

## STILL AND DEEP.

BY F. M. F. SKENE, AUTHOR OF "TRIED,"  
"ONE LIFE ONLY," ETC.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

Laura Wyndham's first proceeding after the departure of Bertrand Lisle from Chiverley had been to compel her father to agree to a plan she had formed, of spending the interval before her marriage in London. Chiverley had become more hateful to her than ever now that she no longer had even the society of John Pemberton to enliven her, and she declared it was quite impossible that she could procure even the scanty *trousseau* which was all they could afford, in any shops less fashionable than those of the West-end of London. There was but one way by which Mr. Wyndham could gratify Laura in her wish without incurring an expense greater than he could bear, and that was, by making an exchange of duty with some London clergyman for the time he wished to be absent from his own parish; he was much too inert to undertake the arrangement himself however, and it was Lurline who put advertisements in the papers, and managed the correspondence which ensued. It was not very difficult to find an incumbent glad to escape from the dust and the heat of London for the months of July and August, and one such was induced to enter into arrangements with the Wyndhams, which resulted in their having been established in his house in town two or three weeks before the declaration of war had broken over France like a thunder-clap, which reverberated, with its ominous peal, through every country in Europe.

To Laura Wyndham the news was a matter of the most perfect indifference. Although she had caught Bertrand's fancy sufficiently to make him wish to marry her, she had never in the slightest degree won his confidence, and she knew nothing of his deep hidden love for the native land of his fathers; nor was it possible for her selfish worldly nature to comprehend the generous enthusiasm which could sacrifice personal interests to any cause whatever. She went on, therefore, making arrangements for her wedding, which she was resolved should take place in London, and at a time when every one was looking forward with dismay and dread to the wide-spread suffering which was certain to result from the war, the chief subject of the Lorelei's thoughts was the expected arrival of a set of jewels which Bertrand had promised to send her as his present before their marriage.

About ten days after war had been declared, however, she received a letter from Bertrand which threw her into a violent state of indignation and disquiet; he wrote evidently under the influence of great excitement, assuming that she would at once understand how for him, by birth a Frenchman, the fate of his native country in this tremendous war must needs supersede every other consideration, and absorb his whole soul with feverish anxiety till the probable results of the struggle were known. Bertrand seemed to have been so accustomed to Mary's ready sympathy all his life-long, that it never occurred to him to doubt that Lurline would feel for and with him in his present emergency, as entirely as would have been the case with his early friend, and he went on to pour out to her all the conflicting feelings that had plunged him in the most painful perplexity: the longing to fly at once to fight for France against her foes; the unwillingness to seem to act in the smallest degree unfairly by the country of his adoption; the check put upon his

strong impulse to give up all at once for the defence of his native land, by the certainty that as his single arm could avail France but little, he should, by doing so, for a mere sentiment wreck his whole career, lose forever the position to which he had only attained by years of steady progress, and reduce himself to a state of comparative poverty; all these contending feelings warred in his mind, he said, night and day, depriving him completely of calmness and rest; but the question would soon be decided: if France were victorious, and surely her arms could not fail, it would probably be absolute madness to ruin his prospects for life in order to offer her that which she neither needed nor desired—but if she were unfortunate—ah, then!—(he did not finish his sentence, he seemed certain that Lurline would understand him). He ended by saying that his darling Lorelei would, he was assured, feel with him that in any case their wedding must be postponed for a time; it would make no difference to their mutual love; his heart should be with her wherever he was; and he trusted that it might be but a little time before he could come to claim her.

