

NARKA, THE NIHILIST.

By KATHLEEN O'NEARA. CHAPTER X.

Winter reigned at Yrakow in all its severity. The castle, with its mighty bastions and battlements sheeted in snow, went shelving down to the white forest; the fields on every side presented an interminable rolling white plain; the whole earth was buried deep in snow; and still it snowed and snowed. Narka would stand at the window and watch the flakes falling until the monotony of the motion almost sent her to sleep. The ghost-like stillness was overpowering; it seemed to wrap everything in a winding sheet. Not a sound made a break in it all day long. In the night-time the wolves came down into the village and howled; but except for that dismal concert the land might have been a graveyard, so profound was the hush. Any sound would have been a relief—the voice of a man, the cry of an animal, the creaking of a wagon; but these would have seemed as phenomenal as if the stars had begun to talk in the mid-night skies.

The death-like silence of external nature was made doubly oppressive to Narka by the moral silence which enveloped her like a shroud. Life was becalmed in a fog. She never heard from Basil. He had not sent her a sign since they had kissed and parted after that ride of hers to X. This cessation of all intercourse between them was inevitable, but at times it was unbearable. If she could have moved away anywhere, have changed place, it would have helped her, for the immobility of life adds fearfully to its weight and weariness. The spirit is wonderfully relieved sometimes by the flight of the body, and the old Egyptians expressed a common human need as well as a deep spiritual mystery in their emblem of the sistrum agitated on either side of the sitting god for a sign that motion was life and stagnation death. There was nothing to stir the waters round Narka, and her normal life seemed to be stagnating like a pool in the desert.

Tante Nathalie's rheumatism and peevish complaints did not enliven the monotony much. She, good soul, found excitement enough in her own troubles, past and present, in her knitting, and the few comings and goings of the morning. This daily routine, with the ever new interest of ordering the meals and lecturing the servants, was enough to keep her occupied; but Narka's hungry, ardent soul craved for something more, and the dull white days and the long black nights dragged on with intolerable weight. Sibil's letters were the solitary incident that broke the leaden monotony of her life. Sibil gave her news of Basil. They had agreed to speak of him as "M. Charles," a cousin of Gaston's. But even this disguise had to be carefully used, for of course the letters were opened. M. Charles could not send messages to Narka, whom he was supposed never to have seen. Sibil could only say that he was hoping to make her acquaintance, and inquiring when she was coming to France, etc. He was himself in Italy, studying painting; he hoped to come to Paris in the spring, unless his father insisted on his accompanying him to Scotland, alias Russia. These meagre details were to Narka like drops of water to a thirsty soul.

About her own life Sibil spoke freely. It was evidently a very pleasant one, full of gay activities, balls, concerts, dinners, and all the brilliant devices of modern society for making the days fly; there were also benevolent contrivances for helping the destitute, and very pleasant opportunities seemed to be, by Sibil's accounts. But what interested Narka most in these personal records was the place that she, though absent, filled in them. She seemed seldom long out of Sibil's thoughts, however busy or brilliant the chapter of her life might be. "Oh, my Narka, I miss you so terribly! I feel your absence more and more every day. There is nobody like you—nobody whose sympathy is like yours," etc., etc. Words like these recurred at every page, and they were as wine to Narka. It gave her confidence in herself to be reckoned thus amongst the best values of Sibil's life. Since Sibil, who had all the world to choose from—Sibil, whose taste was so refined, whose sympathies were so noble,

whose instinct was so true—since Sibil set such store upon her she could not be the poor worthless creature she sometimes fancied herself in moments of despair. Then she would remember that Basil loved her; that she was his affianced bride; that he too was reckoning the days until he could claim her for his own, and present her to Sibil and all the world as his wife. She could surely afford to wait, and to be patient under the present, when the future held such joy in store for her.

Marguerite wrote occasionally, brightly and affectionately. But toward the close of the winter Sibil began to speak of Marguerite with anxiety. The child's health was very delicate; there was no organic ailment, but she was drooping like a flower; they had had several excellent offers of marriage for her, but she had refused them all unhesitatingly, giving no reason except that she was not in a hurry to marry.

