

THE
PILGRIMAGE OF BERENICE,

A
Record of Burnham Abbey.

~~19905~~

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TALES

ROUND

A WINTER HEARTH.

• BY

JANE AND ANNA MARIA PORTER.

In winter's tedious nights, sit by the fire
With good old folks; and let them tell thee tales.
SHAKSPEARE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

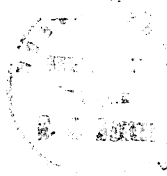
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TALES

ROUND A WINTER HEARTH.

THE PILGRIMAGE OF BERENICE.

Hush ! 'tis a ~~holy hour~~ ! the quiet room
Seems like a temple ; while yon soft lamp sheds
A faint and starry radiance through the gloom,
And the sweet stillness, down on bright young heads,
With all their clustering locks untouched by care,
And bowed, as flowers are bowed by night, in prayer.

HEMANS.

A RECORD ;

*By the Reverend Mother of the Burnham Cells,
of Saint Magdalen's at Jerusalem, to the Seven
Chantry Sisters of our Lady of Ockhoul.*

MY daughters ! while I live, you know
my entire affections are with you. But
when I am gone, I would yet leave a
memorial of myself in your bosoms, of a

2 THE PILGRIMAGE OF BERENICE,

more durable remembrance there, than the engraved stone that may monument my grave. It is not endowment of lands I bequeath ; for such this roof renders needless to you. Neither is it the sacred book, which has been my own solace from youth to age ; that, too, in accurate copy, was bestowed on each of you, by the same bounteous hand which first taught mine to form the like hallowed characters. No, my daughters, I prepare for you the history of yourselves ; that is, of woman's heart ; but tried, where yours have escaped ; — in the person of your benefactress Berenice. First, indeed, under refuge like this of yours, then on life's wide ocean.

But with that, or with the world, as those words relate to objects beyond this our little haven, you happily feel you have no link as sharers in the conflict. From all the heart-wearying hopes, and soul-cloud-

ing dreads of that troubled ocean, heaving constantly with the splendour of vain shows, or of gulf-sinking prospects, you are safe. These peaceful walls have sheltered you, since the earliest years of your orphan childhood; and will continue to do so, from the hour in which you break this seal, till that in which ye, too, shall rejoin me in the rest of Paradise. Read, then, this narrative, and learn what you have escaped. Read, and remember the long fostering care of her that made the record. For the manuscript is not to meet your eye, till mine, and hers who planted you here, are shut on mortal life. Read, and bless her memory, who provided you this tranquil homestead, from storms, which so nearly wrecked herself. Lay the lesson to your protected hearts, gratefully; and, teaching it to the young unprofessed maidens of our house, who come amongst us to learn Heaven's precepts to woman, send them

4 THE PILGRIMAGE OF BERENICE,

forth duly prepared to fulfil their duties ; as the cheering help-mates of them for whom their gentler aid was created. Do this, and I shall not have retraced in vain

THE PILGRIMAGE OF BERENICE.

The day-spring of her morn was brightness. She drew her first breath in the Holy Land ; and her earliest consciousness to existence, ~~was finding~~ herself the infant darling of a consecrated sisterhood like ourselves ; whose convent, under the title of the House of Saint Mary of Comfort, stood on the eastern side of the Mount of Olives, in a deep dell there, shaded by groves of that beautiful tree of peace which gives the mount its name. The gentle undulations of the ground immediately about the convent, bloomed a garden. Its mossy softness, and its grassy banks, returned to the light pressure of the passing footsteps, a fragrance that spread every where, from violets and other

sweet-breathing herbs budding in the pathway. Myrtles, roses, and the scented briars of Carmel, grew also in profusion; clothing that mountain glen with all the splendid hues of their various leaves and flowers, and adding a richer perfume to the already balmy air. A cool and limpid stream, watered this little Eden; social with the walkers on its banks, by its soft murmurs while it rippled along, through the waving sedges, and sighing lilies, in its bed. It was called the Tur, from its dove-like sounds. I have roamed delighted there, of moon-light nights and dewy mornings. For it is the home of my youth, as well as that of Berenice's, I am picturing to your eyes; and its features are fresh to me, as if I were now tracking them, step by step, with the fond, familiar recognition of an actual visit to their scenes.

