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LIFE IN THE CLOISTER; OR, FAITHFUL AND TRUE.

By the Author of "The World and the Cloister,"
&c., &c., &c.

CHAPTER XII.—(Continued.)

The visitor was a widow lady, a Mrs. Cecil, a good woman and a very zealous Catholic, who had been the friend of Catherine long before Lillian's marriage with her brother.

Her means were small; yet she may safely add that, had they corresponded with the wishes of her heart, the Leslies would not have been suffered to know distress.

Lillian's letter of the previous day had told her of the death of her child, and the good lady had come to pay her a visit of condolence.

The loss of her child, at the age when childhood is most engaging, had been a severe blow to Lillian; and the energy, the fortitude she had shown through all her severe trials, seemed on point of forsaking her at this troubled crisis of her life.

Herbert heard the doer of the adjoining room softly opened, and then the deep sobs of his wife. She yielded sadly to her grief. He felt cruelly apprehensive lest, if this should continue, her own health would sink under her heavy grief.

At length she returned with her friend to the room in which she had left her husband; and a spark of the haughty Lillian of former days still lurked under the subdued demeanor into which she had been schooled by misfortune, by the look of contempt she threw around the room, and the tone of voice, betokening wounded pride, in which she said, as her eye fell on the scantily-spread table,—

"Really, Mrs. Cecil, unless I knew you well, and esteemed you much, you would never have been welcomed into this humble domicile of ours. I tell Herbert I can bear to see no one till some little gleam of better fortune shall attend our efforts."

"My dear Lillian," said the visitor, "pray do not be so cast down, the darkest hour often precedes the dawn; depend on it there will yet be a silver lining to the cloud, and that Herbert's genius, both as an artist and an author, will ultimately meet with its reward."

"I doubt it very much," replied Lillian, "that is to say, if he is to depend on the joint-profit system, of which the constant result appears to be that there is nothing for the wretched author to receive. Mrs. Cecil," she added, her fine eyes filling with tears, "I cannot tell you how much we have had to undergo, and that at the very time my poor baby was dying, because, while we see the title placarded on the walls, and are reading very favorable reviews, and behold it in the windows of the circulating libraries, Mr. Maunton yet tells Herbert that his book has not paid its expenses. Ah, you know not what we suffered," she continued, "before we gave up our house; threatened with an execution for poor-rates, and then obliged to sacrifice part of our furniture in order to pay up our rent."

"But, my dear Lillian," said Herbert, "the rates must be paid, you know, and the poor must be cared for."

"Yes, by the cold charity of the union," she replied. "Oh for the days when England was Catholic, when the good religious succored the needy and starving poor, instead of persons, struggling with poverty like ourselves, having the last farthing wrung from them in the form of poor-rates! Look you, Mrs. Cecil," she continued, "in this very house there lives a poor young dressmaker; the father is out of employment, and the three children are all too young for work. A week since Elizabeth had an order to make up some mourning; it was required in a few days; and for three nights that poor girl and her mother were hard at work, or else they could not have finished it in time. This morning she received twenty-five shillings in payment; and she came to me, with her eyes red and inflamed from close application to the black work, to tell me that it must all go to pay the quarter's poor-rate. Is it not shocking to think of the way in which the genteel poor are mulcted for the destitute who have to seek the refuge of the poor-house?"

"Ah, indeed! and a sore refuge, too, it is," replied Herbert. "We may truly say that England has lost by her Reformation, or deformation, for she has sent her poor to the walls of a work-house; they were the dearly-loved children of a Church which taught them that poverty had a sacredness in its character, because it gave them a closer resemblance to Him who honored poverty by bearing it in His own person, whilst now it is treated as if it were a crime and the very pariah of society. The convict within the walls of his prison is better fed and cared for than the innocent and suffering poor. What, then, has England gained? except it be for those struggling with misfortune themselves, an often

overwhelming rate, whilst the whole land is studded with poorhouses?"

"Herbert grows eloquent, Mrs. Cecil," said Lillian, smiling. "As to myself, I must tell you I look back with a bitter self-reproach on the past. I remember old times, and the extravagance and luxury in which we lived; and when my ears are dinned with the discordant sounds by which they are constantly assailed in this little square, and Herbert pauses, and protests he can write no more till the place is quieter, then I remember, and wish that it were mine again to enjoy the quietude of the country which I once so disliked."

"That, I am well assured, will one day again be yours," said Mrs. Cecil, rising and bidding adieu to Herbert, Lillian accompanying her to the street door. Then after good-bye had been said, and there was no longer time for expostulation, the kind friend, as she shook Lillian warmly by the hand, pressed therein a five-pound note, whispering—

"Take it; love, for the expenses of dear baby's funeral."

