Back to Life and Love;

OR, WAITING THROUGH WEARY YEARS.

CHAPTER X.—(Cont'd)

They called her mad. Her mania was harmless enough, but they were afraid of her. Mad people were very uncertain. Sometimes they broke out very dangerously, or fatally, and cut throats, and set houses on fire. And so they cast about for some means of securing this woman who told them that she was helped every day in her work by her spirit child.

They dared not turn her out of doors now. She might come back some night and burn down the house over their heads.

Nor could they send her to prison, for she had committed no offence.

So they cast about for some legal method of restraining her, and mean time they watched her very closely.

They detected nothing in her, unusual, except a tendency to sleep walking. They found that she often arose in the night and accomplished great feats of labor while in a state of somnambulency, but when taxed in the morning with her nightly performances, she would firmly deny that she had ever stirred out of her bed, and as firmly maintain that her spirit child had done the work.

On this ground they charged her with insanity, and lived in constant fear of her doing them some fatal injury, and they watched her day and night, and studied how they should rid themselves of her with safety.

At length it occurred to Carl Berger to write to the only person Marie Serafinne had ever referred to as a friend—named, Mr. Ismael Worth, of Richmond.

Mr. Berger wrote a letter and posted it himself.

The letter was answered by Is-
The letter was answered by Ish-

He came down to the farm and expressed much interest in the Marie Serafinne whom he had never forgotten, but whom he always remembered as the most interesting client he had ever been called upon to defend.

He told the Bergers nothing of her trial at Pine Cliffs, but he called himself a friend, and asked to see her.

She was sent in to him.

The meeting between Marie and the benefactor who had saved her life, was very affecting.

Marie Serafinne wept and kissed his hands and would have kissed the soles of his shoes, if he would have permitted it.

He asked her about herself, and she told him of her long wanderings and of her finding a home at length at Witch Elms, of the hard work that had worn her almost to death until the last year, when her spirit child had helped her, adding in relation to this astounding information—"I know you will think I am crazy, Mr. Worth, for indeed I should have thought so, two years ago, of any one who should have told me such a thing of themselves, but indeed I am not crazy, Mr. Worth. And I know that my child is now a maiden beautiful and strong, who lives in the spirit world, but comes daily to help me with my hard work in this!"

"Have you ever seen her?" inquired Mr. Worth, humoring her fancy.

"No, never seen her! but I have heard her sweet voice and felt her soft hand, and more than all, I have perceived her presence through some sense that I do not myself understand and cannot therefore describe," she answered firmly.

Ishamel Worth did not dispute her words. He fell into deep thought. He was sufficiently interested in this case to consent to remain twenty-four hours in the farm house to attend to it.

Later on the same evening, while Marie Serafinne was in the kitchen preparing supper, he had an interview with Mr. and Mrs. Berger, in their common sitting-room. He told them that their young friend was probably a somnambulist who did not understand her own case, a condition which would account rationally for everything that was otherwise inexplicable in her case; that her mind was certainly in an abnormal condition and that she required special medical treatment. He would recommend her removal to the "Good Samaritan Asylum for the Insane," and would himself undertake to persuade her to go there, where also, he would cheerfully defray all the expenses of her treatment.

And thus it was arranged through the benevolence of Ishmael Worth, that poor Marie Serafinne entered as a first class patient the famous Asylum of the Good Samaritan.

There was, however, a secret known to Ishmael Worth, regarding his poor protegee, that he did not care to confide either to the Berger family or to Marie Serafinne herself. For he could not tell the Berger family without bringing to light and exposing all Marie Serafinne's early sorrows and humiliations; and he could not tell Marie herself without inflicting upon her bitter grief and regret. The secret was this—that her husband had turned up, six months after her departure from Pine Cliffs, where he heard with horror and amazement of her trial for the murder of her own infant child. He learned farther that though she had been acquitted by the jury, she had been actually driven from her native village by the force of public reprobation! He then sought far and wide for news of his lost wife, but found none.

He at length went to Richmond to confer with the noble and humane counsel who had gratuitously defended her.

But Ishmael Worth was as much shocked as was Talbot himself at hearing of Marie's flight from Pine Cliffs. He could give no information of the fugitive; but he offered every assistance in his power towards tracing her.

In the presence of the man stricken with grief and remorse, Ishmael Worth forbore to express the detestation he had felt for the heartless desertion which had plunged the poor young wife into such unutterable horrors.

