

GERALD DE LACEY'S DAUGHTER

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF COLONIAL DAYS

BY ANNA T. SADDLER

BOOK II CHAPTER III—CONTINUED GLADNESS AND TEARS

To Evelyn it seemed scarcely possible that the temperaments of the prospective bridegroom, which she divined to be both hard and cold, would harmonize with that of Polly. The two were fundamentally different, with a difference that could not be bridged over, and which, in the estimation of this keen observer, promised but little happiness for a girl of Polly's training and antecedents. Warm-hearted, affectionate, and with a nature that turned as if instinctively to what was bright, she had been the very idol of her grandmother ever since that lady had adopted her out of a household of many sisters and brothers and brought her up as her own. Evelyn well knew, however, that this betrothal, which was to be duly signed and sealed in the presence of numerous relatives of both parties and some intimate friends, was a serious matter. Once Polly had given her word, she would never recede from the position in which she had placed herself, and it would be worse than useless for her friend to point out those shoals and quicksands which she foresaw must lie ahead of her. So, impatiently wiping away the tears which would gather in her eyes, and which were not entirely, as Polly supposed, for the loss of her girlhood's friend, Evelyn took the most effectual method of cheering Polly by causing her to talk of the preparations that would soon be under way, and the festivities that would accompany the marriage.

"And Henricus will have the wedding fellow very speedily upon the betrothal," Polly informed her, and Evelyn thought she spoke somewhat ruefully. "Perhaps he is afraid I shall run away from him," she added with an effort at a laugh. Then looking not at Evelyn, but away over the garden: "And since I have given my promise I do not seem able to oppose him in anything. I feel as though he had bewitched me."

Though Evelyn did not comment on this information, it in no way surprised her. Her quick insight had made her aware that such would be always the case with Polly. Her influence over the man would cease with her consent to the marriage. And that marriage once an accomplished fact, she who had been a power and a force among the young associates would become and remain to the end of the chapter merely the wife of Henricus Laurens.

Polly, who was wonderfully brightened by the discussion of the wedding gaities and all the pretty clothes which were in course of preparation, said suddenly:

"And you must marry, too, Evelyn. Oh, if you would but decide to become the wife of Pieter, that dear Pieter who is so splendid a man, we could be married on the same day, dear, and from our house!"

There was a look on Evelyn's face that chilled the other's enthusiasm; it was so aloof, so mournful.

"I do not think I shall ever marry," she answered, "at least not for very long. And I fear much it can never be Pieter, although I love him dearly in quite another way."

Polly wondered if Evelyn's aspirations had soared higher, but that, as she instinctively felt, was not a subject for discussion.

"Happiness does not come my way," declared Evelyn, "though I have had pleasure and gaiety in abundance, and you well know I have enjoyed it."

While they stood thus, forming a lovely picture, Captain Ferrers came up the street with his quick, alert gait. The look with which he accompanied the action of taking off his hat to Evelyn, was quite unmistakable to the observer. Polly noticed too the slight tremor that passed over her friend, and the look of interest and excitement that came suddenly into her face.

"If that be he," reflected Polly sagely, "such a passion would be hopeless, even though he is plainly infatuated. And why must she let her thoughts stray from all those who have so much admired her, to these men of another world, who perchance will go away and forget her? Though no king," she added, in her loyal enthusiasm, "were too good for Evelyn."

"Mayhap, if I had not been here," she said, with a gaiety that was a trifle forced, "Captain Ferrers might have come in to pay his respects."

"No," said Evelyn, "though often enough he passes the door."

"To admire—the garden?" laughed Polly.

"Sometimes he has stopped for a word," remarked Evelyn, "but I have never asked him to enter the house."

She did not say what her reasons were, but she now more than ever held aloof from the young man, since the new provisions of the law might at any time, if it had not already done so, place her father and herself under the ban. She clearly perceived that, under such circumstances, it was not fitting that a member of His Excellency's household should be a visitor to their dwelling.

"Oh, life, life!" she exclaimed suddenly. "What a puzzle! What a tangled web it is! I make no doubt that for me it will grow harder. I am intended to walk in the shadows, Polly, as you are in the light."

With a swift, impetuous gesture, she threw her arms around her friend's neck and kissed her.

"How I shall miss you," she cried, "the friend whom I love above all others! How glad I am that your future is at least as safe and secure!"

