

because all things it contains move together, so the beholder is unable by comparison with objects of petty dimensions, to judge of the vastness of St. Peter's.

The building of this great basilica was continued during the reigns of forty-three Popes, and extended close upon three centuries and a half. A description of its wonders is thus given by the Very Rev. Canon Pope in his work *Holy Week in the Vatican*:—"The Church is 610 feet in length; the height of the nave is 150 feet; the diameter of the cupola is 193 feet; the height of the dome inside, from the marble pavement to the base of the lantern, is 400 feet, and to the top of the cross 430. The marble, founts, sculpture, and mosaics with which the interior is decorated, are of priceless value. The weight of the dome is 55,428 tons; more than 30,000 lbs. weight of iron was used in its construction. The space of ground covered by the buildings is 240,000 square feet, about eight English acres! Immediately under the dome stands the Papal high altar; it is surmounted by the baldacchino, which is supported by four richly decorated spiral columns of solid bronze, and is 93 feet in height; the gilding alone of the decorations cost 40,000 scudi, or Roman crowns; the entire cost of this grand canopy was 100,000 scudi. Beneath repose the holy relics of the Apostles enclosed in a gorgeous shrine. Before it gold and silver ever burning lamps are suspended, and around the confessional 112 large brass lamps burn for ever, day and night. The general view of the interior of the basilica unveils to the eye an astounding perspective of wonders and beauties from the pavements of the richest marbles ingeniously disposed, to the towering altitudes of the concave dome studded with the richest mosaics, elaborate bronzes, sacred relics of antiquity, Peter's chain, Veronica's handkerchief, Christ's cross, many precious ornaments, and sculptural works from the chisels of the greatest masters, and specimens of all that is wonderful in art."

Yet however grand the Church—until within the last few years it was but the fitting scene for the ceremonies that were yearly celebrated there. Thither from all parts of the world flocked those whose circumstances permitted them to do so; and whatever difficulties or hardships they may have encountered by the way, they felt that all was atoned for during the wondrous devotions of Holy Week, and the glories of the Easter. But a sacrilegious hand was interposed; an usurper seized upon the sceptre of the Popes, and a cloud obscured the face of the heavens. No longer is the voice of the Great High Priest heard blessing from the loggia, but blasphemies and the sound of impious revelry are loudly echoed throughout the seven hills. For how long shall it be?—Who can tell? Until the time appointed has been accomplished. The hour is approaching surely, howsoever it may seem to delay, when the "proud" shall be scattered once more "in the imagination of their hearts," and the lofty dome that shelters the relics of the Apostles shall resound with the "Te Deum" of the Church of God.

HAWTHORNDEN.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AFTER STORM COMES SUNSHINE.

"Yes," replied his attendant quietly, "what is it?"

"Captain Hart—," interrogated the Sister, as a light seemed to break upon her mind, like a flash from an unseen cloud; her own voice slightly trembling. "Is it Captain Hartland?"

"Aleck is what she called him," he said wanderingly.

"Yes, tell me what I shall write for Captain Alexander Hartland," inquired the Sister, realising the need of haste.

The man slowly raised his hand to his forehead, as if to collect his scattered senses, and bringing it down upon the paper with all the force of which he was capable, he said with a terrible oath, "Tell him I deceived him; she was never mine:" and again his mind wandered.

Sister Angela hesitated but a moment; enough had been said already to lift the dark cloud from Laura's heart; she felt this, as she looked at the miserable man before her, striving with the few gasps of his flickering life to undo his own wicked labor for years. She knew only pity for him, and she prayed to the good God, if peradventure there were yet hope for this soul, about to appear before his judge. It was some moments before he again opened his eyes, or rallied from the state of unconsciousness into which he had relapsed. The Sister had written on the paper, "I protest in my dying hour, that Laura Hartland is innocent of that of which her husband accuses her." Once more he opened his eyes, still clear with the light of reason, and with evident anxiety turned towards her, while she, stooping over him, read the paper distinctly.

"More," he said, eagerly; "I seized the ring, their wedding-ring; when she lay helpless in a swoon." This was added, and with the last energies of a strong nature, by a powerful effort of will, he snatched the pencil and signed his name, "Etienne Le Compte," almost as legibly as in his palmist days. This done, he sunk rapidly; all efforts to turn his mind to anything beyond this life were useless; all that night he breathed still, but did not speak, and his pulse was imperceptible. Prayers constant and fervent were said for this soul which seemed to have abandoned God; but he sunk away and made no sign; having lived as the fool liveth, he died as the fool dieth. Sister Angela had no time, directly to make use of the intelligence she had gained; the pestilence raged more and more, and lest she should be stricken down in the midst of her labors, she imparted the precious secret to her Father Confessor, with the understanding that if she were taken away, he was to reveal it to those most interested. But at length the early frosts of autumn checked the raging scourge, and her first care was for Captain Hartland. The difficult task of bringing back her thoughts to the living was accomplished, and this letter was dispatched.

"New Orleans, September, 18—.

