

STILL AND DEEP.

BY F. M. F. SKENE, AUTHOR OF "TRIED,"

"ONE LIFE ONLY," ETC.

CHAPTER XLII.

Meanwhile in Madame Brunot's house the anxious hours were slowly passing, and the poor invalid, worn out by the suspense, had fallen asleep at last, leaving Mrs. Parry free to quit her bed-side and come into the room where Mary Trevelyan still sat at the window. She was looking out at the calm clear sky, which now was bathed in all the glory of a beautiful sunset, and she was thinking of John Pemberton's wistful gaze towards it when he told her how his spirit longed for the presence of his Lord.

"He will always be happy," thought Mary, "whether he lives or dies, for his heart is already in heaven," and then her thoughts turned, as they ever did, to her poor Bertrand, and to mournful speculations as to where, even at that moment, he might be.

Mrs. Parry, meanwhile, was walking restlessly about the room, feeling more and more anxious as to the fate of the missing child.

There had been a succession of sharp quick shots heard not very far from the house a short time before; but cannonading and firing of all kinds were so continually going on around them, that it had scarcely attracted their attention at all. Suddenly, however, the door opened, and Valerie burst in, bareheaded, with her long hair tangled in confusion on her shoulders, her dress stained and torn, and her face convulsed with passionate weeping.

"Oh Mary! oh nurse Parry!" she exclaimed; "my Mr. Pemberton! my poor Mr. Pemberton! What shall I do? oh! what shall I do?" and, sobbing, almost shrieking, she rushed to Mary, who had risen, trembling, and hid her face against her, while she clung to her hands.

"What is it, Valerie? dear child, try and tell us!" said Mary. "Where is Mr. Pemberton?"

"Lying on the pavement, Oh, he cannot speak to me; they shot at him, and he fell! They were trying to kill me, and he came between me and the guns! he did it to save me! Oh my Mr. Pemberton! I want him to get up and speak to me!"

Mrs. Parry uttered a cry of dismay, but Mary, white and calm laid her hand upon her arm.

"Do you not hear Madame Brunot calling? she has been awakened and is alarmed; go and tell her Valerie is safe."

Mrs. Parry obeyed, and then Mary made the child drink some wine and water, and when her gasping sobs had a little subsided, she said to her, "Now, Valerie, try and describe to me exactly the spot where Mr. Pemberton is lying; I am going to him at once."

"I will go with you and show you; I want to go to him, my dear, dear Mr. Pemberton!"

"But will it be safe for you? who was it hurt Mr. Pemberton and tried to kill you?"

"The soldiers, because I helped Herr Klein; but they have gone away. Some people came out of their houses when the shots were fired, and they said the men had killed an Englishman, and the English ambassador would be angry, and then the soldiers all ran away and took no more notice of me; and I want to go to my poor Mr. Pemberton; I am not afraid."

"We will go there at once, dear child," said Mary, hastening to quit the room before Mrs. Parry, whom she had purposely sent away, should come back to exclaim against her going out in her weak state of

convalescence. She threw a scarf lightly over her head, took Valerie by the hand, and stole down the stairs and out into the street.

It was a soft lovely evening, calm and peaceful; the western horizon seemed flooded still with liquid gold, while already the shadows were deepening on the earth.

The excited child drew Mary on more quickly almost than her feeble feet could carry her, but they had not far to go.

It had been impossible for John Pemberton to bring Valerie home without passing the ruined house whence Herr Klein had escaped; and there, it seemed, the vindictive soldiers had actually kept watch to intercept the poor child, whom they chose to believe could reveal to them some Prussian plot of treachery. Possibly they might hardly have meant to compass her death, but, as she afterwards told Mary, the moment she came out of the ruined house half a dozen of them rushed out from behind its broken walls, where they had been in ambush, and pounced upon her with shouts of triumph, but instantly Pemberton's strong hands had torn her out of their grasp, and he confronted her foes. Then ensued a terrible struggle, of which Valerie was never able to give any distinct account. Mary was now about to learn what had been the fatal result. She saw, as they advanced, a group of persons standing in a circle on the pavement, a short distance from the ruins, among whom she recognized one of the English gentlemen associated with the Society for the Relief of the Sick and Wounded, and several officials from the police-station. They made way for her as she came near, and then she saw that on which they had been gazing. John Pemberton lay stretched out on the stones, his calm face upturned to the sunset sky, whose glory fell upon it with a soft pure light. His dark eyes were fixed upon the blue depths above his head with an intense full-orbed gaze, that seemed pregnant with meaning, and his pale lips were illuminated with a bright and joyful smile such as they had seldom worn in his days of life and energy; yet radiant and peaceful as was his countenance it bore the unmistakable stamp of that great change which gives a solemn grandeur even to the features of the child who has passed through the mystery of death. It was so few hours however since Mary had seen him full of animation and spirit that it seemed almost impossible for her to believe he had been finally severed from all the conditions of humanity. She stood watching him for a few minutes in silence, and then looked round appealingly to the Englishman.