Narka read all this with growing apprehension. Could it be that Marguerite's feeling for Basil had been deep enough to make her shrink from the idea of ever marrying any one else? Narka had never contemplated such trouble as this. She had hoped, and had come honestly to believe, that it had been a mere passing flame, such as the first accomplished man she meets kindles easily in the heart of a very young girl. It would indeed be an added weight on Narka's spirit if bright little Marguerite was entering on life with a broken heart.

One day a letter came announcing that the doctors had ordered her to go south and travel for a couple of months.

"The remedy comes most opportunely," Sibil said. "M. Charles has been lingering on in Florence, intending to go to Rome for Lent. It will be delightful for us to join him there, and I am very much in need of a change myself. Marguerite had at first seemed charmed at the idea of going to Rome, but all of a sudden, when the programme was settled, she changed her mind, and has been nervous and depressed ever since. The doctors say this unreasonable state of feeling is only an additional proof that she wants change, and they assure us the journey will set her right. We are now in the bustle of packing, and I shall probably not write again until we are starting."

Narka could not pretend to herself that this letter was not a shock. She was not jealous; she did not for a moment doubt the strength of Basil's constancy; but it was hardly in woman's nature that she should not feel uncomfortable at the prospect of his being thrown for two months into daily and hourly companionship with a charming girl who was deeply in love with him, and whom he was already very fond of. Oh no, Narka was not jealous; but her heart rose in passionate rebellion against the cruel fate which put mountains and seas between her and Basil, and forced him into the society of Marguerite. And it was Sibil's doing! For the first time in her life Narka felt angry with Sibil. It was very well to talk about this lucky chance that had brought this meeting about; it was much more likely the result of Sibil's clever manœuvring. She had long ago set her heart on this marriage; fate, which was fighting against Narka with such overpowering odds, was playing into Sibil's hands, those pearly, poetical hands whose soft touch had such a compelling power, and had always made everybody and everything bend to their will. They were now bending Marguerite's destiny to it. Was it quite impossible that they should eventually bend Basil's?

Narka was as restless in the narrow cottage rooms as a strong, untamed creature in a cage. It was horrible to have to carry this gunshot wound in her flesh, and go about with a smiling countenance, discussing with Madame Larik the best way of preparing the codfish for dinner. The comedy of life was intolerable. Why should heaven and earth be set against her, as they had been from her cradle up?

"Narka, you are singing like a soul in purgatory crying out for prayers," said her mother, as poor Narka gave vent to her misery in a strain of passionate music.

"Mother, I am a soul in purgatory," she answered, with a dry laugh. "It is my firm belief that this life is purgatory, and that in the next there will be only heaven and hell."

"Dear! dear! what a wonderful notion you have about things! Your head is too full of poetry, child; not but that there may be some sense in what you say. I do believe this life is purgatory to many of us, and mostly to those who do not want any purgatory, one would think. Alas! alas!"

Narka knew that the concluding sigh was directed to Father-Christopher. Each knew that he was seldom out of the other's mind, but as by tacit consent, they never spoke of him.

A week went by. There was a fresh fall of snow in the night. The next morning the wind rose, and blew with its might from the north. A carrier coming on horseback from X, said the roads were impassable from the drifts that rose like embankments at intervals. For the next week traffic was suspended. If Prince Zorokoff had been at home, or Count Larchoff alive, there would have been an army of scavengers at work; but there was no one there now to press the peasants into the service. Even the Stanovoi was away at X, which was pleasanter in this weather than snowed up Yrakow.

At the end of three weeks the welcome face of the postman appeared at the cottage gate. He brought two letters from Sibil. One bore the Paris

postmark, the other that of Palermo. Narka went up to her room to read them alone. She opened the one from Paris first.

"I have a most extraordinary piece of news to tell you, my Narka," Sibil began. "I ought to have written to you sooner, but I was so bewildered at the first moment that I had not the courage to finish a letter I had just begun to you."