CHAPTER IV THE PAST IS INVOKED

Polly Van Cortlandt had been right in her surmise that, but for her presence, Captain Ferrers would have entered the garden. It had been his intention to have a talk with Mr. de Lacey and at any rate to put him on his guard. For, though he was unaware of what Captain Prosser Williams had said to Evelyn, thereby showing a knowledge of her relations with the Indians, a conversation had taken place upon the previous evening between the two officers which had determined Ferrers upon an immediate course of action.

The two men had been smoking together on the roof of the Governor's dwelling—that same Whitehall which had been built by Governor Stuyvesant many years before when the town of New Amsterdam was still in its infancy. The closed in space upon the roof was a favorite lounging-place, especially for the men of the Household, and it chanced upon that occasion that these two, who were so ungenial, were left alone together. Though they were constantly being brought into contact, since they of all others mingled most freely with the towns people, there was but little intimacy between them. They usually avoided anything like confidential intercourse, and the silence between them remained for some time unbroken till Prosser Williams said abruptly:

"Have you any recollection, Ferrers, of having seen that traitor and knave, de Lacey, before?"

"I did not know," replied the other trying to speak carelessly, though he was instantly on the alert, "that there was a traitor or knave named de Lacey."

"We may differ as to terms," responded Captain Williams, "but probably you know full well to whom I refer. If not," he added presently, with a scarcely perceptible sneer, "I may refresh your memory by declaring that he is the father of Miss Evelyn de Lacey."

"Ah, indeed," said Captain Ferrers and his companion, striving hard to see his face in the light that was growing dim, continued:

"Indeed, I may have occasion to refresh your memory on other points as well. But one will suffice. "You are very kind," Ferrers answered with a certain grim civility. He was holding himself well in check.

"I asked you," went on the other, "if you had a remembrance of that man, if I will tell you at once that I have a very decided one, though I could not recall it to mind on that first occasion when together we saw, standing with Mistress de Lacey and her friend, the tall man whom we both remembered."

He waited, but Ferrers made no attempt to assist him conversationally, and he presently resumed his narrative:

"The occurrence to which I refer did not take place in these Colonies. It was in London and on the occasion of the entombment of King William, whom may God save!"

Ferrers bent his head as in duty bound, and the self-constituted narrator proceeded with his story.

"There was a tumult, and a man was handled roughly by the crowd for refusing to cry God save King William." There were other circumstances to which I need not refer, but I knew him then, and I know him now as a pestilent disturber. Having been in one of King James' regiments, he was forced to retire because of a wound. But to the last he made himself conspicuous. To the last he rendered such service as he might in public or private, to the Papist king."

"There was a malignant fire in his eyes, and a note of savage triumph in his voice, which caused Captain Ferrers to tremble for the fate of Mr. de Lacey and his daughter. But preserving a cool demeanor, he attempted to rally the other.

"You have, in truth, a wondrous memory," he said, "and I thank you for having given, in words so few and concise, a history which is common to most of us, to many a gallant gentleman."

He repeated the last words with an accent of bitter mockery, but Captain Ferrers, anxious to bear more, gave his attention in silence.

"He contrived to escape arrest, flying from place to place, though openly declaring in more than one place that he was a Catholic and acknowledged no King but James. It was discovered that he would fain have followed that monarch to France save for the wound by which he had been incapacitated. Further, it was learned that he had long been under suspicion as a pestilent disturber and dangerous emissary of James. He fled to these Colonies where he had been formerly in the service of the Papist, Donagan, and had been driven forth in the time of that excellent Protestant and loyal champion, Jacob Leisler."

"And how came it that you did not immediately recognize him?" inquired Ferrers, striving to maintain his calmness.

"For the reason that I had seen him but once, on that memorable occasion in London."

Ferrers laughed as he said: "You would make an excellent orator—I mean to say that you should have been detailed for secret service."

Prosser Williams reddened.

"I have a nose for disloyalty," he declared, "and I hold it as certain that such men as this cannot escape the displeasure of Lord Bellomont, especially since the late decree."

"His Excellency scarcely intends, I should presume," said Ferrers, controlling himself with an effort, "to deal with individual cases. The late decree was rather, I would opine, a large public measure to prevent the spread of the Romish religion."

Prosser Williams' eyes narrowed.

"It can be made to fit whomever it will," he replied significantly, "and this man who was dangerous yonder may easily become dangerous here."

"It seems peaceable enough now," remarked the other with apparent carelessness, "but such matters are scarcely in my department. I am a soldier, and no policeman."

"All members of His Excellency's Household must be such, if need demand," said Williams sententiously, with a venomous look at his companion.