Laura Wyndham read this letter to the end, then flung it to the ground and stamped upon it in a fit of ungovernable passion. One of her best natural qualities was an even temper, which was not easily ruffled, but the contents of this most unwelcome epistle were too much for her equanimity; her own self interest was her first and last thought always, and it was clear that her plan of becoming the wife of Bertrand Lisle, which she had brought to a triumphant success by so much wily astuteness, was not only thrown back to an indefinite period, but absolutely endangered altogether. It was not love for Bertrand himself, as we know, which made her wish to marry him, but only for the sake of his position, his large income, and the gay world to which he would introduce her; and she knew that if he once joined the French army, all this, which she alone desired, would be put out of her reach for ever; he must, of course, instantly quit the office held under the English Government, with its generous emoluments and many advantages; and as she had taken care to inform herself as to his means, she knew very well that if he did so he would be reduced to the mere pittance he derived from his mother, and she as his wife to an even more impoverished condition than that under which she so long suffered at Chiverley. The bare idea of such a disappointment just when she had attained the summit of her hopes was not to be endured for a moment, and she paced up and down the room in angry agitation, while she thought out the best mode of holding him back from the fatal act of resigning his post; not the faintest response did her cold heart give to all the feelings for which Bertrand claimed her sympathy—patriotism and self-devotion were incomprehensible names to her, into the meaning of which she could not enter, and she simply scorned him for what she had held to be the miserable folly of thus ruining his own career.

Finally a letter was sent off, which contained a wild passionate appeal to him for her sake not to leave his home of safety and peace to enter on so dangerous a campaign. She told him it would kill her if she were to know him to be in the perils of war—that he had won her love, and therefore she had a claim on his life, and that if he did not wish her to die of terror and distress he must give up the idea of volunteering for the defence of France; then she added that the very idea of such a calam-

ity had given her so great a shock, that her nerves were completely shaken, and that she would have neither rest nor peace now, so long as he was out of her sight, and therefore she was driven to beg that he would shorten the interval which was to have elapsed before their marriage, and come at once to take her back with him to his wife to his Italian home, where they might dwell safely together while this terrible war raged at a distance, unseen and unheard by them in their happiness. The Lorelei had a triumphant smile on her lips when she closed her letter, for she had never yet failed to master Bertrand's true nature, and she believed that she would do so now, but she had somewhat overreached herself, for although the letter was calculated to convince Bertrand more than ever of the truth of her love for him, yet her entire want of sympathy with his most sacred feelings could not fail to jar on him; and, unconscious as he was of the deceit and cunning which had dictated it, he could only gain from it an impression of her shallowness and weakness, while in spite of her selfishness pierced through every line of it.

It was a stifling afternoon in August, a few days after one of the worst defeats of the French army, when a cab drove up to the door of the house inhabited by the Wyndhams, and a gentleman alighted from it, and, going up the steps, rang the bell for admittance. It was not Bertrand, however, but a man in every way unlike him. He seemed about forty years of age, with a somewhat portly figure, and attired with the most scrupulous correctness. He had strongly-marked hard features, a sallow complexion, and small keen eyes; his hair also, was black and very smooth, and his face close shaven. He had a look of great decision and self-possession, and his manner, when he spoke to the servant who opened the door, was full of quiet authority. Was Miss Wyndham at home? he inquired. The maid thought he said Mr. Wyndham, and answered that she was lying down, but Miss Wyndham was in the drawing-room. It was Miss Wyndham he wished to see, he answered, and straightway walked into the house. Being asked his name, he replied, "Mr. Brant."

## CHAPTER XXX.

Mr. Brant is an individual of whose previous career it is necessary we should give some account, in order that his share in the events yet to be recorded in this history may be better understood. The son of an English father and an Italian mother, he possessed some of the characteristics of both nations. He had the courage, coolness, and self-possession of an Englishman, with all that disregard of truth and reckless unscrupulousness which often are to be found among the inhabitants of the soil and sunny south. At the present moment Mr. Brant was established as one of the prince merchants of the town where Bertrand Lisle held his diplomatic post, and he had in that part of the world the reputation of enormous wealth; certainly his mode of living supported such a view; he inhabited there a vast mansion that was almost a palace, enriched with marble and gilding externally, and with the most costly fittings of velvet and silk and splendour within its walls; carriages, horses, servants, everything that money can procure, was there in rich profusion; and, when Mrs. Brant was alive, no lady went to Court with such magnificent diamonds, or gave such grand entertainments at her own house. She had been an Italian lady, whom he had married when very young, and her manners and character had not been altogether satisfactory to the more fastidious portion of the society