The young author was indeed bitterly smarting under the effects of the delusion attendant on the joint-profit system; and the dark cloud had gradually been growing darker and darker, just as you have watched it settle over your own fortunes, reader, if it ever has been your fate to be tried in the rough school of adversity, if so, you will know what a sad thing it is to wake in the dead hour of night, and the moment you open your eyes, whilst you are still writhing under some unexpected blow, to have the thought of your great trouble rush upon you; to toss and turn upon your bed, feverish and restless, not knowing how to meet the coming morrow, or face the difficulties the dawn is sure to bring with it. Ah, it is a very terrible thing, this looking from day to day, and yet how many are thus doomed in this great metropolis, especially amongst the genteel poor, so to run out the measure of their days! And is it not true that the trouble in the sleepless, wakeful hours of night is far more terrible than the same trouble in the day? so both Lillian and Herbert felt it; and then to complete it all, came the death of the child, and the news that, in consequence of a change of circumstances in the family of Mr. Burke, Marion's services would not be required beyond the next quarter: so that their poor hearts were almost crushed under their sudden access of trouble.

Lillian, however, bore up bravely, like a true-hearted woman, as she was; only, you know, like all of us, there were moments when the trouble seemed too heavy to bear, and then she would give vent to a hearty flood of tears; perhaps they would be tears in which impatience as well as grief bore some part; if so, she soon took herself to task, and resolved to renew her confidence in that Providence which never tempteth us beyond our strength.

Trouble, especially pecuniary trouble, is very hard to bear; we all shrink from its approach; but I have often thought that it must surely be more grievous when, as was the case with Lillian, it visits those who for several years have been the favored children of fortune, and then are suddenly plunged into severe distress.

CHAPTER XIII.—FROM SUNSET TILL SUNRISE; OR, MAID, BRIDE, AND WIDOW.

Four months have passed since the pleasant evening on which our friend Marion held the conversation with her pupils about the Order of Notre Dame, and in that time many changes have taken place; Minna has left home in order to begin her novitiate at Namur, thus proving the truth, that many a word said in jest turns out to be earnest in the end. One source of discord, then, was removed from the household; but all is not honey yet, "making it apparent," says Mrs. Burke, "that it was not my poor Minna who was always in fault; very far from it, indeed, for the two sisters are often at variance with each other, and not over well behaved to me."

Kathleen, however, was shortly to quit the parental roof, to become a wife, and mistress of a household; and the thought of the new importance she was about to acquire made her exceedingly happy. The wedding *trousseau* was purchased, the day had long been fixed upon, the marriage was considered an eligible one, and all things seemed as prosperous as could be desired. The evening of the day previous to the wedding had arrived, and the flutter of excitement and anxiety in which Kathleen had been during the whole day was at its height, as the time approached for the return of Leonard Moran from an expedition some twenty miles from Dublin, which he had made that day, solely with the view of procuring a wedding present which he had commissioned a relation, who had just returned from London, to procure for his bride.

It was a very valuable gift, being nothing less than a diamond bracelet; and, unwilling to hazard the custody of anything so expensive to strange hands, the young man had left home in

the morning with the promise that he should bring his wedding gift to Kathleen that evening, and should not fail to arrive by the train at 7 p.m. Marion could on no account be spared; she had been invited to be one of the wedding party on the following day, and it was only with some little difficulty that she could get away for the night.

She was to accompany Kathleen and her sister to the railway station to meet Leonard Moran, leaving Mrs. Burke very busy, and all smiles and good humor. And if some of these smiles, Mrs. Burke, are because it will be the last night Kathleen will pass beneath her father's roof, we can still almost forgive you. In high spirits, the two young ladies, accompanied by Marion, tripped off to the station. They were, however, a little before the time; but they amused themselves in walking up and down the platform, talking very gaily, little thinking of the dark cloud that was gathering around them.

At last Kathleen noticed that the hour was past, and made inquiry of the guard. She was told that the train had been due at seven, but would doubtless arrive shortly.

"How very tiresome!" she exclaimed. "I feel so impatient till I see Leonard; but let us step into the waiting-room," she added, "for see, there is a knot of people collecting at the other end of the platform, and it is so unpleasant to get into a crowd."

Thus speaking, she turned into the waiting-room, and another ten minutes passed away; but Marion was abstracted and uneasy, for her quick ear, as she left the platform, had caught the words, "Railway accident." A painful thought occurred to her, as she looked at the blooming happy girl before her. What if there had been an accident, and harm had befallen Leonard Moran?

At length Kathleen became anxious, and again returned to the platform. The knot of persons who had previously assembled had doubled, nay, trebled, their numbers, and a train was heard speedily advancing. This, then, was the train which contained Leonard; and, breaking from Marion's arm, which she hastily dashed aside, she pushed through the crowd, followed by her friend and her sister. Marion had heard the words, "Telegraphic message." There had been an accident, then; and the message had been received whilst they were idling away the time in the waiting-room. On, on through a now excited throng, Kathleen forced her way; the words, so alarming in their import had reached her ear. Had Leonard escaped? Was he the occupant of one of those carriages which slowly, oh, so slowly for her excited mind steamed their way into the station?

