

Family Department.

BE STEADFAST.

○ Christian! hold thou on thy steadfast way,
Still looking upward for the perfect day;
So may'st thou win to cheer earth's "little while,"
The Saviour's smile!

Jesus, Thy sun the cold, dead heart shall warm,
And quicken into life the nerveless form;
Till in His matchless image Thou shalt shine
With light divine!

M. H. S.

CLAIRE.

A TALE.

(Written for the Church Guardian).

By T. M. B.

(Continued.)

"Felix," said Marthe, "we must not leave her—we cannot leave her." "Ah, Marthe," said Claire, "don't make our parting harder. Your place is with your father, as my place is with mine." "You would be right, Mademoiselle," said Felix, "were it not that our father has severed the ties which bound his children to him. He has placed himself on the side of violence and wrong; we cannot cast in our lot with him, without stifling our conscience and every higher feeling of our nature. God knows," he continued, "that I suffer in thus leaving him to his own choice, but I know him too well not to feel certain that we weigh as nothing in the balance with his purposes. It may be, when he finds he has driven us from him, that he will awaken to his miserable mistake. I have been planning since I escaped from Paris how it would be possible for you and Marthe to leave France until this tyranny of evil is overpast. Of Monsieur le Comte I could learn nothing, but, since he has escaped those bloodhounds so far, it might be well for him and you, Mademoiselle, to travel in our company. Marthe and I are children of the people, and should not be suspected of being aristocrats." Felix spoke calmly and simply and with a quiet decision which gave a feeling of comfort and support to the agitated girls, though Marthe sobbed bitterly at his mention of their father.

"My poor Ursule," said Claire, "how will she bear being parted from me!" At that moment Ursule herself entered and started back in momentary terror at the sight of Felix, but he quickly reassured her. "It is your old friend Ursule come to bring what help he can." "God be thanked," said the old woman, as she clasped his hand between her withered palms. "Felix He has sent you to save my child; there is no sign of Bartel," she continued, looking with eager anxiety at Claire. "Children I felt from the first that we could not trust him. When he comes he will not come alone; even if he intended to be honest, by this time they have made him mad like themselves. Jacques came back just now with frightful tales from the village. *Mes enfants* do not wait! fly, while it is yet time." "And how am I to leave you, my foster-mother," cried Claire, as she flung her arms about Ursule's neck, "what will you do without me? ah, why can you not come with me?" "Hush, ma mignonne," said the old woman, in whose great love the consciousness of self-sacrifice was lost, "I can pray for you day and night, and *le bon Dieu* will listen to my prayers. I shall hear that you are safe, and, it may be, I shall be able to follow you, and if not, I shall be with thy mother waiting for thee." For a moment, in speechless tenderness, she clasped the beautiful woman in her arms, who had lain there as an orphaned babe, and then once more urged them to prepare for their immediate departure. While Claire, with Marthe's help, was disguising herself, as far as possible, in the ordinary dress of the peasant women, Ursule set before Felix a flask of the *vin du pays* and some food. "You look as if you had eaten nothing to-day," she said, "you will need strength for what is before you."

And in truth Felix needed refreshment and felt himself invigorated by his hasty meal. A little

while and the girls returned, Claire's slender shape disfigured by the dark-blue petticoat and short jacket of course woolen home-spun, and her fair hair hidden under a close fitting little cap of some dark material. A cotton kerchief knotted round her neck, and a pair of coarse shoes completed her costume, which that of Marthe nearly resembled. Each carried a basket with some few necessaries, while a wallet, which had been prepared for the recusant, Bartel, was strapped on Felix' shoulder. "And now, lose no more time my children," said Ursule—"Le Bon Dieu will be with you. Has He not sent Felix in our hour of need?" she went on confidently; and would he have sent him for nothing? Come," as Claire still lingered, looking wistfully at her, "I will go with you a little way, as far as the first pines;" and, taking the hand of her foster child, she led the way out of the Chateau du Plessis. Claire cast one swift glance about her as for the last time, she went out from the home of her childhood, the scene of all the associations of her youth, the spot hallowed by sweet, vague memories of the mother whose spirit had ever seemed to hover about her child; the home of that long line of ancestors, whose accumulated sins of pride and arrogance were being visited upon the young and innocent head of their decendant.

Out for the last time through the narrow postern, into the still brightness of the night. What intense stillness; and yet no, was there not a faint, far-off sound, the mere shadow of a sound as it were, as of shouting and tumult? They stood still for a moment and listened; yes, there again. "Did I not tell you," said Ursule, as they looked at one another, "that when Bartel returned he would not come alone? Come *pour l'amour de Dieu!*" It was enough; there was no cause to enquire whence came that far-off sound; the others in imagination, but Felix from actual experience, knew what it meant. There was no more delay, and in a few moments they had reached the outer belt of pines, standing like the vanguard of the great army of ancient, stately trees, which stretched down the northern slope of the hill and for some leagues across the country. And here Ursule parted from them. Claire would even then have implored her to go with them, not to return alone to face the dangers from which she herself was flying, but Ursule silenced her with a swift but tender farewell. "There is no danger for me, *ma mignonne*, and my old feet are too weary to carry me far." Then with a gesture of benediction she turned from them, looking back a moment after to see that they had disappeared.