"I told you that Marguerite showed the strangest reluctance to go to Italy when everything was settled. It puzzled us all. She was very nervous and quite miserable, but gave no explanation of her sudden change. At last, one morning before I was up, she came into my room, and sat on the edge of my bed, and said: 'I have something to say that will be a surprise, and I fear a disappointment, to you. I can't go with you to Italy. I have made up my mind to be a Sister of Charity.' I was so taken aback that I could not speak for a moment, but just stared at her as if she had gone mad. 'I have been thinking about it for a long time,' she went on, 'and I am now quite sure it is my vocation. The idea of going to Rome and seeing the Holy Father tempted me at first; but I soon saw it was only a temptation, and that I must not yield to it; so instead of going off with you and Gaston, I am going to the Rue du Bac to make my novitiate.' I really did think that the child had gone out of her mind. 'Why,' I said, 'you will be dead in a month; the hardships of the life will kill you.' She laughed, and said, 'Oh no; I promise you not to be dead before two months; you will be back in time to see me alive. I did not know whether to burst out crying or to be very angry. She looked so sweet and bright, and yet there was something so unnatural in the idea of her doing such a thing. Oh, Narka, if you could have seen the expression of her eyes, those clear brown eyes of hers, when she went on to talk about the happiness of giving her whole life to God, and making atonement for those who offend Him! The idea of atonement seems to have taken hold of her like an *idée fixe*. I said that if she had had a wicked father, or if any one belonging to her had committed a crime, I could understand it; then there would be some sense or some show of reason in her putting on a stuff gown and burying herself in slums and hospitals; but she said that every sinner was her brother, and she felt a call to suffer and atone for them. In fact, she has atonement on the brain."

"She asked me to break the news to Gaston. I was quite ill at the thought of having to do it. I have such a horror of seeing anybody in pain, above all, any one I love. However, it had to be done. He cried like a child, dear Gaston. But he was not at all as shocked as I expected. He said if it was her vocation he would not lift a finger to hold her back. He talked like a theologian about people being 'called to the religious life.' I never could have believed Gaston knew so much about theology; but Frenchmen are so strange; they are full of contradictions. I was so upset by all these emotions that I had to keep lying down all the afternoon, with compresses of *eau sedative* on my head; and—"

Narka at this point let the letter drop, and interlacing her long white fingers, she straightened up her arms above her head, and heaved a gasp of relief. It was not for herself that she was relieved. Oh no! it was for Marguerite. Gentle, sensitive little Marguerite, who had escaped from a cruel ordeal. Loving Basil as she did, it would have been torture to the child to be thrown into constant companionship with him, to be the object of his brotherly solicitude, to be forced under the charm of his sympathetic nature, a charm that no one came near Basil without succumbing to. How could she have endured this for two whole months and not gone out of her mind? Narka lay back for a long moment, considering the danger and the pain that Marguerite had been saved. This improvised vocation was of course a stratagem to escape from an intolerable trial. They might safely let her go to the Rue du Bac during their tour to Italy; they would find on their return that the vocation had come to an end. Narka smiled as she thought of Marguerite giving up her flowers and dainty coquettish toilets for the gray gown and the *cornette*. But as she smiled she felt a sudden prick of remorse and doubt. Could it be that the idea of offering up her young life in atonement had become an *idée fixe* strong enough to impel her to the sacrifice?

Narka would not dwell on this possibility. There was another letter of Sibil's to be read. She opened it with a pleasant anticipation of interest.

"Here we are, with flexes and oranges making a background to the loveliest villa you can imagine! The roses are scenting the air till the sweetness makes one tipsy. If only you were here to enjoy it with us, my Narka! No delight is complete to me without you. You would find out so many beauties that I can't see, and you would sing all this exquisite idyl to me with that heavenly voice of yours! Well, some day, please God, we shall see it together. We had a most comfortable journey, and already Marguerite looks better for the change. Oh! I forgot I had not written to you since I told you of the bomb shell she threw at us about her vocation. Well, after a week spent in pleading and coaxing, appealing to her love for us, to every motive that could move her, the matter was decided by the Superior of the white *cornettes*, a most fascinating woman, and a saint Gaston says, who had several long talks with

her. She told Marguerite that it would be better in every way for her to come away for the change, because the doctor of the community was in great doubt whether her health would prove equal in its present state to the hardships of life; consequently the wisest thing would be to get up her strength before she made the trial. Marguerite was greatly disappointed at first, but after a day or so she seemed to take a more cheerful view of things, and was quite satisfied to come away. And you can't imagine how much better she already looks—so much less pale and languid. She is in excellent spirits."

"M. Charles joined us at Naples. We were all delighted to meet. He is very thin, and looks a good deal older; but his health is good. We do our best to cheer him, and he is so happy to have us near him!"

