

Choice Literature.

CAROLA.

BY HESHA STRETTON.

CHAPTER XXVII. A NIGHT WATCH.

Carola had been a year in the hospital, but she had not kept account of the weeks and months. The seasons made but little difference in the landscape surrounding it, except in the length of the days and nights; yet she had not missed very much their pleasant changes. All her time was so much occupied, and her hands were so full of work, that she had no thought to give to other things. She had not taken the trouble to apply for her little income, for all her wants were supplied, and she had no leisure to spend upon herself. For the first month she had worked as a servant merely, cooking, or scrubbing floors, or washing linen as Sister Elizabeth ordered her. But before long she was employed as a nurse, and displayed so much ready tact, and patience, and trustworthiness, that she soon found herself on constant duty in the wards. Next to teaching children this was a work she would have chosen for herself: yet now and then her spirit fainted a little within her, for she saw only the sorrow and suffering there is in life. It was a surgical hospital; and most of the patients who came in were wounding-men who had met with accidents in the pits or at the furnaces; and many a sad sight she had to witness without yielding to any outward expression of her natural tendencies. Yet before many months were over, if Sister Elizabeth could not be present at any operation, it was Carola, with her steady nerves, and strong, gentle touch, and watchful eye, whose help was called for, both by the surgeons and the patients.

The evening was the time Carola loved most, when the patients had had their tea, and the wards were quietly gliding into the stillness of night. She could then sing or read aloud to the poor sufferers, until some of them fell asleep, and the rest were soothed into patient endurance of their pains. She was pacing to and fro one night carrying in her arms a little child who had been badly burned, when Sister Elizabeth softly opened the door. The lights had been turned low, and the fire was a heap of glowing embers only, and Carola was passing slowly down the ward, followed by the peaceful and wistful eyes of the patients lying on the beds, for she was singing in a low clear tone, and they joined their feeble and quavering voices with hers. She had sang the same verse two or three times—

"But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed;
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed
through
Ere He found His sheep that was lost.
Out in the desert He heard its cry,
Sick and helpless, and ready to die."

"It will be a hard thing for the men to spare her, even or a few days," thought Sister Elizabeth. But she called Carola away, and sent in the night-nurse. A telegram had come from a friend of hers, a doctor in a country place forty miles away, begging her to send him the best nurse she had by the next train. There was not much time for preparation, and Carola had to hasten.

It was a small and lonely station, lit up by a flickering oil lamp, and the train only dropped a slip coach there as it whirled on through the night. There was no one on the platform but the station-master and the doctor, who was waiting anxiously for her arrival, and who hurried her into his carriage and ordered his coachman to go on as quickly as he could. It was a drive of more than an hour, during which the doctor was reading by the light of a carriage-lamp; and it was not until they passed through some lodge-gates that he addressed her.

"Are you used to the sight of frightful accidents?" he asked.

"We have had ones at Netherton Hospital, sir," she answered.

"I want a nurse who will be obedient and watchful," he went on; "this patient of mine was shot yesterday, accidentally, of course, and it will depend upon you as much as upon me whether we can pull him through. I suppose Sister Elizabeth has confidence in you."

"I have been with her since last September," Carola replied. "I will be obedient and watchful. I think you may trust in me, sir."

"Good!" he said, turning again to his book, until they reached the door of a hall, in which a single light was burning. Carola followed the doctor through long and silent passages to a room but dimly lighted. A woman, who was evidently only a housekeeper, welcomed her appearance warmly, and led her to the side of the bed on which the patient was lying.

It was a long and anxious night. The doctor lay down in the adjoining room, ready to be called at a moment's notice; and the housekeeper soon fell asleep in an easy-chair. But it was Carola's duty to sit beside the bed, with her eyes fastened on the half-concealed face of the stranger, sunk in stupor, and possibly passing away into death. It was the first time she had been called away from her tranquil home in the hospital, and she was excited. There was no fear of any drowsiness coming over her; this one thing she had to do, to see that no change took place in the patient she was watching, that he made no movement which might disturb the bandages about his head. This great and silent house in which she was must be somewhere in the very heart of the country, for they had passed through no town, and only one small village on their way to it. She knew no being; not even the name of this apparently dying man, whose life seemed to hang upon her watchfulness and care. The room was large and lofty and handsomely furnished; he must be a rich man, but there was not a friend or relative near him. There was no face looking in, silently and anxiously, from time to time, as if any one cared whether he lived or died.

