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CLARA LESLIE.

A TALE OF OUR OWN TIMES.

CHAPTER XXX.—Continued.

"I want nothing, mamma cara," was Clara's sweet answer to Catherine's fond inquiries, after some hours in which she had seemed to sleep, so perfectly still and motionless did she lie in the possession of the Beloved of her soul. "I have everything, for I have my God! You said well last Christmas-eve, that that day year only I should know what a Catholic's rest was, and my joy would be full. A few days more of suffering and longing,—a few days more of Sacraments and holy rites,—and then all will be over, and I shall see Him as He is."

Father Stanislaus was standing by at the moment, and said gently, "You have, then, lost your fear of Purgatory, my dear child?"

She turned towards him her soft, dark eyes with an expression of inquiry. "My Father, there is no sin there. Do you think I ought to fear it?"

"I did not say so, my dear child," he replied; "it may be that God, in His mercy, has not decreed those purifying fires for you. Pray that this bed of death may be your Purgatory."

A few days passed away; Advent glided slowly on, and as the year before she had spent it in anticipation of his first sacramental coming to take possession of her heart, so now it was passed in preparing for His midnight call the last summons: "Behold the Bridegroom cometh: go ye forth to meet Him." And how earnestly and faithfully she trimmed her lamp, by removing every, even the smallest, imperfection, that might unfit her for His embrace, everything that could render less beautiful in His divine Eyes, those who watched around her could testify. Even Father Stanislaus wondered, and sometimes would say to Catherine that a being so pure could not need the fire of Purgatory, as she had never willfully soiled her white robe of baptism. Christmas-eve came, and as Father Stanislaus had promised that the next day should not pass without her communicating, he received her last confession, though no one but herself believed that the moment of departure was so very near at hand.

The bells rang out for the commencement of the midnight Mass, and mingling with them was heard the tinkling bell that announced the passing of the Viaticum in procession along the Riviera di Chiaja.

The chamber of death was lit up; wax-candles burned on the table covered with white, where the Lord of Hosts was to be placed; the usual crowd of pious souls, with lanterns and torches were kneeling at the door, and their blended voices were borne sweetly on the still air to the ear even of the dying sufferer. She was supported by pillows, apparently unconscious, the signet of death plainly marked on her features; Catherine, too, was there, but placed so as to be concealed from her view, for at that moment she would not hazard, for a selfish gratification, distracting one of her thoughts from where they were all to be concentrated. All was over: Extreme Unction administered; the Plenary Indulgence bestowed; nothing remained but that the Lord Whom she loved should come and remain with her during the little while that she still had to linger on earth. The agony-bell was tolling at the Franciscan Church, and one of their number, in his dark-trize habit, now stood by her bedside to see the look with which she welcomed his approach with her Lord in his hands. The tinkling of the bell seemed to have roused her: her eyes had slowly opened and turned with an intensity of gaze towards the open door; the pale lips, which had been drawn up the moment before with suffering, parted with a smile of the most radiant delight; the sunken eyes seemed to dilate, and resume a brilliancy that far surpassed anything they had ever worn in her days of health; and the thin transparent hands were feebly raised for a moment, as if to welcome more eagerly the Lord of her heart, while she faintly murmured, "My Lord! my Love!" Father Stanislaus's attentive ear had caught this last whisper, and the solemn tenderness and awe of the Franciscan's manner told that he, too, had perceived that this was no common death-bed. Catherine's hands laid her back on the pillows, but the look of rapture was still there. She seemed with her bodily eyes to be already entranced in the sight of Him, and thus softly and gently the spirit passed away. An awe seemed to have fallen on every one in the room, and, as if by one impulse kneeling silently around the bed they watched the happy spirit taking its flight, borne as it were, in the very bosom of Him Whom she had just received. Slower and slower came the gentle breathing, and then, imperceptibly and without a sigh, the pure spirit left its beautiful teament, more beautiful in that moment than it had ever been in life, and passed into the presence of God.