"I hope my duty will be something better fitted for a gentleman," said Ferrers with a laugh, which Williams well understood and which goaded him to madness.

He answered with a cold and deadly malignity.

"Decree or no decree, this de Lacey is dangerous. He must be watched; if need be he must be arrested. Such an enemy of the King's Majesty should not be at large. Nor," he concluded, smiling unpleasantly, "can he be shielded by petticoats, however interesting."

Captain Ferrers was grave enough now and the rebuke which he administered to the other was scathing. After Ferrers had abruptly left him, Williams sat still and reflected, while his eyes wandered absently out over the Bay, silent and dark save for the stars which, strewn in the firmament, were reflected on its surface.

"There is a heavy score between us, Egbert Ferrers," Williams muttered. "And, if I mistake not, you will yourself supply the means to pay it."

It was this conversation that brought Captain Ferrers to the cottage which he, however, did not enter because of Polly Van Cortlandt's presence.

CHAPTER V THE WARNING

When Captain Ferrers paid his deferred visit, he was at once ushered into Mr. de Lacey's study, where the latter sat absorbed in his books. It was early afternoon and the sun's beams, slanting through the vine-covered trellis without the window, played in patches on the floor. Evelyn had gone out with Madame Van Cortlandt and Polly to pay some visits and take coffee at the house of some of their friends. The elderly ladies brought their knitting on these occasions, putting their heads together over the latest gossip of Manhattan, while the younger chatted gaily, their chief topic at present being Polly's betrothal and approaching marriage. Evelyn's father had been strongly of opinion that it was more essential than ever for the girl to keep out amongst the people and enter into such festivities as the summer season afforded, and thus ward off any suspicion that might attach to them under the Governor's edict.

To Ferrers it was a relief to find Mr. de Lacey alone. What he had to say, he considered, had best be said in the absence of Evelyn. Gerald de Lacey received his visitor with his usual easy courtesy. For some moments the two men talked of subjects of public interest, concerning either the old country or the new, but, at a slight pause in the conversation, the young man came to the point with a directness that pleased Gerald de Lacey.

"I trust," he began earnestly, "that you will hold me to be neither meddlesome nor intrusive when I say that I have come hither expressly to put you on your guard."

Though Mr. de Lacey could not help being startled, his demeanor was perfectly composed as he replied:

"And for that consideration I thank you."

"Remember," said the visitor, "I am not making any inquiry as to what bearing recent legislation, once it comes into force, may have upon your religious belief. Only I would beg of you to exercise the greatest caution."

He stopped and looked into the calm and still smiling face before resuming:

"Now that the feeling against persons of the Catholic faith, engendered largely by political strife, has become acute, and because of recent occurrence, I am convinced that something more than discretion will be necessary. Charges will be made against you, and in the present temper of men's minds—of those in high places, as witnessed by the law just passed—those charges will be pressed home."

"And the nature of these charges?" Mr. de Lacey inquired.

"Possibly you may remember," said Captain Ferrers "an occasion a dozen years ago in England when

His present Majesty was being acclaimed. There was a man, lately an officer in the Hussar regiment, who created a disturbance by leaping from a car and waving his hat, breaking into open declarations for King James and for the Catholic religion."

There was silence. Mr. de Lacey's face, flushing warmly at first, paled again. Captain Ferrers, who seemed to be studying the pattern of that carpet which had been brought over seas by the late Captain Kidd's "Antigua" in the days when that sea-rover was a peaceful trader, continued:

"That man, though it may be opined that he was lacking in worldly prudence, commanded all my admiration. I can feel even yet a thrill at the gallant act. Unhappily, though, I was not the only spectator. Others in that multitude may have shared my sentiments, but probably the majority held divergent views. It chanced that one of those latter, who was foremost in raising the hue and cry, is now in Manhattan. He professes to have recognized the malcontent, and such recognition he will have no scruple in using as a weapon against him. Under the present conditions that weapon might prove fatal."

"And you, sir," said Mr. de Lacey, in a voice full of emotion, "are willing to render service to that imprudent man, simply because you applauded, despite your better judgment, an insensate act?"

There was a slight embarrassment in Captain Ferrers' tone and manner as he answered frankly:

"My admiration for an act of loyalty would indeed have been a sufficient motive, but it is not my only one."

He saw that his hearer was listening with head slightly bent forward, and proceeded:

"It is due to you to mention that I have a more than common interest in Mistress Evelyn de Lacey. She attracted me from the very first moment of our meeting, and, perhaps rashly I have permitted myself to hope—"

But Mr. de Lacey shook his head in dissent.

