

rival of Mrs Parry, and it was therefore to a large airy apartment, where the open windows let the light fall freely upon the invalid, that Mary conducted her old nurse the morning after her arrival. True to her loyal devotion towards the De L'Isles, whom she believed Laura to have cruelly injured, the good woman grumbled at the task before her all the way from the hotel, and continued to grumble as she went upstairs to the very door of the sick room; but the moment her eyes fell on the wan mournful face of the sufferer all her unwonted sternness gave way, and her kind heart went back with a great revulsion of feeling to its natural compassionateness and ready sympathy; and when Mary with her usual quiet tact, placed the fragile neglected infant in her arms, the victory over her motherly instinct was complete; in an instant she was lavishing endearments on it, and tending it with an artistic skill which brought a smile even to Laura's pale lips, while she became so completely engrossed by its various requirements that she heard nothing of the conversation which was soon commenced between Mary and her friend. Two or three days had passed since that eventful evening when Lurline first heard of the death of the man whose ill-fated love for her had been indeed strong as death, and might be said to shed its light upon her even yet, from the very darkness of the grave, and she had said no word to Mary of what might be passing in her mind as regarded that conversion of her own soul to love and truth for which she had promised so earnestly to strive; yet there were many indications that her mind was dwelling on it anxiously, and her manner was much more subdued and humble than it had ever been in all her life before. She was slowly improving in health, and it was quite plain now that she was likely to recover completely under the tender care which surrounded her; but on this morning when Mary asked her how she had slept, Laura answered that she had passed a very restless night.

"Thinking, always thinking, Mary, till my brain reels, and my heart is so weary. I seem possessed by my past life; it is continually passing in review before me, with the light from the Sun of Righteousness bringing out in hideous aspect all its wickedness, treachery, and selfishness. I long, I pine, for pardon and peace, but I seem as one dead. I have no power to enter into that faith and love which John Pemberton so earnestly desired for me. I do as you told me, Mary, I appeal to the merciful Christ direct. I scarce cease to call on him night and day; but it is with me as with the disciples of Baal, there is no voice nor any that answers; sometimes I think that even the prayers which rose from that pure heart of which I was so unworthy, cannot be heard for such as I have been."

"They have been heard," said Mary, softly, "of that I am very sure, and when it shall seem good to the Most Merciful he will answer them; do you remember how He said even to those whom He knew were about to forsake and deny Him, 'I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you' and to you, too, Laura, in an hour when you think not, the Master will come."

"I trust it may be so," said Lurline with a heavy sigh; "but Mary, one idea has come to me on which I should like to act if you will help me with your advice; it seems to me that perhaps I have no right to expect that I can be permitted to win even faith or hope until I have given some proof that I mean in future to try and do the will of that God whose mercy I am seeking, I seem likely to live now, and I must come to some decision as to my manner of existence in the years to come. I want you to

tell me what you think it would be my duty to do."

"I can have very little doubt on that point; it seems to me perfectly clear."

"But wait, Mary," exclaimed Laura, with a good deal of feverish anxiety in her tone, "you do not know yet what possibilities there are for me; it is certain that I cannot return to England, for my poor father is dead, and Mrs. Wyndham was left without any provision, and has gone to live with her brother and his family; but there is an opening for me here. I had a note this morning from an Italian Marchesa, who was one of my principle acquaintances, but who was absent when my misfortunes came upon me, and who has only just returned. She writes to offer me a home with her if I will give her my services as lady companion; the duties would be quite nominal. I know very well why she wants me in her house; it would be a very gay pleasant life, Mary;" and Laura looked up somewhat wistfully, at her friend.

"But would it be right?" said Mary, gently; "you have others to consider besides yourself, Laura; even in any temporary arrangement are you sure you could attend to your child in the Marchesa's house?"

"He would not be there," said Lurline, hesitatingly; "she says he should be put into the care of a nurse in some village."

"Oh Laura! you could never consent to so wrong and unnatural a scheme. She cannot be a good friend for you I am sure, if she could make such a suggestion."