Once, only once, she turned. "Ellen—Miss Craig," she murmured, with a rigid face and ashen lips, "they say there has been an accident to the train running from Kildare—watch every gentleman leaving those carriages. O God, support me, should he not be there?"

"Thirteen killed and wounded!" exclaimed a second-class passenger as he leaped on to the platform; "there has been a frightful scene, and the line blocked up for nearly an hour."

His words fell like ice on the heart of Kathleen. She had watched the last man descend; Leonard Moran was not amongst the passengers.

"Come home, dear Miss Burke," said Marion; "doubtless your father will at once go and see himself the cause of Mr. Moran's absence."

"Home!" exclaimed Kathleen, in an accent expressive of astonishment; then she feebly tottered to a guard who stood a few paces distant, and inquired when the next train left for Kildare.

"In ten minutes, miss," replied the man; "you can get your ticket at once, the booking-office is open."

"Miss Craig," said Kathleen, turning to Marion, "tell my father that I could not return home in this suspense—every hour is an age; till I see how it has fared with Leonard, go you home with Ellen."

"I shall not leave you, Kathleen," said Marion. "I will put Ellen into a cab, and accompany you, if you are resolved on going."

Expostulation was useless, Kathleen had resolved already, and seeing the terrified Ellen safely from the station, Marion gave her a message to her father, to say that, in the excited state in which Kathleen was at present, she would not suffer her to be put into execution by herself the rash determination she had made. A few moments more and the huge engine came puffing into the station. The friends took their places in a first-class carriage, and Marion felt almost frightened as she gazed on the stony countenance of the girl, which one short hour before had been radiant with joy and happiness.

Kathleen spoke not a word during their journey; but Marion noticed that the small hands were clenched convulsively together, and then placed on her heart. As they advanced, nearer

to the spot which they knew to have been the scene of the collision which had deprived some of life, and had horribly mutilated others—for here and there beyond the line, lying in an adjacent field, they beheld the wrecks of carriages, their shattered debris showing how terrible the disaster had been,—a sickening feeling came over Marion, and she narrowly escaped fainting; but a glance at the pale, sorrowful face of the unhappy Kathleen told her that she should not be the one whose energies should fail at the very moment in which she might be of use.

Slowly the train wended its way into the station; and as soon as it came to a stand still, a crowd of anxious persons sprung from the carriages, eager to know whether their missing relatives were amongst the dead or wounded.

The bodies of those who have been killed by the collision, miss, are placed in a room at the station, in order to await the coroner's inquest, which will be held to-morrow morning," said a guard, in answer to the question put by Marion.

"Have the goodness to show the way," she said; "we are anxious to see if a gentleman who was to have returned by the last train is amongst the—"

She could not finish the sentence; but, with Kathleen leaning heavily on her arm, she followed the steps of the guard.

They entered the room now dimly lighted by the setting sun; it shed a sickly, ghastly glare on the upturned and dead faces of the unfortunate sufferers from one of those disastrous collisions so frequently attendant on railway travelling.

"One, two, three, four," counted Marion, as, with that almost inanimate form leaning on her arm for support, and dragging rather than walking beside the long tables on which the bodies of the dead had been placed, she glanced successively at the countenances of each; some, where internal injuries had been the cause of immediate death, looking as placid as though they were asleep; others, and these were not a few, they numbered eight in all, were shockingly mutilated, so that they could scarcely be recognized save by their clothes.

"He is not here, God be thanked!" were the first words spoken by Kathleen, as they paused beside the corpse of an aged man, whose white locks were crimsoned with his blood. "Take me away; oh, take me to him!" she added, still dragging heavily on the now aching arm of Marion, who herself, sick and faint at the ghastly sight before her, found that she must summon all her resolution, or that she should speedily lose the power of looking after herself, much less one so utterly dependent on others as the poor girl who clung so helplessly to her side.

Turning to the guard, then, she begged him to direct her to the inn to which the sufferers yet surviving had been removed. It was a simple village inn, not three hundred yards from the railway station, to which they bent their steps. The place was thronged by persons of various descriptions; some lurking about from motives of mere curiosity, others in torture, till they could ascertain the probable fate of those whom they had come to seek.

The man, however, speedily made room for the two ladies to pass, the unutterable anguish depicted on the deathly countenance of Kathleen telling him that hers was one of the cases which would not brook delay.

Marion immediately asked to speak to the mistress of the house, and found that there were at that moment three cases which required surgical aid, and that all were more or less dangerous.