About a league from du Plessis, where the high-road to Paris was intersected by that which led through the belt of pine-forest, there stood, a little to the right of the crossing, a very ancient and curious little structure which combined the shrine of some saint, with a stone canopy over a small, deep well of water. This was the "*font concert*" or covered fountain of which Claire had spoken to Felix as the place of meeting with her father, and here, about the hour of midnight, Count Claude du Plessis paced, nervously and impatiently, to and fro. None could have recognized, at a casual survey, in the coarsely dressed, somewhat misshapen peasant, whose white hair was conspicuous under the broad-brimmed hat, the slender, aristocratic form of the still youthful looking noble. The disguise was excellent, but, at this moment, when there were no witnesses, its wearer could afford for a while to resume, at least, the manner which was natural to him and which alone would have speedily betrayed him. Muttering anathemas upon the *canaille* of peasants and plebeians, he clenched his slender hand and shook it towards du Plessis, as though he would, then and there, have called down the Divine wrath upon his faithless vassals. Impotent fury! he and his like must reap the bitter harvest so recklessly sown, so long in ripening. "The rascal should have been here ere this," muttered the Count to himself, "will he too betray me? I was loath enough to trust him, yet to leave the girl there would have been inhuman, not to say the height of folly, for my only hope for the future rests in her. But for her would Saumar ever have offered me a home at his country seat in England? which, dull, miserable exile though it be, is still better than begging ones bread or teaching French

perhaps for a living, pah! the guillotine itself would be better than that!"

Were they never coming! Must he lose the precious hours of night, which were to have taken him so much further from Paris and its more pressing dangers! He had almost resolved upon waiting no longer; straining his eyes in the direction of du Plessis, along the high road, he had not been aware of the approach of the three figures which were issuing from the pine-forest until they had almost reached the "covered fountain" in the black shadow cast by which, he himself had been invisible. Then the muffled sound of footsteps on the turf made him start and turn swiftly, thrusting as he did so his hand into his bosom, and grasping the weapon which was secreted there. The next moment Claire's low tones fell upon his ear. "My father, are you waiting for me? It is I, Claire."

(To be continued.)

THOUGHTS FOR FOURTH SUNDAY
AFTER TRINITY.

IV.

"Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

How shall we dare to claim His mercy, "though He be kind to the unthankful and to the evil," if we show no mercy to our fellow-sinners. "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven." The blood of Christ has purchased our redemption—forgiveness of sins and eternal life—all this is ours, but not unconditionally. "Shouldst not thou have had compassion on thy fellow-servant even as I had pity on Thee?" Let our prayer then be not only for God's mercy, but for the merciful heart which will go out to our fellow-sinners with Christ-like tenderness.

We must be like our Master, we must be transformed into His likeness even here, so far as human frailty can follow Divine perfection, if in the Great Hereafter we would be with Him and *one* with Him forever.

O, hard thoughts, hard words, bitter feelings, loveless actions! how is it that we can dare to let them have full sway, when the love of Christ should constrain us to root them from our hearts! "Be ye therefore merciful," He says, "as your Father also is merciful." Did He not so love the evil and unthankful world that He gave His only begotten Son to be the Sacrifice for all its sin? May we not say to Him Abba, Father?

There is not an hour in our lives in which we cannot show the merciful spirit which Christ demands. To check the hasty word ever ready to our lips, to stifle the evil thought of our neighbour so prone to put the worse construction on his actions, to discourage and put down the little malicious hints and gossips that are whispered round us; this is to be merciful. To seek for opportunities of kindness, (instead of letting them slip past us, leaving an uneasy sense of loss to our own better self) kindness to those who can show us little in return; the weary and heavy-laden whose lot is toil, the suffering, the sorrowful, nay the sinful, recognizing in all the brotherhood to ourselves and the preciousness of all in the sight of Him whose blessed life was spent in doing good; this is to be merciful. As He lifted up His eyes and looked on those who called themselves His disciples thronging about Him, as though living upon the words which fell from His lips, He foresaw that time when they should all forsake Him; the multitudes that pressed to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases, would one day shout: "Crucify Him!" Does not our heart burn within us as we hear Him say to them! "Be ye therefore merciful, even as your Father also is merciful." But the words are spoken to us also, and we, not less than they, are faithless to Him if we hear His words and do them not. Our ingratitude is no whit less than theirs, if we by our lives practically deny Him. He lived and died for us as well as for them.

"Be ye therefore merciful."

We are hanging up pictures every day about the chamber walls of our hearts that we shall have to look at when we sit in the shadows.