CHAPTER XXXI.—THE CONCLUSION.

"Wilfred, by thy sweet name Our little ones will call;

Oh, then, on them and us Let thy rich blessing fall!

Thou lead'st no idle hour; Thy gains with toil were bought; St. Wilfred, make us love Our country as we ought.

For England's sake make us Humble and gay and pure; For so the heart works best, And makes the blessing sure."

Father Faber.

For some minutes there was not a breath in that still chamber. Even the distant sound of the chanted litanies had ceased; for the crowd below were beginning to wonder at the delay in bringing down the Blessed Sacrament. At last the Franciscan monk seemed to recover himself and casting one glance at the still form, almost involuntarily intoned the *Te Deum*. The tears were making their way down Father Stanislaus's cheeks: but his voice was distinctly heard, as with one consent all the assistants arose and responded to that glorious strain of thanksgiving; and the procession moved off. Catherine neither spoke nor stirred; she remained on her knees watching the almost superhuman expression of rapture slowly fading from the eyes of the lifeless corpse, though the smile in which the spirit had taken its flight remained there to the last unchanged; and it was only when Father Stanislaus placed his hand on the eyelids, and closed for ever those sweet eyes, which for the last two years had been, next to God, the light and joy of her heart, saying, in a voice faltering with emotion, "Subvenite Sancti Dei; occurrite Angeli Domini, suscipientes animam ejus, offerentes eam in conspectu Altissimi," that she became conscious where she was. It was, then, true; all was over; but she had strength to respond: "Suscipiat te Christus qui vocavit te, et in sinu Abrahamæ Angeli educant te; suscipientes animam ejus, offerentes eam in conspectu Altissimi."

The midnight Mass was not yet over; but at the Oratory in King William Street it had not begun. It was natural for Father Aidan to think much of Clara on that night,—the anniversary of their meeting and her reception in Christ's Holy Catholic Church; it was natural that one of his three Masses should be offered for her; but he could not account for the sudden check that seemed given him as he thought of her in the memento of the living, and the equally strange impulse that made him insert her name in the memento of the dead after the elevation, against his will, as it were. He could not account for the kind of awe that seemed to come over him as the midnight Mass commenced; and a feeling as if she herself were there in spirit by his side. Again and again he tried to shake it off: in vain. In deep thought he sought the short repose of that night of joy, scarcely thinking to sleep; but, contrary to expectations, no sooner was his head laid on the pillow than a sweet slumber stole over him; and then it seemed as if the veil before the unseen world was withdrawn, and a light form stood by his bedside. It was clothed in white; a gentle light played round the features, and the smile was one of intense love, mingled with one shade of sadness, as she stood and gazed on his sleeping form. And then it seemed in his dream as if he put out his arms towards it; and it shook its head gently, and said, "No, Alan; I loved you too well on earth, and for this I am now deprived for a time of the open vision of God. See how my soul longs for His presence." And she threw open the folds of her white vest, to show her heart like a living coal beneath, and softly murmuring, in accents of the most gentle entreaty, "Pray for me, Alan; pray, pray, pray." As the last accents died away, the light spirit-form faded and faded till it was gone, and with a start Father Aidan awoke; but the sweet entreaty voice was lingering in his ear, "Pray for me, Alan; pray, pray, pray." Fully convinced in his own mind of the reality of her death, the next day he sought the Passionist's Convent, and begged the aid of his friend's prayers. Father Raymond listened and spoke not. He did not seem surprised, he merely promised what was asked him; and Father Aidan asked no more. Three days passed thus; the same sense of her presence near him continued on Father Aidan's mind. Of course every prayer and mortification was offered for this intention; and then, as his mind glanced to what he knew was the one longing of her life, and he pondered over the sacrifice she had offered to God for the conversion of those nearest and dearest to her, he felt convinced that now that hour was approaching, and her prayers were to be answered. The third night came, and again the young Oratorian sought his couch, tired with the labors of the day; and again the light form of his loved sister stood by the bedside. Streams of light played around the beautiful tresses, and seemed flowing from every wave of her snow-white robe, while every shade of sadness had disappeared from the smiling loveliness of the cherub face, that beamed in all its angelic beauty and love upon him. "Alan," she

said,—and her voice seemed like the warble of some bird from Paradise, the ringing of an angel's lyre, while she fixed upon him a look of love and joy unutterable—"I go to intercede for you. Farewell."