"I do not perceive, Captain Ferrers," he interposed, "how detrimental under existing circumstances, and in your present position, such an alliance would be?"

"If Mistress Evelyn will but deign to consider my suit—the young man was beginning impetuously.

"But the other again interrupted him.

"If know Evelyn, she will never consent to bring misfortune upon any one, even though he be brave, and chivalrous enough to desire her favor. You would ruin yourself for what may after all prove to be but a passing fancy."

"Your daughter," replied Ferrers, with an emotion not to be misinterpreted, "is not one to excite a passing fancy."

Gerald de Lacey could not but acquiesce in this opinion, and he said:

"If that be so, so much the worse for you."

Then struck by a sudden thought he added quickly:

"I trust in God that he has not gone further than yourself, that Evelyn—"

His voice broke, and, though Captain Ferrers felt an exultant thrill of joy at the mere suggestion he answered gravely:

"I have spoken no word."

RETURN OF BROTHER SEBASTIAN

Brother Sebastian was tall, thin and homely. His features were painfully irregular, and only redeemed from positive ugliness by a pair of bright eyes that resembled nothing more than two blue pools of limitless depths. He was a man of much learning, but he had the innocence and simplicity of a child, which caused the thoughtless to misunderstand and underestimate him. He was industrious, devoted to his work, and, gazing into the liquid depths of those calm eyes, you would say that here was a man who was transparently honest; one without deceit or guile.

The Order with which he was connected was not called the Brothers of Benevolence, but that title comes so near expressing its aims and intentions that it may well serve the purpose of this veracious story. Its house was on the outskirts of Vigilles and had been there as far back as the memory of the oldest inhabitant. Its roots were deep in the soil, indeed; for it had been founded in the fifteenth century. The Brothers of the Order were plain men, who worked for the poor. They fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, lodged to the homeless, nursed the sick, and buried the dead. That was all, but their persistence in the work gave them the name of the Little Brothers of the Poor.

But while they labored thus day by day, unconscious equally of the praise or the censure of the world, other men, known as deputies, were busily engaged in redefining France to suit their own designs. Thus it came to pass that Colonel Hillaire called on Brother Sebastian and informed him that he and his companions must leave their home—that it was the decree of the State.

"But why?" asked the honest servant of God. "This is my dwelling and France is my birthplace, and I am happy and satisfied."

"It is the law. This is the twentieth century and we cannot permit you and your monks to endanger the Republic."

Sebastian shook his head slowly and sadly.

"You get out by eight o'clock tomorrow morning—you understand that?"

Colonel Hillaire tugged viciously at his great black mustache as he said this. He had a very red face, with the mark of a saber thrust on one side, and his left eyelid had a queer droop, which gave him a sinister look. Brother Sebastian looked at him steadily from out of his own unwavering blue eyes and said:

"But that would be a dreadful injustice—that would be flying in the face of God!"

Colonel Hillaire gave a shrill, merciless laugh. The droop in the eyelid made him repellent.

"God! We're through with that drive in France. It may do for women and children, but never again for men. We shall have only justice."

"Yet you would steal our property?"

The black-mustached one frowned.

"Beware of such talk. The State can not steal; it confiscates."

Sebastian was silent. If he had chosen to speak he might have said: "I began to see the wonderful minds of our statesmen. We pray to the God that created us—that makes us dangerous; feed the hungry—that endangers the Republic; nurse the sick and bury the dead—surely that constitutes treason in these enlightened days. It is a pity to drive Frenchmen from France, even though they be monks, but if the stars are to be blotted from heaven for a moment, a start somewhere. We must be broad, so we shall begin by denying the existence of God; we must have free thought; so we shall institute it by banishing all who do not think as we do."

Sebastian said none of these things. Instead he simply denied the right of a handful of men—who called themselves the Government—to rob them of their property, which they had acquired by generations of toil. They resisted eviction, but it was a passive resistance, and the next morning they were driven from their home amid an encircling line of their townfolk, who made a great demonstration in their favor, but offered only a feeble fight against the pointed bayonets of the soldiers under the command of the fierce-mustached and much-be-medaled Colonel Hillaire.

They had entered the religious house penniless and they left it in the same condition. They had kept their vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The threadbare cassocks, the serene countenances, and the attitude of non-hostility toward their persecutors proved the honesty and sincerity of their pledges. As they approached a turn in the road Brother Sebastian turned his head to take a last sorrowful look at the building which had housed them for so many years and where they had done so much for the glory of God and the good of their fellow-creatures. That one look dramatized the tragedy of a human soul—the look of a son thrust from the house of his fathers. It was agony personified; it was grief sanctified—it was the unspoken forgiveness of a crime that cried to Heaven for vengeance.