"Is he really quite gone?" she whispered.

"Quite," he answered, sorrowfully; "he must have died instantaneously; he is shot through the heart. His little messenger Pierron, who was hovering near him, as usual, saw the deed done, and came at once to summon me. I hurried here as fast as a carriage could bring me; but I saw at once that no human aid could avail him. I can do no more now than arrange for his removal, and afterwards for his interment, which, in the present state of the city cannot be long delayed."

"Let him be brought to our home," said Mary—"to Madame Brunot's—till you are obliged to take him away; we have a right to ask it, for he was our truest friend."

And so it was arranged. In a room on the ground-floor of their house he lay that night and part of the next day, where Mary and Valerie went continually to kiss the kind hands that could labour for his

fellow-creatures no more, and to lay bunches of snowdrops and violets on his quiet breast, while the little children played round his bier, fearless of the gentle presence that was only associated in their mind with thoughts of love and tenderness.

At noon on the following day he was borne forth, and taken to a sunny corner of the vast realm of the dead at Pere la Chaise.

Mrs. Parry could not leave the invalid, who had been greatly shaken by the terrible events of the previous day; so Mary Trevelyan and Valerie alone stood side by side, and saw the earth heaped over the heart that had been so pure and true. When at last they turned away, leaving no trace of the noble, faithful friend, save one little additional mound among the thousands that are gathered there, little Valerie burst into a fit of uncontrolled weeping, while Mary walked, calm and silent, by her side. After a time the child looked up into the fair tranquil face, and said, half indignantly, "Are you not sorry to leave him all alone in that strange place, Mary?"

"Dear, I cannot grieve for him," she answered, gently; "for I knew that he has gained his heart's desire. Though we have laid his body down alone in a foreign country, his happy spirit is safe in his native land of paradise."

"But he will never speak to us again, or help us as he used to do."

"No, Valerie! and I well know what we have all lost in him. I cannot think how we are to go on without his protecting care. But would it not be very selfish to wish him back in this sad world, away from the blessed home where he has found his Lord, because on earth he can labour for us no more?"

"I will try not to fret, if it is selfish," said Valerie; "but I shall miss him, oh so much!"

And poor Mary, glad as she was for his sake that his longing wish was granted, could echo that lament with all her heart. Who, in truth, could miss his generous help as she would, who had depended on him alone for sympathy and succour in that which was the very life of her life?

Since the second disappearance of Bertrand Lisle, which had been followed by the total absence of any tidings of him, every one but Mary herself believed that he must have succumbed to the fever from which he was suffering, especially after his exposure to the cold of that winter's night; but she never faltered in her conviction that, had he died, she would have known it in the innermost depths of her spirit, by the powerful instinct of her own faithful love.

All the time that she lay helpless on her sick-bed she knew that John Pemberton had persistently sought for him, in obedience to her wishes, though without the least hope that any good could result from it; and now she was well aware that there was no one left but herself on earth who either could or would take up the quest.

Yes, she stood alone—alone, with her constancy to that one love; but her heart only grew the stronger on his behalf from the sense that all others had forsaken him; if he were alive at all, it was certain that he must be in Paris; and if in Paris in its present state, it was equally certain that he must be in pain and suffering; therefore, as she passed out from the gate of Pere la Chaise, and left her only helper in his quiet grave, she took the solemn resolution that she would devote all the strength and power which yet remained in her weakened frame to ascertain the fate of Bertrand Lisle, and bring him succour, if it could yet avail him.