The dawning of the day was scarcely perceptible through the thick curtains; and it was broad sunlight before the doc-

tor set her free from her post, and bade her get the rest she needed before being called upon to watch again. The housekeeper led her to a room near at hand, and as soon as she was left alone, Carola drew aside the curtain to look out on the freshness of the early morning. But what familiar landscape was this that stretched far and wide before her? Was she back in her little cottage at Hazelmount? for there lay the great plain sloping up to the distant horizon, with its clusters of trees all touched with autumn tints; and its yellow corn fields just ripe for the harvest, as they were three years ago. Three years ago? Nay, three centuries of years. Could this indeed be Hazelmount? She opened the window, and leaning through, looked across the hazy park. Yonder was the path leading across it to the school-house; and there was the school-house itself, and the empty rick-yard behind it, and beyond that the ivy clad gable of the Grange. Yes; she had been brought back to Hazelmount.

All that lost and happy past rushed back upon her like a flood. Oh! how she had loved them all! What a real home she had found there! She saw, as if a flash of lightning glanced across the future, that the hospital could never be as full and true a home, with the patients dwelling only a little while under her care, and then making way in endless succession to fresh cases. Her heart yearned towards the peaceful little village with the longing of home-sickness. Yet they must not discover that she was here, so near to them; for now she knew a little more of the world, she felt that they had acted according to its dictates in considering her unworthy of a place in their midst.

This house then must be Hazelmount Hall, which had been closed for years; and probably there would be no one in it who would recognize her in her nurse's cap and uniform. But it would not be right to quit her post because there was the risk of being known. Sister Elizabeth confided the most dangerous cases to her care; and this stranger was committed to her charge as a trained nurse. Ought she to leave him because she was afraid of meeting again those who had despised and rejected her?

Carola shed a few tears, very sorrowful ones. But tears were a luxury not permitted in the narrow path of duty. It was right now that she should sleep, and recruit the strength she had devoted to the service of the feeble. She whispered to herself the Lord's Prayer, for these were the very words her Lord had bidden her to say; and when she was too weary or too troubled to utter any other, she could remember them. In a few minutes she was sleeping a tranquil and unbroken sleep.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—SISTER CAROLA.

It was evening when she resumed her post at Captain Bentley's side. There was still danger, but it was less imminent, and the doctor told her she might allow him to talk a little if he seemed inclined. For some hours she sat reading beside a shaded lamp, glancing often at her patient, with her ear intent for any stir or whisper. Towards midnight he made an effort to move, and she was beside him instantly.

"Is the danger past?" he whispered.

"Almost," she answered; "you have only to keep quiet, and trust in me. The doctor is still in the house; and if there is any need I will call him."

"Shall I be blind?" he asked.

"We cannot tell yet," she replied, "but I have seen many men far worse injured than you get well, and go to work again. You might have been killed on the spot; and now the danger is nearly over."

"I'd almost sooner have died than be maimed and blind," he said, and yet perhaps it is better to be a live dog than a dead lion, as they say. Is that true?"

"I don't know," she replied, "but for myself I know that if I live, I live unto the Lord; and if I die, I die unto the Lord; living or dying I am the Lord's."

There was a ring of gladness in her voice which made it pleasant to his ear, but her words sounded to him almost like a foreign language. He lay quite still after the effort of speaking; but he was conscious that she did not move away, that she stood near him ready to perform any service; and there was a feeling of security in being thus carefully watched. If any thing went wrong this quiet, silvery-tongued nurse would see it at once. His brain was clear now, and he could recall his accident and all that passed before it. But was it an accident? There was enough hatred of him, hatred kindled altogether by himself, to make it not impossible that he had been shot at. He thought of the families about to quit their homes and emigrate to strange lands, who felt that it was he who was driving them away. He had been a hard, selfish, and tyrannical landlord; and no wonder if one of them had shot him from behind a hedge.

"Do you know how it happened?" he inquired, after so long a pause that Carola thought he had fallen asleep again.

"You were out shooting in the Long Coppice," she answered, speaking very deliberately, and you were crushing through the underwood with your gun loaded, and a branch caught the trigger. There was no one with you but Tudor, the gamekeeper."

"Do you think any body out of Hazelmount would do it?" he asked.

"Oh, no, no! that is impossible," she answered.

"They hate me," he muttered.

"Why?" asked Carola.

"I've turned the Arnolds out of their old farm," he said, in troubled accents, "and half the villagers are leaving with them. Young Arnold is gone to America to buy a place there. Oh, they hate me bitterly enough."

Carola listened with passionate astonishment. The Arnolds leaving the Grange; the place which seemed as if it belonged to them by right! What right could this stranger have, a man unknown to all of them, to drive them away from the home that had belonged to them from time immemorial? Oh, the pain and the heart-breaking misery of it! And she could do nothing. For first always in the movements of her eager heart came the instinct of helping; and if that was unsatisfied, as it must be now, her own pain

was great. She would need no book to keep her awake tonight; her brain was too full of thoughts for reading.