And soon he felt glad of his forbearance, when Talbot, in a voice broken down by sorrow, explained the reason of his apparent abandonment of his wife.

He had left her, he said, in a fit of boyish anger, because she refused to leave her selfish and grasping old grandam, to go with him to his own home in the city.

But when he reached his home his short lived anger was succeeded by compunctions and grief, and he wrote an affectionate letter to Marie. But he never got an answer to that letter, which of course was never received by Marie Serafinne. After waiting a week, he wrote a second letter; but before there was time to hope for an answer to that, he received a letter from Leeds, in England, summoning him to the death bed of his father, who was sinking to the grave with a lingering disease. He wrote a third letter, apprising his wife of the necessity of his sudden voyage, and promising to return and claim her as soon as he possibly could get away.

He went to England and to the city of Leeds, where his father was a wealthy manufacturer.

He was detained there many weeks in attendance on the death bed of his only surviving parent, and even after having closed his father's eyes and laid his body in the grave, he was detained many weeks longer in settling up the vast estate to which he was the sole heir.

He had no taste for the business at which his father had made a fortune, so he sold it out to a good company, and with the proceeds of the sale he returned to this country a very wealthy man, to invest his money and to claim his wife.

The dreadful news of her trial for infanticide met and nearly killed him. In leaving her, he had not had the faintest suspicion that she was likely to become a mother. How overwhelming then was the horrible information that she had borne a child, and had been tried for its murder, and that she had fled from her native village, pursued by the reprobation of the whole community!

"See here, Mr. Worth," he said, in conclusion—"If you blame me without measure, for all the woe my carelessness has caused, you will do right. But, if you think me now remorseless, look at my hair. I am twenty-three years old. When I came back from the old country I had not a gray hair in my head. Look at it now!"

His hair was, indeed, half gray, and his face was that of a careworn, grief-bowed, middle-aged man!

"I pity you from the bottom of my heart. But we must not lose our time in idle regrets. We must try to find your wife," said Ishmael Worth earnestly.

And they did try to find her. They advertised widely, offering large rewards for any information respecting her. But Marie Serafinne, buried in the lonely farm house among the mountains of the northwest corner of Virginia, where no traveller ever called and no newspaper ever came, could not be found by advertisement.

At length, Mr. Talbot started on a tour of search in person. He began at Pine Cliffs and traced her to Wendover, but there he lost the clue, and never found it again.

At the end of three years he reappeared at Mr. Worth's office in Richmond. He had given up the search in despair, and was going to Italy to try and divert his thoughts from remorse that was deranging his mind, by studying the different schools of art at Rome.

He took leave of Mr. Worth, and embarked by the next outward bound steamer. Since that, eleven years had passed, during which Ishmael Worth had heard nothing further from Talbot. He did not even know if the artist was then living; and in fact, from Talbot's long silence, Mr. Worth rather inclined to the belief that he was dead.

Such was the explanation that Ishmael Worth gave to the physician in charge of the asylum, at the time of his placing Marie Serafinne under his care; but which he withheld from Marie herself, lest it should only bring her sorrow and regret, until he would, by writing to our consuls abroad, seek and find some definite news of Talbot's fate.

CHAPTER XI.

"And this is all?" I inquired, as the doctor finished his story.

"Yes; for she remains precisely in the same state in which she was when she entered the institution; and her circumstances and prospects are the same.

"Mr. Worth has written, I believe, to every American minister and every consul in Europe, Asia, and Africa, without obtaining any news of the present whereabouts of the artist Talbot. He is still pursuing his investigations, but with little hope of success. The last heard of Talbot was, that he had spent a winter, eleven years ago, in Rome, and had left in the spring for a tour in Switzerland. There all trace of him was lost."

"But she is happy," I said, with a sigh of relief.

"Yes; her hallucination makes her happy," he answered.

It was after ten o'clock and I got up and thanked Dr. Abbot for his story, and bade him good-night.

I looked in at the nursery, on my way to my room, to see what had kept my cousin Nellie away from the drawing-room all the evening. I found her still engaged with her teething baby, to whom the doctor was just administering some simple medicine. I bade them good-night also, and went on to my room to go to bed and dream of Marie Serafinne.

The next morning every trace of the night-storm had disappeared.

The sky was perfectly clear; the air keen and cold.