And as she spoke she gradually rose from the ground, while the heart of the young priest seemed bursting in its intense desire to detain the sweet vision, or follow it to where it was now taking its flight. "A little while, a little while," seemed whispered, as he flung out his arms to catch the departing form; "there is yet work for you; and the radiant spirit faded from his view amid a burst of music that seemed such as thrilled the soul of the shepherds who were guarding their flocks that dreary winter's night eighteen hundred years before on the plains of Bethlehem.—He awoke with intense emotion,—that rich strain ringing in his ears, and the word 'England' engraving on his heart. He threw himself on his knees, and amid the tears that flowed abundantly came the thrilling conviction that his own loved Clara was admitted to the Vision of Beauty, the open and unclouded sight of God; and amid the joy of that thought came the certainty that he and those who were now, as it were, left as his peculiar portion of work in God's vineyard, had another intercessor before the Throne of God, whither they were now to seek to rejoice in.

The short day had closed in; Vespers were over, and Father Aidan again sought his room. Some one was waiting for him, but in the twilight he could not distinguish the figure. "Bernard," said he, in his sweet voice, thinking it was one of the novices, "is that you?" The figure did not answer, but merely turned round and silently approached. Father Aidan stood still in doubt, for he soon could see it was not the dress of the Oratory, but a large cloak that shaded the wearer's form, and the silence the person maintained half alarmed him. He came nearer and nearer, and at last stood close before him.

"Alan!" said he at last, in a voice scarcely audible from agitation.

"Douglas! is it possible?" exclaimed the young priest, and in an instant, wrongs, estrangement, years of separation, were forgotten in one long, long embrace.

"The death of her two darlings so suddenly and near together had injured Mildred in the situation she was then in," said Douglas, "and for forty-eight hours her life has been in the greatest danger. A few hours ago, however, after this long agony, to the utter astonishment of every one, the child was born alive, and since then both she and it are going on well."

"Thank God," fervently exclaimed Father Aidan. "O Douglas, how mercifully He has heard your prayers! And now, my own brother will you still resist His call? What will you render to Him for all that He has given to you?"

"No, Alan; I am conquered,—quite conquered. I only wish now to know what God wills me to do. Take my child; admit it into the Catholic Church your Christian forbearance has taught me to love; and then in retreat I too will seek to know and follow the Voice of God."

"Thank God, Douglas, thank God," was all the young priest could answer, as again he clasped his brother to his bosom, and in that pressure and the tears of joy that flowed felt the prayers and vows of years repaid and answered a hundredfold.

"And Clara—poor Clara!" said Douglas, after a moment's pause, "this is another debt I have to pay. Where is she?"

"In Paradise," replied Father Aidan, "rejoicing over the fulfilment of the prayer for which she gave her life."

"Alan, what do you mean?" exclaimed Douglas; "she is not dead?"

Father Aidan seemed to recollect himself, but answered almost instantly again, "Yes, Douglas, she died on Christmas-eve, at Naples, and last night her happy soul passed into the open vision of God."

"You rave, Alan," replied Douglas; "you cannot have heard from Naples since Christmas-eve?"

"And yet what I say is true, Douglas," he said gently; "for three days has her spirit been lingering round me; last night only the gates of Heaven were unlocked to receive her. A few days must bring us the news by human means, and then you will see that what I say is true."

Douglas remained silent, in deep thought. "You will say nothing of this till our letters come, of course," said Father Aidan.