"Cheer up, Brother," cried a peasant, emboldened by righteous anger; "you will return to France, because she needs you more than you need her."

It was the voice of prophecy, but to Colonel Hillaire it came also like the voice of conscience. It made him ugly; it roused the slumbering devils in his breast. He jabbed his sharp sword at the slowly moving monk and made a rent in the old cassock.

"Hurry!" he shouted, with an oath. "I haven't time to fool away. I've more important work to do than running monks out of France."

And his words came true, but in a manner that he had never dreamed. Before the gentle breezes of summer had given way to the melancholy tints of autumn the great European war was declared, and the accoutred and booted enemy was knocking at the gates of Paris. The soldiers of the Republic were called upon to fight armed men, and priests and nuns were given no respite. And nowhere was there greater consternation and terror than in the ancient city of Vigilles. It fell to the lot of Colonel Hillaire to defend the place, and he went about his work with the energy and resolution of a man who knew not the meaning of fear. He was a great soldier in the human and worldly sense of the word. He was capable and determined; he worked day and night; he reinforced the defenses; he was the lone hope and salvation of the people. Every able-bodied man was pressed into service—and still there was a crying need for more.

It was then that the seeming miracle occurred. Colonel Hillaire was hourly expecting the attack. He stood there studying a map when an orderly dashed up and informed him that the enemy was within five or six miles of Vigilles. He said that they were coming in large numbers, that they were well-provisioned and armed, and that every minute detail certified to their amazing preparedness, not the least of which were their olive-colored uniforms, which, matching the trees and shrubbery and general surroundings, prevented them from being conspicuous marks for the French sharpshooters. While he spoke a column of dust was seen to rise in the rear. It filled the colonel with alarm. Was he to be attacked from behind? But even before he could give his orders the cause of the commotion appeared within his gaze. It was a long, thin line of men tramping determinedly toward his headquarters. Presently the head of the queer single column came under his very eye, and he recognized—Brother Sebastian.

The monk was at the head of perhaps thirty members of his Order, all dust-covered, travel-stained, with torn cassocks and wearied faces. Colonel Hillaire, for all of his stern self-control, was bewildered. Was he to face a mutiny at home as well as meet the enemy from abroad? Brother Sebastian, tall, thin, and thoughtful, with set lips and mournful eyes, was saluting him.

"You—you here!" spluttered the colonel. "What do you mean by—"

But the monk interrupted him with a gesture that was imperious.

"My country needs me—I am here. Myself and my companions. We came to fight."

"Do you really mean," began the officer, at a loss how to express himself—"do you really—"

"We came to enlist," curtly interrupted Sebastian, with a trace of wearied impatience in his voice. "Surely we have that poor privilege."

"Why, yes," admitted the colonel, still staring at the forlorn looking, dust-covered figure; "but I thought on account—"

But he did not finish the sentence. Sebastian understood, and as he answered his plain face was transfigured with enthusiasm.

"I fight for France—we fight for France!" he said, "as a son fights for a father. It is my own, my native land. I love its hills and valleys, I love its virtues and its faults—for me there is nothing earthly that means as much. I shall cheerfully lay down my life for my country."

"But—the Church?" questioned the colonel.

"The Church is my mother," retorted Sebastian fervently; "and the State is my father. I love them both with all my heart and soul. You would separate them and force me to choose between them, but it is impossible. They are my parents, and I shall not recognize the divorce you would decree. The Church, my dearly beloved mother, bids me hasten to the defence of France, my father. I am ready. So are my companions. For God and country!"

The excitement of the moment brought a faint flush on the ivory-lined cheeks of the monk. And the soldier, gazing at him fixedly saw that he was in deadly earnest—saw what his spiritual superiors had long before seen, that this man was transparently honest.

But there was no time for soliloquy or for philosophizing, and the officer was soon giving orders for the disposition of the new and unexpected recruits. They were not numerous, it is true; but they came when they were sorely needed and when every man counted. And, curiously enough, they fitted into the war machine with perfect ease. The cassocks of the monk gave way to the blouses of the private soldiers most naturally. All the while the enemy was coming nearer and nearer to the city; the regiment lined up for final inspection, and Sebastian and his companions surpassed the others in their marching and soldierly demeanor.

The red-faced and black-mustached colonel was totally unable to repress his astonishment.

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