"Who are you?" inquired Captain Bentley at last. "I do not know your voice."

"I am a nurse from Netherton Hospital," she answered, "and there they call me Sister. But they are all poor people, and you had better call me nurse."

For in the bitterness of her resentment she did not wish to hear him call her by so dear a name. He was doing evil to those she loved; and how could she look upon him, as she had trained herself to look upon the wounded work-people brought to her from their dangerous occupations, as brothers injured in the battle of life?

"I had a sister once," he said sadly; "she was the last creature who cared a straw for me."

How desolate the words sounded! Carola looked down on him with pitying eyes; for the thought of the dreary future which lay before him passed vividly through her mind. If he indeed recovered it would be as a maimed and disfigured man, almost blind, from whom all the pride of life had departed. If he had secured no one's love in the past there was little hope for the time to come. Her heart melted in pity towards him.

"I care for you," she said, "and I am nursing you as carefully as a sister could."

"But you are paid for it," he replied.

"Not as you think," she answered; "I shall have none of the money you pay to the hospital. But of course he who sent me will pay me."

"That is what I said," he muttered; "that makes all the difference."

"But you do not understand," she said, in a joyous tone; "He who sent me to you is my Lord Jesus Christ."

It was a long time since that name had fallen upon his ear; so long that he had to go back to his boyhood and childhood for memories of it. He had heard it chiefly at Christmas and Easter; and the recollection of holidays was principally associated with it. They were pleasant times those holidays, when he had gone home from school, and played with his little sister, and been indulged by his mother. His thoughts wandered away among silent memories until he fell asleep again; and Carola stole noiselessly back to her seat, but not to read. Her heart was too full of trouble.

During the days that followed there was no difficulty in Carola keeping her presence unknown to the villagers of Hazelmount. It was her duty to watch Captain Bentley through the night, and most of the day she spent in rest for herself. Presently he demanded more companionship from her, for her voice was always soothing to him during the dreary hours he lay awake, fretted by the long inaction. It happened one night that she began to talk of old Matthias Levi, the Jew cobbler, and she drew a picture of him and his little shop with a vividness that brought the whole scene clearly to his mind. Her own mind was dwelling fully on those early days, and Matthias seemed to stand before her in a clearer and brighter light than he had ever done before.

"Why, I know him better now than I did then!" she cried; "I can see him now, and what he was trying to do. For what doth God require of thee, O man! but to do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God?" That is what Matthias was doing."

"It is impossible," murmured Captain Bentley.

"But he did it," she said; "not perfectly, of course, but to the utmost of his power. Yes, he did justly, and loved mercy, and walked humbly with his God."

He could hear her voice trembling, and he knew she could say no more to him just now. For the last week or two he had been seeing through her eyes, and thinking with her brain; and all life wore a different aspect for him. Her mind had gained so dominant an influence over him that they were pondering over the same subject, with a subtle feeling that it was so, though no word was spoken. They were both thinking of that flagrant act of injustice and tyranny lying at his very gates; and he was contrasting his own life painfully with that of the humble and poverty-stricken Jew. At last he called softly to Carola.

"Sister," he said, "do you know that at first I thought I had been shot for revenge?"

"Yes," she answered; "but that is impossible."

"I should have deserved it," he went on, "for I am driving away people who have lived on these lands hundreds of years. The estate came to me, and I thought I'd a right to do what I pleased with my own; and I have been guilty of an unjust and an unmerciful deed. I was lifting up myself proudly against God. I thank God you have told me of that old Jew to-night."

"Why?" she asked, with almost breathless eagerness.

"Because it is not yet too late to repent," he answered; "it is still two months to Christmas, and I can change all that. No, I would sooner quit Hazelmount myself than drive them away. The place is more theirs than mine."

"You make me happier than I can tell," sobbed Carola.

"Do I?" he asked; "then if it were for nothing else the thing should be done."

The next afternoon, when Carola awoke and opened her window, she heard a merry peal of bells ringing across the park from the unseen church tower, and she knew that the glad tidings had already reached the people of Hazelmount. She leaned through the window and looked towards the Grange, which was now hidden from her by the brown stacks that began to fill the rick-yard. But how well could she picture it—the joyous meeting in the great kitchen, and the tall, strong old master standing in the midst of his work-people, and telling them there were to be no sorrowful separations, and no heart-breaking departures! They were saved from their overwhelming trouble. Yet her eyes filled with tears, and her heart felt heavy, as she thought how soon she would be going away, even though she was about to return to her work in the hospital, with the dear companionship of Sister Elizabeth.

(To be continued.)

THE Free Church of Scotland has lost an influential member by the death, in his eightieth year, of Cluny Macpherson, the last typical Highland chief.