"Of course," replied Douglas; "but, Alan, if this is true, you have used a powerful argument to draw me towards the Church of Rome."

"I meant it as such, dearest Douglas," returned Father Aidan, with deep emotion; "and did you but know how every action of that poor spirit, that is now interceding for us before the Throne of God, was directed towards the one aim of her life,—your and Mildred's conversion,—you would

know what feelings are mine, when I see how quickly her admittance into Paradise has been followed by your coming to seek me of yourself here, and Mildred's life being thus marvellously spared, to pave the way for the return of you both to the Fold of Christ. O pure spirit!" exclaimed the young Father, joining his hands on his breast, and looking up with an expression of joy and hope unutterable, "now rejoicing in the presence of God, leave us not while we still linger on in this valley of tears; remember thine own ardent love while still on earth for thy native land, thy family, and friends; look down upon our desolation, and pray for England."

A few weeks after the Church of the Oratory Fathers presented one of those touching spectacles which nowadays, thanks to the unspeakable mercy of God, are not uncommon in England.—It was the feast of the Purification, and a triple baptism was to take place. A few people had assembled before Mass to view the admittance of the couple who first approached together to receive the regenerating waters conditionally from the hand of the young priest who administered it, and then he took from the arms of the trembling mother the sleeping babe, who was thus unconsciously to partake of the joy of those who gave it birth. Tears stood in the eyes of nearly all the bystanders; and the voice of the young priest even trembled with emotion as he pronounced the mystic words.

"Wilfred, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

The little one uttered a feeble cry; for an instant opened its dark eyes upon him, and then peacefully sunk back into its repose, its infant brow assuming a beautiful placidity, that the eye of faith interpreted as the sign of its adoption and reconciliation as the child of God. There were few there to whose mind the event that the Church on that day commemorate did not come, as the young mother, dressed in white robes that shaded her still pale and lovely features, followed by her husband went into the sacristy to sign the renunciation that a little more than a year before Clara had there also signed. Catherine Temple was again there, and Mr. Morris, and Mr. and Mrs. Wingfield stood beside them; and there was another figure in the dress of the Oratory, who kept close to Father Aidan's side. But they all looked sad amid their smiles; there yet seemed something wanting. Every one's thoughts were evidently fixed on one object, the brightest and fairest of that little band: the one who had won all their hearts was not among them; and their joy was not full—it could not be.

"How Clara would have rejoiced to-day!" said Mr. Wingfield.

"She does rejoice," said Father Aidan; "she is amongst us, though we see her not. Our joy is not full, but we mourn not as those that have no hope, for we know that hers is what ours cannot yet be. She is enjoying the sight of that God whom her soul so longed after on earth.—A little while of patient endurance,—a little while of toil and suffering, weary toil and patient suffering for our Lord's and England's sake,—and then, when our task will be accomplished, and we shall meet again beneath the Throne of God. O joy of joys!" exclaimed the young Oratorian, again clasping his hands on his breast, and raising his eyes to Heaven, while tears fell from the eyes of every one of that little group and each felt that even his blood could willingly be shed for that faith and that home he spoke of, and their very hearts "burned within them," and beat high with exulting hope, "to see Him as He is!"—Oh who would not barter this world's little loss for Thee? Who would not sacrifice this world's vain applause and love to fight beneath Thy banner of reproach and shame? O faith of our fathers, new-found treasure! too long have we wandered in error's darkness; too long have we sought thee, the light of our weary feet; too long has our country wept thy faded glory; too long has she cast dishonor on Mary's name:

"Faith of our fathers, holy faith, We will be true to thee till death."

THE END.

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY.

The following letter from the Rector respecting the annual collection for the Catholic University, on next Sunday, has just been issued:—

Catholic University, Dublin, Nov. 5th.