Narka did not see what more Sibil wrote. The reaction from the intense elation of the first letter to the disappointment of this made her feel sick. She sat, with the two letters in her lap, in a kind of half stupor. Her mother's voice calling to her made her start as if she had been asleep, in a bad dream. Madame Larik knew that letters had come, and was impatient, of course, to hear all about them. Narka stood for a moment to recover her self-possession and make up her mind how much she should tell. Perhaps it was best to read the letters as they were. There was nothing in them that she need conceal, and the mere communicating of their contents would be a relief.

She went down to the sitting-room, and read them aloud, and found Madame Larik a most responsive listener.

"What nonsense to talk of being a Sister of Charity! The pretty young creature! Of course there is a love affair at the bottom of it. Why does not Princess Sibil find it out and settle it?"

"But you hear what M. de Beaucriillon says? He would not oppose her entering the convent in the least."

"Then he ought to be ashamed of himself. I thought better of the Count. He was exceedingly polite to me. I suppose it is some great noble who has no money, or who has more than Mademoiselle Marguerite. Princess Sibil told me that the marriages in France are such matters of business! What a pity she and our young Prince could not take to each other! Who knows but they may, now that they are going to be together for a few months? I can't think why Prince Basil did not fall in love with her here."

This was hard to hear and respond to; but Narka felt it was not so hard as having to stifle the mention of the subject altogether.

TO BE CONTINUED.

CATHOLICITY IN ENGLAND DURING SIXTY YEARS.

A subject touched lightly by those American journals, secular or even distinctly Protestant, which are devoted most space to the retrospective and contemporaneous interests of Queen Victoria's Jubilee season, is the religious history of England during her reign. Can this be due to a weak desire to conceal one of the most remarkable features of that history—the resurgence of the old Catholic faith upon England's soil?

Sixty years ago, eight years after Catholic Emancipation had been won for England as well as for Ireland by Daniel O'Connell, the Church in England was just climbing feebly out of the catacombs in which she had been hidden for nearly three hundred years. To-day, in the splendid restored Catholic hierarchy, some of the proudest names of the nation shine. The Benedictines, Carthusians, Franciscans, Dominicans, are strong again in England, not as foreign importations, but men of the people, as in olden times. The Catholic body has much of the noblest lineage, ampest wealth and ripest culture in the land and is well represented in the councils of the nation, and in its best intellectual expression. Nay, it is even said as of old in Pagan Imperial Rome, that the church has won her conquests within the palaces of the Caesars themselves.

Mr. G. W. Smalley has written a parallel between the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and Queen Victoria. He is not tender of the former's memory, on many points. Indeed, in his zeal for Victoria, he hardly gives Elizabeth her intellectual due. But on one of the alleged achievements of the daughter of the eighth Henry—her victorious championship of Protestantism and destruction of the Papacy in England—Mr. Smalley waxes enthusiastic. He forgets, however, to continue the parallel at this point. It would be awkward to have to state that the representative of the Pope of Rome and the Catholic Archbishop of Westminster are two of the most honored guests at Queen Victoria's jubilee; that the present Lord Chief Justice of England is a Catholic, and an Irish Home-Ruler, too; that his predecessor had a brother among the Jesuits; and that the Jesuits, so numerous, hanged, drawn and quartered in the reign of the gentle Elizabeth, for daring to exist on English soil, are now entrenched even in Oxford, and employed in British scientific expeditions. So, in place of the natural contrast of the religious condition of England under Victoria, he tells us that the Queen has kept Home Rule from Ireland despite Ireland's unceasing struggle for it, and the willingness of the best English statesmanship to concede it. Only he stigmatizes the former as "plots and rebellions," and the latter as "schemes of disintegration."

The Church has thriven within the

past sixty years in England, first, because it is free. Second, because it has been helped in its open expansion, as it was in its secret expansion by the multitudes of faithful Irish Catholics flocking every year to London and other English cities. Third—and this the most marvellous in the world's eyes—it has grown in numbers and still more in influence, because of the accessions to the ranks of the faithful from the Anglican Establishment itself.

It is impossible to write the religious history of Queen Victoria's reign without giving large space to the Oxford Movement (which began but a few years before her accession), with its two-fold action on the religious life of the land. On the one hand it has started that long procession of Rome, led by Newman, Manning, Faber, Wilberforce, Ward—which like the kings of Banquo's lineage in Macbeth's vision, stretches in the outlook, on till the crack of doom. Think of the unspent force of that movement! Conversions to the Faith at the rate of six hundred a month during 1896, according to Cardinal Vaughan's careful and conscientious estimates. Let us remember, too, that four hundred of the Catholic priests in England were formerly clergymen of the Anglican body.