It was good Christmas weather; and Christmas was drawing near.

I joined the family at breakfast; and after breakfast, at my own request, I was permitted to make a visit to Marie Serafinne, attended by young Doctor Abbott.

We found Marie sitting by the window of her room, looking out over the wintry sea.

She silently extended her hands to us, and her face was so radiant with happiness, that the young doctor exclaimed:

"Why, Marie, you look as if you were delighted to see us."

"I am. I have had much good news."

"Ah! indeed! What news have you had, Marie, and who brought it to you?" inquired the doctor, humoring her, as if she had been a baby.

Marie Serafinne's voice sank to a low tone, as she answered:

"My child brought me the news. Before I was well awake this morning, I heard her sweet voice close to my ear. She said to me, 'Do you know you will be married soon? I do.'"

"So you are to be married, Marie? It must be to me, then, for I am the only young man who ever comes to see you. Are you going to marry me, Marie?" inquired the young doctor.

She looked at him in grave surprise for a minute, and then answered, gently.

"No, Dr. Abbott; of course not. There is only one in the world I can possibly marry, and that one is not you."

"I am very sorry," said the young man, laughing good-humoredly, as he arose to attend me from the room.

In the corridor outside we met Dr. Hamilton, who was hurrying toward us in considerable agitation.

"Have you seen Marie Serafinne this morning?" he hastily inquired.

"We have just left her," answered Dr. Abbott.

"How is she?"

"Not quite so well this morning. A little excited. Thinks she has had a fresh communication from her child."

"Ah! ah! I am sorry to hear that! especially just now. The fact is, Mr. Worth is down-stairs, and with him a stranger, who has come to see Marie Serafinne."

"Stop!" said I, breathlessly; "a stranger to see Marie Serafinne? You don't mean to say that he is—he is—"

"Her missing husband? Yes, that is just exactly who he is. But I must see Marie Serafinne myself before I can permit her to be excited by such a visit," answered the doctor, as he went past us, and entered Marie's room.

We waited anxiously in the corridor for his return.

At the end of ten minutes he came out with a look of astonishment on his face.

"Would you believe it? She was prepared for this visit! She received me smilingly, told me she knew what I had come to announce, that her child had told her about it! So you see I had nothing to do but to ask her when she would receive Mr. Talbot. She answered, with delight, that she would receive him now!"

"And are you going to take him up to her room?" rather anxiously inquired Dr. Abbott.

"Yes, immediately," answered the elder physician, as he preceded us down stairs.

We all went into the drawing-room together, where we found Mr. Worth and the stranger in conversation with my cousin, Eleanor.

Mr. Worth I had seen before, and so I greeted him as an old acquaintance. He introduced his companion, Mr. Talbot.

And I curtsied to a tall spare, grey-haired man really but thirty-seven years of age, but looking fifty, and very unlike the raven-haired, dark-eyed young Adonis of fourteen years ago, who had fascinated the little beauty of Cliff Cottage nearly to her destruction.

We had scarcely exchanged the usual words of greeting when Dr. Hamilton invited Mr. Talbot to walk up stairs with him, and they left the room together.

Mr. Worth remained with us.

So none of us saw the meeting between the long-severed husband and wife. But we afterwards heard something about it. We heard that Dr. Hamilton had left Mr. Talbot at the door of his wife's room, and that the artist had entered that room alone.

She was expecting him, and she received him with calm delight.

But he was quite overcome by the sight of her, and by the remembrance of the terrible suffering he had brought upon her. And when he would have humbled himself at her feet, and implored her pardon for the great wrongs he had done her, and besought her to listen to his explanation of his apparent abandonment, she prevented him by gently replying that she was well assured he had never been in fault, and that she needed to hear no defence from his lips.

The next day Mr. Talbot removed his beautiful wife from the asylum. Mr. Worth accompanied them as far as New York, when they embarked for Liverpool, because Mr. Talbot had determined to fix their future residence in England, where the terrible story of Marie Serafinne's early life was unknown.

* * * * *

Some years have passed since their settlement in London. I have heard of Mrs. Talbot recently as a spirit medium of great power. She shows no signs of mental derangement, unless it be her persistent belief that she is in constant communication with her spirit-child. But if that belief is a proof of insanity, there are about half a million of lunatics at large, holding seances, exhibiting signs and wonders, and calling themselves Modern Spiritualists.

THE END.

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