Reverend Dear Sir,—In obedience to the commands of the bishops of Ireland, contained in the following resolutions, I beg respectfully to remind you that Sunday, the 18th inst., is the day fixed by their lordships for the Catholic University collection:—

We unanimously agree to fix the third Sunday of November as the day on which the Catholic University collection shall be annually held in every parish of every diocese of Ireland.

We also declare our willingness to permit the Rector, or other duly appointed authorities, to

communicate with the clergy of our dioceses, with the view to the proper organisation of the collection.

The friends of Catholic education may, I think, congratulate themselves on the progress made during the past year by our University, and by the principle it represents. These principles seem to have obtained more than ever possession of the public mind. Men of all classes and shades of opinion begin to admit the justice of our claim—viz, that Catholics should be allowed without let or hindrance, to educate their children according to the principles which the Catholic Church approves; that in a country such as this, no one educational system should be propped up by legal and social privileges to the injury of another more agreeable to the masses of our Catholic people. Let us hope that these principles will develop daily more and more till all our just demands are granted. Within the last two years several leading members of the House of Commons have admitted that the restrictions imposed on this University are manifestly unjust.—The late administration, urged by the eloquent appeal of one of the most distinguished of our Catholic representatives, declared, "that it would not be right . . . to continue that which really amounts to the imposition of civil disabilities for religious opinion." And a leading member of the political party which now holds the reins of Government expressed himself still more clearly on the subject. The chief organ of public opinion in England made the same admission. It said:—

The Roman Catholics have endeavored to supplement the system established by Government by one of their own. The Catholic University has been the creation of that obstinate priesthood which has declared unceasing war against the Queen's Colleges. The Catholics declare they have a right to educate the youth of their communion by means of teachers of their own faith, and that this right they are determined to uphold. They point to the reiterated declarations of English statesmen, that the denominational, as opposed to the secular, principle, has received the definite sanction of the country; that the age at which young men go to college is one which especially requires theological guidance; and they argue that it is impossible, with any regard to justice, to refuse them a Charter for a University in which the students belonging to their Church shall be instructed by teachers who profess its tenets. . . . By means of those facts and this reasoning the Catholics undoubtedly made out a very plausible case. They show that, though they are the most numerous religious body in Ireland, there is no public and recognised institution to which they can send their sons to be educated in their own faith, and that their University is at present a mere private school, which can give none of these titular rewards for learning which are valued both for the social standing they confer and for the professional privileges which in many cases attend them.—*Times* of 21st June, 1865.

In order to give effect to those declarations, and to redress the grievances complained of, negotiations were opened between the late Government and the bishops of Ireland. Unfortunately, the demands of our bishops were not granted; but in the course of last summer a Supplemental Charter was given to the Queen's University in Ireland, enabling that body to grant degrees to students other than those of the Queen's Colleges, to whom the privilege of graduating in the Queen's University had previously been limited. It would be premature for me to say what will be the effect of this Supplemental Charter, more especially since the public has not yet been made aware of the manner in which its provisions are to be worked out. It is expected that, under it, students of the Catholic University will be able to obtain degrees recognised by law—that the unfair monopoly hitherto enjoyed by the Protestant University and the mixed colleges will be abolished; and that thus one of our chief causes of complaint will be removed. On the other hand, it is certain that it will not place Catholics in a position of equality with their fellow-subjects as to University education. While the vast endowments of the Protestant University remain untouched, and while the mixed colleges are supported out of the public funds, Catholics are obliged to tax themselves for the maintenance of our Catholic University. And the object of my present appeal is, precisely, to ask you, reverend dear Sir, and your people who have hitherto contributed so munificently to Catholic education, to assist the holy work once more this year by your contributions.

The University itself has advanced bravely but steadily. Its library has lately been increased by the valuable collections, bequeathed by the Very Rev. Dean Cussen, of the Museum, and the late lamented Primate; and the Zoological Museum, to which our Holy Father the Pope has sent several valuable specimens, for teaching purposes, second to none in Dublin. The board of King Charles Hospital in this city