Even in her worst days Laura had been frank and outspoken when there was nothing to be gained by being otherwise, and now she had strong motives to incite her to truthfulness, she answered, therefore, at once, while a tinge of colour rose in her white cheeks: "I will own to you, Mary, that she is not very good in any way. She is scarcely received in society now, and it is for that very reason she wishes to have me with her. She thinks that having the companionship of a lady, and especially an Englishwoman, might help her to regain her position."

"Then surely that settles the question, feeling as you now do, you cannot have entertained the idea of going to her at all seriously."

"Perhaps I hardly did, only I could not help thinking what a bright luxurious life it would have been," said Lurline with a sigh.

"A life utterly unblest; and besides, Laura, I do not think that you ought to accept the most unexceptionable offer of a situation that could be made to you; there can be no doubt whatever that it is your duty to join your husband."

"Oh, Mary, I felt sure you would say so, and I quite dreaded to hear the words!" said Laura turning round to bury her face in the pillow, with almost a wail of pain. "You do not know all that is involved in such a proposal; bitter humiliation certainly, and perhaps misery and want."

"Still, dear Laura, you would have God's blessing on your life, and that blessing can turn all that seems most dark to purest light."

"I have not written to Mr. Brant yet at all," said Laura, half impatiently.

"Then I think you ought to write without delay, and offer to go to him."

"It is not a question of offering," said Laura. "I must beg him to take me back; we parted on very bad terms; he was so indignant with me for refusing to go with him then, and share his misfortunes, that he declared I should never enter his doors again, unless I prayed and implored of him to receive me, and I scoffed at the very idea, and said I never would."

"But you were not then trying to do right, Laura," said Mary, very gently; "you had no wish, as you have now, to find the Blessed Christ who pleased not Himself."

"No, that is true; but I seem far enough from finding Him, and I do not suppose that humbling myself to Mr. Brant would help me in my search for Him."

"But it would, dear, most essentially; for you would be going after him by the way of holiness, and that is the very surest path by which He may be found."

"Well, if you think so, Mary, I will do what you consider right, and ask my husband to let me go to him, bitter though it will be to do it; but from the moment that you told me of John Pemberton's life and death the whole world has seemed changed to me, and I feel as if nothing was of any consequence, except to win eternal life in the love of God, if only it be possible to me."

"You have taken the first and surest step towards that now, dearest Laura, for you have proved your absolute sincerity; and I have the strongest hope that not only will you win the higher blessing which you seek, but that even in the very return to your husband which you so dread, you will find more of earthly happiness than you could anywhere else."

It is not a very bright prospect at present," said poor Lurline with a sad smile; "but, Mary, if I take this painful step according to your advice, I may, I think, ask you if you would help me to gratify one strong desire which I have in connection with it."

"I am sure I shall be only too glad if I can help you in any way; what is it that you wish?"

"It is that I might stand just once by the grave of John Pemberton before I leave Europe never to return to it, which will be the case if I rejoin my husband."

"I think that might be managed with very little difficulty," said Mary. "As it happens, I had thought of proposing that, as soon as you were able for the journey you should go to Paris with nurse Parry, for she is anxious to go back and attend to Madame Brunot's children, who are not very well, and you would be more comfortable in many ways there than you could be by remaining here."

"Oh, I am so glad it can be," said Laura, "but is there any hope that you could be there yourself, Mary? I would rather go with you than with any one else to visit that sacred grave."

"I think that too could be arranged," answered Mary, "for Bertrand has promised to take me to Paris in a few weeks to see a monument which we are having erected over John's resting place, and we could time our journey so as to meet your wish."

"Thank you so much, dearest Mary; how good you are to me! Well, at least, I will obey you now without delay, and write that painful letter. Mr. Brant will be surprised indeed when he receives a petition from me to be taken back by him."

"Surprised and pleased," said Mary, smiling, as she kissed her, and felt she had gained a great step in Laura's reformation.

(To be continued.)

THE Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge has in preparation a series of monographs on the Fathers and their writings. The series is to be called, "The Fathers, for English Readers." Six of the volumes are in hand, having been entrusted, we learn, to eminent patristic scholars of Oxford and Cambridge.