"Captain A. Hartland:

"My dear Sir,—It is my pleasing duty to inform you, that the cloud which has hung like a pall over your life, has been lifted by

the hand of death. I enclose the evidence of your wife's innocence, which I have long felt was unquestionable. I will only add, that this paper was written by me at the request of the signer, and the name was subscribed by him almost in the agonies of death. Praying our dear Lord that this may relieve your heart of a heavy burden, I am, very truly, yours,

ANGELA."

The letter reached the residence of Colonel Hartland in due time, and came into the hands of the Doctor, who eyed it suspiciously, and not without some curiosity; recognising as he did the hand-writing at once, there could be no other like it to him, even now, and this was the first time he ever felt an impulse to open a letter not addressed to himself. He turned it over and over again—no, there it was, fairly written in Dora's clear, bold hand, "Captain Alexander Hartland, U.S.N." "Ah, how shut out she must be from us all," he said to himself, "not to know that Aleck has resigned."

His brother was at Hawthorndean, that dear paradise for souls wearied with contending against the ills of life, and the letter was at once forwarded to him in his retreat. Here he had built himself a tiny cottage below the lawn, where he could look up to the mansion of his friends, and be alone when he chose. He was in the rustic arbor which Harry had planned, now covered with vines of his own planting; he was going over the dark days of the past, thinking, O, how relentlessly, of the knowledge that this day years ago had brought to him; the anniversary had never been forgotten, the ring still rested on his finger, and a ghastly bitter smile spread over his sunken pallid cheek as he gazed at it. "Never, never!" he said, in a cold, stern voice, as if replying to some inward pleading. "No, never!"

A sound of a footstep met his ear, and he arose hastily; it was only the blind boy, his chief companion, bringing him a letter, which he held most carefully in both his hands, as if it were made of some brittle substance. The Captain took it carelessly, looked at the post-mark, then turned to the dear boy, whom he had learned to love with almost paternal affection. He thought the missive was from some of his old navy friends, and he had hardly curiosity to read it, so he slowly broke the seal, turning to Willie, and holding one arm about him as he read. "Good God!" he exclaimed, when he saw the purport of the letter, the blood rushing to his heart.

Willie turned anxiously to his friend, and stroked his beard with his small hand. "Uncle Aleck, does it tell you bad news?" inquired the child.

"Who knows?" replied the Captain, abstractedly, his voice trembling as he spoke.

"Let's go to mamma," said the boy, affectionately, "she will know."

They went together, hand in hand, Willie really the stronger of the two, in that silent, rapid walk. Aleck Hartland gave the letter and its enclosure to Mrs. Benton, and hurried away into the library, as if afraid even of her presence; overwhelmed with mingled emotions, all of them more or else tinged with the doubts and distrust of the long years of darkness; distance, time were annihilated, and the hours of those dreadful days in a far-off land were alone remembered. Presently, there came a low tap at the door, and a gentle voice, speaking his name; he arose to meet Mrs. Benton, but staggered to a seat, unable even to offer her a chair.

"This is so wonderful, such a heaven-sent blessing," she said, coming towards him, her face shining with delight, and putting her hand on his bowed head. "Such blessed news! Indeed I am so grateful to the good God for you; you will seek out your wife at once."

"But I have wronged her bitterly," he said, his head still bowed on his arm—"wronged her constantly in thought and deed, all these years of suffering."

"Yes, Aleck," she replied; "years of terrible suffering for you both, let us hope it may increase your reward, I know it will; and O, what a weight this will take from many hearts; dear Rosa always had faith in Laura's innocence."

"Rosine is a saint," he said, looking up for the first time; "think what she was to me in those first horrible months. God bless her for it—but I must not wait," he added, rising. Eagerly, hope, strength, had returned with human sympathy; before night he was in the city, with an invitation to bring Laura immediately to Hawthorndean. He did not pause at his father's residence, he made no delay till he stood at the entrance of the House of the Infant Jesus. The little child who opened the door shook her small head when he inquired for Mrs. Hartland; and after several ineffectual efforts to explain himself, he asked for the Sister Superior, and was forthwith ushered into her presence. The calm, subdued, chastened spirit of Sister Agnes was melted by the intelligence, and tears glistened in her eyes, as Captain Hartland imparted to her the news which had so changed everything for him; but Laura was in New Orleans, to leave soon—it was uncertain how soon, but probably before he could reach there, and she advised his waiting a few days. He wait! he sit still! while she whom he had so deeply and tenderly loved was repudiated! Never. He rushed to his father's house, meeting Rosa at the door just going for a drive with Harry, who had lately returned from a long sojourn in the far west. Captain Hartland pulled them both back into the house, with an earnestness that made them fear for his senses, and taking from his memorandum book the letter of Sister Angela, he thrust it into Rosine's hand. Harry Greenwood stood by her side while she gave one glance through the lines, penetrating at once to their meaning, and turning to Aleck, who stood as if waiting to be gone, she clasped her arms about his neck, uttering no words but tears.

"Thank God," said Harry, as he closed the letter, "right must prevail; and what a joy to my dear sister Dora to be the instrument. Aleck, let me congratulate you; we will have a double wedding next month, Rosa, if Aleck can wait so long."