



CHAPTER X—Continued.

"The river," thought Constance, white with horror: "the ruins are only a mile away from the river."

She ran along the romantic pathway which followed the river bank, for about half a mile, and there ascended the steep hill on the slope of which stood the battered old shell which had once been a feudal castle, with dungeons beneath its stately halls, and a deep and sacred well for the safe putting away of troubous enemies.

Constance crept up the old stairs on this balmy September day, in the mellow afternoon sunshine, solitary, silent, deserted. There was no trace of nurse or child in the grassy court or on the crumbling old rampart. Yes, just where the rampart looked down upon the river, just at that point where the short, submerged grass sloped deepest, Constance Sinclair found a token of her child's presence—a toy dog, white, fleecy, and deliciously untrue to nature—an animal whose shapeless beauty had been the baby Christabel's delight.

Constance gave a little cry of joy.

"They have been here, they are somewhere near," she thought, and then, suddenly, in the sweet summer stillness, the peril of this particular spot struck her—that steep descent—the sunken, swayed, slippery as glass, the deep, swift current below—the other loneliness of the scene—no help at hand.

"Oh, God!" she cried, "the river, the river!"

She looked round her with wild, beseeching eyes, as if she would have asked all nature to help her in this great agony. There was no one within sight. The nearest house was a cottage on the bank of the river, about a hundred yards from the bottom of the slope. A narrow foot-path at the other end of the rampart led to the bank, and by this path Constance hurried down to make inquiries at the cottage.

The door was standing open, and there was a noise of several voices within. Some one was lying on a bed in a corner, and a group of peasant women were round her ejaculating compassionately.

"Das arme Madchen. Ach, Himmel! Was geht es?" and a good deal more of a spasmodic and sympathetic nature. A woman's garments, dripping wet, were hanging in front of the stove, beside which sat an elderly vine-dresser with stolid countenance smoking his pipe.

Constance Sinclair put the women aside and made her way to the bed. It was Melanie who lay there, wrapped in a blanket, sobbing hysterically.

"Melanie, this is my child!"

The girl shrieked and turned her face to the wall.

"She risked her life to save it," said the man in German. "The current is very rapid under the old Schloss. She plunged in after the baby. I found her in the water, clinging to the branch of a willow. If I had been a little later she would have been drowned."

"And the child—my child?"

"Ach, mein Gott!" exclaimed the man, with a shiver. "No one has seen the poor child. No one knows."

"My child is drowned."

"Lieber Frau," said one of the women, "the current is strong. The little one was at play on the rampart. Its foot slipped, and it rolled down the hill into the water. This good girl ran down after it, and jumped into the water. My husband found her there. She tried to save the child; she could do no more. But the current was too strong. Dear lady, be comforted. The good God will help you."

"No, God is cruel," cried Constance. "I will never see Him or believe in Him any more."

And with this blasphemy, wrung from her tortured heart, a great wave of blood seemed to rush over Constance Sinclair's brain, and she fell senseless on the stone floor.

CHAPTER XI.

GETTING OVER IT.

Baby Christabel was drowned. Of that fact there could not be a shadow of doubt in the minds of those who had loved her, although the sullen stream which had swallowed her lovely form refused to give it back. Perhaps the lovelies had taken her for their play-fellow, and transformed her mortal beauty into something rich and strange.

Anyhow, the thoughts that dragged the river did not drown up the golden hair, or the sad drowning eyes that once danced with joyous life. And if anything could add to Constance Sinclair's grief it was this last drop of bitterness—the knowledge that her child would never rest in hallowed ground, that there was no quiet grave on which to lay her aching head and feel nearer her darling, no spot of earth on which she could press her lips and fancy she could be heard by the little one lying in her pure shroud below, asleep on Mother Earth's calm breast.

No, her little one was driven by winds and waves, and had no resting-place under the weary stars.

Melanie Dupont, when she recovered from the horror of that one dreadful day, told her story clearly enough. It was the same story she had told the peasant woman whose husband rescued her. Baby Christabel had been playing on the rampart, Melanie holding her securely, as she believed, when the little one, attracted by the sight of a butterfly, made a sudden spring—alas! madame knew not how strong and active the dear angel was, and how difficult it was to hold her sometimes—and slipped out of Melanie's arms on to the rampart—which was very low just there, as madame might have observed—on to the grass, and rolled and rolled down to the river. It was all as quick as thought; one moment and the angel's white frock was floating on the stream. Melanie tore down, she knew not how; it was as if heaven had given her wings in that moment. The white frock was still floating. Melanie plunged into the river; ah! but what was her life at such a time?—nothing. Alas! she tried to grasp the frock, but the stream swept it from her; an instant and one

saw it no more. She felt herself sinking, and then she fainted. She knew nothing until she woke in the cottage where madame found her.

Melanie was a heroine in a small way after this sad event. The villagers thought her a wonderful person. Her master rewarded her handsomely, and promised to retain her in his service till she should choose to marry. Her mistress was as grateful as desirous can be for any service.

The light of Constance Sinclair's life was gone. Her natural source of joy turned to a sad strain of bitterness. A dull and blank despair took possess of her. She did not speak out to her grief. She struggled against it bravely, and she would accept no one's compassion or sympathy. One of her married sisters, a comfortable matron with half a dozen healthy children in her nursery, offered to come and stay with Mrs. Sinclair; but this kindly offer was refused almost uncivilly.

"What good could you do?" asked Constance. "If you spoke to me of my darling I should hate you, yet I should always be thinking of her. Do you suppose you could comfort me by telling me about your herd of children, or by repeating bits of Scripture, such as people quote in letters of condolence? No; there is no such thing as comfort for my grief. I like to sit alone and think of my pet, and be wretched in my own way. Don't be angry with me, for I am too fragile. I sometimes feel as if I hated the world, but happy mothers need not do."

Gilbert Sinclair endured the loss of his little girl with a certain amount of philosophy. In the first place she was not a boy, and had offended him ab initio by that demerit. She had been a pretty little darling, no doubt, and he had had his moments of fondness for her; but his wife's idolatry of the child was an offense that had rankled deep. He had been jealous of his infant daughter. He put on mourning and expressed himself deeply affected, but his burden did not press heavily. A boy would come, perhaps, and by and make amends for this present loss, and Constance would begin her baby worship again.

Mr. Sinclair did not know that for some hearts there is no beginning again.

Martha Briggs recovered health and strength, but her grief for the lost baby was genuine and unmistakable. Constance offered to keep her in her service, but this favor Martha declined with tears.

"No, ma'am, it's best for both that we should part. I should remind you of—here a burst of sobs supplied the missing name—and you'd remind me I'll go home. I'm more grateful than words can say for all your goodness; but, oh, I hate myself so for being ill. I never, never, shall forgive myself—never."

Constance went back to Davenant in her mistress' train, and there parted with her to return to the parental roof, which was not very far off. It was not so with Melanie. She only had her mistress more devotedly after the loss of the baby. If her dear lady would let her remain with her as her own maid, she would be proud of it.

"I shall do my best to oblige you, Gilbert; but perhaps I might have been a better wife if you had let me take life my own way."

TO BE CONTINUED.

A MODERN HEROINE.

How She Stopped a Driver's Brutal Treatment of a Horse.

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