She was yet conferring with the woman as to how they could best obtain admittance, so as to ascertain if either of these three sufferers should be the unfortunate Leonard, when a gentleman habited in a sober suit of black, and whom the landlady addressed as Dr. Gannon, entered the room. Marion instantly addressed him—

"You can, perhaps, give us some information, sir. One of the sufferers in this house is probably the gentleman we seek. Papers may be on his person, for he had articles of value with him at the time of the disaster. Leonard Moran is the name of the friend of whom we are in search."

Dr. Gannon cast a sympathising look on the trembling form and pale face of Kathleen, and then took his tablets from his pocket, reading aloud—"Sufferer from concussion of the brain; name and address unknown. Patrick Delany, both legs broken. Leonard Moran; severe internal injury."

"I have this moment left the gentleman," said the doctor, with so grave an aspect that Marion knew that Kathleen's fate was sealed.

Kathleen grasped the doctor by the arm, exclaiming, "Show me the way to Mr. Moran's room; I must see him without a moment's delay."

"Is this young lady his wife?" said the doctor. "The slightest excitement will be fatal. I warn you of this beforehand."

"No; but twelve short hours would have

given me that title," said Kathleen, in so despairing a tone that the eyes of the doctor were humid with tears.

"I scarcely like introducing you to him in the precarious state in which he lies," he said.—"Will you, however, promise me to control your feelings?"

"I will," she replied, shivering as though in an ague fit, and followed the doctor, as he led the way to the small, ill-furnished room in which Leonard lay.

No power on earth, however, would have made Dr. Gannon commit what he knew professionally was an imprudent action; but then his patient had, he was aware, ordered a telegraphic message to be sent immediately to Rutland Square. The excitement attendant on meeting his friends must come in a very short time—why not at once?

Kathleen tottered, still leaning on Marion, into the darkened room. She stood beside the bed on which he was stretched; she leaned over him; and her rigid countenance, pale as marble, unrelieved by a single tear, told him how much she suffered.

"I cannot live many hours, Kathleen," he feebly whispered. "Is there any request you wish to make, my own darling?—if so, speak whilst I have yet power to reply."

"Yes, my Leonard," said Kathleen, as she sank on her knees beside the bed. "To-morrow would have visited us at the foot of the altar," she added, placing her hand in his; "let us now—"

"Be made one," he feebly replied, catching the meaning of her words.

At that moment the door opened, and Kathleen's father enter the room, accompanied by his wife.

Leonard Moran gave them a look of recognition, and exclaimed, "Let us be made one—it is Kathleen's wish."

At the same moment he signed to Dr. Gannon: the latter placed in the hands of Kathleen a small parcel, telling her that the gentleman had directed him to give it to her in case of his death before she arrived. She knew well that its contents—a token of love for her—had been purchased at the cost of his own life, as but for that tiny parcel Leonard would not have left Dublin on the day in question. Her tears fell thick and fast on the glittering baubles which the casket contained. In the parcel, disclosed to view, there lay the diamond bracelet, and folded in a heap of cotton and wool the tiny gold ring, which she was to wear on her finger the following day.

The change in the countenance of Leonard sufficiently announced to his afflicted friends that his time on earth,—nay, his very hours were numbered; but amidst the breathless silence of all, broken only by the deep sobs of Kathleen; he whispered out the words,—

"Dr. Gannon, do not deceive me; how long have I yet to live?"

"Not many hours," was the reply; "mortification will speedily set in."

"Send for a priest," he said, and covered his face with his hands, he lay for some moments engaged in deep and earnest prayer.

Leonard Moran was a devout Catholic, and as the nuptials of the Morans were to have been in strict accordance with good old Catholic usages, both bride and bridegroom had prepared themselves by approaching the tribunal of penance.

In less than half an hour the priest arrived, a venerable man; the parish priest of a simple country congregation. He had been told a gentleman was dying, one of the sufferers of the recent collision; but he was not aware that he had to confer the sacrament of matrimony also, till Mr. Burke, having drawing him aside, briefly explained the case.

What a contrast did the wedding party, assembled in that small, mean scantily-furnished room, present to that which had been projected for the morrow.

Oh, death, indeed, to every worldly hope for the poor, pale, half-fainting bride, who, raising her head from the friendly bosom of poor Mrs. Burke, now stood beside the bed, repeating the words of the marriage-service, her hand clasped in one scarce colder than her own. And the solemn rite concluded, the priest prepared to administer that other holy sacrament—the mystery of ineffable love, the Eucharist—to the dying man. Ah! on the morrow the husband and his bride—the latter now to return to a widowed home—were to have sealed their compact together in that holy sacrament. And then intimating that before the night grew late he would call again to administer the rite of extreme unction he returned home.

Not for a moment did the heart-broken Kathleen leave the pillow of the ill-fated Leonard, and a gush of bitter tears burst forth as he informed her that he had already named her in the will which he had drawn up some time since, then banishing earthly matters from his mind, and