On the other hand the Oxford Movement has created what is called "the Anglo-Catholic Party" within the Protestant Church of England itself. These people— and they are a strong body—rich, cultivated, charitable, earnest, everything but logical—are intensely ashamed of the Protestant spirit of Anglicanism; and down the so-called "reformers," and endeavor to be, externally at least, as Catholic as Cardinal Vaughan himself in all things but submission to the Pope.

It were not strange, if, agnostic at this two fold result of the Oxford Movement, Elizabeth's shade did indeed revisit the corridors of Windsor, mourning that her work is being fast undone.

It must be remembered, too, that Catholicity has made great gains from among the Nonconformists during Victoria's reign.

It may be urged, however, that if the inconsistencies of Anglicanism have driven many into the Catholic fold, they have played heavily into the hands of agnosticism as well. We grant it. What, then, of the lasting foundation of the English Church, which Mr. Smalley credits to Elizabeth? Three hundred years should be little in the life of a religion—if it had the vitality of truth in it. Here is the Church of England at the close of Victoria's reign, as described by an acute American student of religious movement: "Roomy enough for the Ritualist standing near the gates of Rome on one side, and for the rationalist not far from the cloudland of agnosticism on the other."

Verily, the "English Church" of the end of the nineteenth century is already something very different from that which Elizabeth founded in the sixteenth century, and still greater changes await it, according to the testimony of its own members, ere many decades more have gone by. Alas, for all attempts to lay "lasting foundations" on the shifting sands!

Meanwhile it behooves the children of that Everlasting Church which Christ Himself founded on the Rock, and which Caesar cannot destroy, to be worthy of their high mission in England.—The Pilot.

Vacation. With warm weather, comes vacation time. Not only students, but their parents and friends also, so many of them as can afford, are counting upon a few weeks of rest and recreation in the country, or across the seas. No one, we are sure, begrudges their vacation to them. On the contrary, the general sentiment will doubtless wish them well in taking it and hope for their safe return from foreign climes, or native village, farm, or seaside, to their city homes, and business haunts.

We have written that so many as can afford it, will do so; but why should not all of us, or nearly all of us, take at least a few days vacation? It seems to us that most of us could save enough, by avoiding less necessary expenses during the rest of the year, to give us leave to break away from the hum drum of the city once a year. But would it not be well for those who are abundantly supplied with money to make generous donations for the purpose of providing fresh air and change of scene for the very poor who have not been able to save enough to secure these for themselves?

We have read of several individuals who make a habit of giving certain sums for this purpose on the eve of their annual vacation. Why not the number of such praiseworthy incidents be increased? The prayers of the poor follow their benefactors. The poor are the friends of God! How desirable therefore it is to have them praying for us!—Cath. Review.

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MOTHER AND BABE.

Nature is cruel and visits upon mother and babe alike the results of the mother's neglect of her own health. It is an oft-told tale—the mother dies in the agony of child-birth, and in a few short months the sweet babe follows her to the cemetery.

If women will only learn, and teach their daughters, the supreme importance of keeping the distinctly feminine organism in a perfectly vigorous and healthy condition, this ever-recurring tragedy will soon be a story of the past. If women who suffer from weakness and disease of these delicate organs will write to Dr. R. V. Pierce at Buffalo, N. Y., they will learn that in order to recover and maintain their health in this respect, it is not generally necessary to submit to the humiliating examinations and local applications insisted upon by physicians. In writing confidentially to Dr. Pierce, a woman places her case, without charge, in the hands of an eminent and skillful specialist, for thirty years chief consulting physician to the Invalids' Hotel and Surgical Institute at Buffalo, N. Y.—one of the leading medical institutions in the world, with a staff of nearly a score of eminent practitioners. Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription cures all weakness and disease of the organs distinctly feminine. Honest druggists recommend it instead of urging a substitute for a little extra profit.

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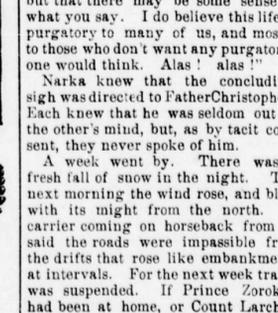
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