gentlemanly looking man, who was introduced as Mr. Wingfield, made a third in the group. They were all looking intently towards the chancel, and the first words that Clara heard as she approached served to confirm sundry speculations she had been making ever since she had caught the first sight of him. He was tall and thin; a very nicely-fitting single-breasted frock coat, buttoned almost up to the throat, was surmounted by a standing collar, and a white neckcloth, above which not an atom of shirt-collar was allowed to peep. He was slightly bald,—it looked suspiciously like a tonsure,—his eyes were rather sunken, his forehead high and

intellectual, and there was an expression of mild melancholy in his features, which was almost belied by the piercing glances which sometimes came from his dark eyes, and were as quickly restrained.

"I think," said he, in that soft voice and insinuating manner which is quite an index of a certain party in England, 'you will find that the Bishop of London has almost authorized that species of reading-desk in his diocese.'

"Alan," said Clara, in a low tone, pressing the arm she held, 'look, there is a stranger! Do you see his coat? I am sure he is an Oxford man.'

Alan laughed. He looked over his shoulder at Douglas and Mildred, saying,

"Clara smells out an Oxford man at a hundred yards' distance by the cut of his coat.—Don't you think she had better graduate there at once instead of me, and I will stay and make the puddings meanwhile?'

All laughed, and Clara blushed; but there was no time for any more talk, for Mr. Wingfield, with true Oxonian reserve, was standing aside perfectly grave and motionless, and on being introduced made such a true Oxford bow to his new acquaintance, that Clara could not resist inflicting a meaning pinch on the arm she still held; and it nearly upset Alan's gravity, and brought a smile even to Mildred's face as she witnessed the manoeuvre.

"We have interrupted your conversation, sir," said Alan, with that the entire deference he always paid to his father.

"We were only speaking about the new reading-desk," said Mr. Leslie; 'and,' added he, smiling, 'Mr. Wingfield uses such reasonable arguments in favor of our scheme, Clara, of its having two desks,—one half facing the altar, and the other the people, for the Lessons,—that I am inclined to ask him to be so kind as to step in and order it as he passes by the shop at Ashton.'

Clara looked unutterable things, first at her father, then more shyly at Mr. Wingfield. Then she turned to Alan; but he, much to her surprise, did not seem as contented as she expected.

St. Wilfred's had once been a small Gothic structure of no common beauty. It consisted of a long nave, with a very deep chancel ornamented by one large beautifully-moulded window, in which there still remained some few stray panes of richly-tinted stained glass, as if to show what once in Catholic times had been its ancient beauty. A delicately-carved stone screen ran across the entrance of the chancel, so light in its elegant proportions and in the graceful curve of the archway that adorned the middle, that it was a model of architecture; but, alas, the cross that once crowned the whole was broken away, the angel-forms, with their expanded wings, had been decapitated by fanatic fury, and it only remained a wreck of the beautiful thing it once had been. There were some few huge pews encumbering even the thus guarded chancel; but the most unsightly extravagance was a long deal gallery, that trailed its ugly length half-way up the nave, and blocked up the corresponding beauty of the west window. The altar was a table covered with a now shabby blue cloth, and some rickety rails guarded the deserted and desecrated sanctuary. Outside the chancel a rostrum, containing reading-desk, clerk's desk, and pulpit, towered, in due Protestant magnificence, above the large pews which lined the church.

Mr. Wingfield's melancholy countenance grew more melancholy still as he surveyed all this.—Alan stood up in one corner near the door in deep meditation, with his arms folded on his breast; and Mildred, who apparently knew more of the stranger than any one present, stood by his side, while Mr. Leslie informed him of some things which had been already decided on.

"I do not think I shall find any opposition in taking down all these pews," said Mr. Leslie— 'at least, those in the chancel; and we have ordered some new rails from London.'

"I have seen some churches without rails at all," remarked Mr. Wingfield; 'might it not be an unnecessary expense, as you are limited for funds?'

"I don't think it is usual," replied Mr. Leslie; 'I am afraid it would be remarkable.'

"Do you not think rails pretty?" said Clara timidly.

Mr. Wingfield smiled, and cast a kind glance upon her, but said nothing. It was a very sweet smile, and Clara watched for another.

"How do you like that gallery, sir?" said Douglas, approaching.

Another smile, and a very gentle,

"I think that must come down; do not you, Mr. Leslie?" he added, turning appealingly to him, almost as if he had given his opinion too strongly in the presence of his elders.

"I do not know," said Mr. Leslie; 'we have no money to build another better gallery, and I do not know how the organ is to stand without one.'

"You might place it in the corner, on one side of the door," suggested Mr. Wingfield.