That well-remembered stream, so sweetly solitary in some of its winding, narrowed paths, at its broadest expanse was deepest; and there a bridge, of one single arch, of very anciently-sculptured marble, crossed it, and led where our secluded vale, opening to the south, and hung with all the fruits of spring and autumn, formed the convent-refectory-garden. The orchard of Pharaoh's daughter, which, tradition says, Solomon the king planted on this very spot, could not have been more variously or amply furnished. The almond-tree, and the fig, the pomegranate, with the bright clustering vines and golden citron, grew from terrace to terrace, in ripening bowers over the strewn ground beneath, for any hand to gather them. And there, at even-tide, the joyous children from the cottages near, came on permission, and sported amidst the scattering blossoms, or regaled on

the abundant fallen fruit ; while the younger sisters of the convent, joined their plays with all the fellowship of mirth and innocence.

This might be called luxury ; but it was of nature's providing. In the structure of the convent itself, art had bestowed no pretension, though it had been erected during the imperial times of Constantine the Great, and by his pious mother. But it owed its continued existence, through the many evil days that followed those happier times, to that very humility of aspect. It offered no prize to the spoiler of cities, to turn out of his way to sack such anchorite walls ; and disdained, till forgotten, it remained as in a wilderness, a little chapel of refuge for the destitute. For none, then, trod Mount Olivet, but those who fled to sanctuary. Those dreadful times commenced, when the Saracen infidels first overran

the Christian empire of the East ; and they were numbering, with a blackening calendar, when the mercy of Heaven staid the calamity of the land, and a deliverer was appointed. Godfrey de Bouillon came with his heroes, and Jerusalem was again the emporium of the Christian world.

Still, even then, ~~this~~ little convent remained in the obscurity of its cherished seclusion ; for the comforted need not others to meddle with their joy. But on the fifteenth day of July, in each succeeding year, the anniversary of the Holy City's recovery by the Christian arms, ~~the curtain of separation~~ between these sequestered duties, and the contemplation of the great earthly memorials of our faith, seemed for awhile withdrawn ; and just as the dawn broke it was the custom of a ~~certain~~ number of the Sisters of Saint Mary's, to ascend their Mount to-

wards the southern side, and after traversing its peculiarly consecrated spots in that direction, proceed to the summit, where, viewing the Holy City, they stood uttering their hymns of praise. It was the privilege of each young disciple, on taking the white veil of preparation for a year's ministry in the sick wards of the hospital of St. John's at Jerusalem, to lead that pilgrim band; and there for the first time behold, though from afar, the spot of her votive duty. St. Mary's, in common with all the other convents adopted into the rule of that charitable commandery, sent thither its serving-sister, at the beginning of every autumn; and received her again, on the expiration of her year, either to assume the black veil of profession, or still to remain an assisting member in the preceptory, a nun, in every religious respect, excepting the vows.

10 THE PILGRIMAGE OF BERENICE,

Berenice, as she grew from childhood to youth, often contemplated the busy preparations for that sacred progress of the Mount, with the most animated desires to partake it. She, then, hourly heard talk of Jerusalem, the great parent city of “ the chosen people ;” whose history she had listened to with wonder, when a child, and afterwards studied daily, with deepening interest, in her own little Greek Bible. But what was yet dearer to the genuine devotions of her young and pure heart, it was the city where the Saviour of mankind had trod ; where his tears of tender mercy had bathed its stones ; where the tomb, which he had entered once, to unseal for ever, was yet to be beheld ! She had lived all the years her brief memory could register, within a few miles of these doubly-consecrated walls, and still the unexplored heights of Olivet reared themselves

in interdicting barrier, between her and the objects of her yearly increasing wishes. For each descending group from the annual pilgrimage, told her so much of the magnificent spectacle they had seen ; of the august bulwarks of Jerusalem, of the splendid domes, marking the site of the ancient temple, and the palace of David ; and, above all, that of the holy sepulchre ; beyond which the Christian banner, floating from the citadel top, protected the sacred places in a lasting sanctification. But, to the vivid curiosity of the young scholar, to the ardent piety of her innocent and grateful heart, another circumstance added a personal motive there ; augmenting to an almost impassioned yearning, her impatience for the day of her own permission to see what her companions so exultingly described.

On the morning of Berenice's sixteenth birth-day, Paula, the reverend command-