

GERTRUDE MANNERING

A TALE OF SACRIFICE

BY FRANCES NOBLE

CHAPTER VI.—CONTINUED

Gertrude paused a moment, and then, fixing her eyes very earnestly on her cousin's face, she answered: "Julia, if God were like what you think, He would not be just; and He is both just and merciful. There would be no difference between good and bad, if He took no notice, but treated both the same. Why did He come on earth to redeem us, if there was no hell to be redeemed from? why did He preach and teach so much, if it was to make so little matter in the end how we lived—if the good were not to be rewarded and the wicked punished? We must believe that He hates sin, that it cannot come near Him; and how could He have sinners for ever in heaven with Him—persons who have despised and disobeyed Him on earth all their lives? And don't you see that our idea of God is higher than yours, because we believe that whatever He teaches and ordains must be good and for the best, however little we can understand it, or however little we may like the idea of it? We do not judge God by our human rules, but believe that whatever He wills is the wisest and best thing that can be, because He has willed it, and He is all good and just. Hell, even, terrible as it seems, is no harder to believe in than heaven, when once you are convinced that God created both, and that it is presumption to judge or find fault with His actions as if we could know what was best—we whom He created and who are less than worms compared to Him!" And the color mounted to Gertrude's face in her earnestness.

Lady Hunter looked at her in admiration for a minute. "What a good little preacher you'd make, Gertrude! And you do really believe it all, I think, too, or you could not tell it so well and earnestly."

Gertrude blushed deeper still. "I wish I could tell you better, Julia. Any Catholic could tell you as much as I have done. We grow up with the knowledge, you see; and we feel, or we should do, more strongly on the subject than on any other; and it would be strange if we did not speak about it, too, a little warmly, wouldn't it, Julia?"

"But, Gertrude, you must be dreadfully shocked at me, and Sir Robert too, and every one you meet here, for that matter dear. You see, I've always been so content with my own wide views on these subjects. It never struck me before to think of God in that way, or to feel that there was any presumption in my idea of Him. But your view is a very beautiful one, very sublime; there must be such a feeling of rest and certainty in it, as well as in your religion altogether. I could almost wish I had been born a Catholic, Gertrude." And Lady Hunter sighed, while a troubled, puzzled, look came over her face.

Gertrude said no more, but took her cousin's hand, and smiled as she caressed it, breathing a silent, inward prayer that if her poor words should be the means of bringing any whisper of grace to Lady Hunter's heart she might not be prevented from listening to it by any worldliness or self-deception. But she did not weary her now by speaking any more on the subject, as she saw that Lady Hunter seemed to wish to change the conversation; for she soon banished the anxious look from her face, and began smilingly to talk on some less serious and, alas! to her, more congenial topic.

And when the Sunday had come round—Gertrude's first Sunday away from all her old accustomed Catholic surroundings—Lady Hunter was quite surprised to hear that she could not miss going to Mass because she had been up very late the night before and was very tired after rather an exciting day. Gertrude wanted to go to Mass at the Jesuits' church in Farm Street, because she had heard Rupert speak so often of it; and as she was ready long before the time, though the carriage was ordered to take her, she stood talking a few minutes with her cousin and Sir Robert as she waited for it. They were only commencing breakfast, Gertrude having had hers early by herself.

"You are sure, dear, you do not mind going alone?" Lady Hunter asked.

Gertrude laughed merrily at the idea.

"I shall be quite at home when I get into the church, you know, Julia."

"Yes, I know Catholics always seem to feel that. I remember your poor mamma once saying to me, but I had forgotten that you never could miss going on any account on Sundays. I had a vague idea that the Mass on Sundays was a kind of obligation; but it never came home to me before, because on the two Sundays I stayed at the Grange, in your mamma's lifetime, the going to church only seemed part and parcel of their religious way of going on altogether, and I did not trouble to think or ask anything about it; besides as I told you, Gertrude, I always laughed so in those days at anything of the kind that my poor cousin gave up speaking at all on the subject."

"I am afraid my wife shocks you very much, Gertrude," said Sir

Robert, with his courteous smile; "but she is not so irreligious as she appears, I assure you."

"You think me an angel, dear, of course; and I am afraid I return the compliment, for you are certainly the chief article in my religion." And her ladyship smiled fondly at her husband. "But here is the carriage, love," she added to Gertrude, "and I don't want to make you late with listening to my heresy, you know." And she rose for a moment to kiss Gertrude as she left the room.

That afternoon Gertrude found at last a spare hour or two and devoted them to writing to her father and to her dear Sister Teresa at the convent. "You cannot think," she wrote to the latter, "how glad I was to be at Mass again after these few days in London, which have seemed more like a month; I have seen so much, and am getting quite used to all this dressing and visiting and gayety alone here without papa, if I had any time to think of it, but I have not; and Lady Hunter is so kind, quite a 'duck,' as we used to say at school. I did so pray for this morning at Mass, because I think she sometimes puts away the thought of religion out of her head just because it frightens her; and she would be a grand Catholic, if such a thing could happen as her conversion. You will pray for her, I know, if only for my sake, won't you? And don't forget me either, your poor giddy child, for I really do like the world, I am afraid, after all. If you saw how I dance and how I enjoy it, and how I delight in looking nice to go out, how I catch myself gazing in the glass so often at my finery, O sister! you would scold your silly Gertrude. But still I shall not be a bit sorry to leave it all to go back to papa and the dear old Grange; I shall even be good enough to be quite anxious by then to get to Mass ever day again and see all my poor people again; for, after all, it is a queer sort of life this for a Catholic, isn't it? I shall not go to Benediction tonight, of course, though it is Sunday; for two or three gentlemen are coming to dinner, and I shall have to stay and eat my dinner and flirt (don't be horrified, sister dear!) with the gentlemen. I will promise not to do much at the last accomplishment; indeed, I would rather flirt with dear old Sir Robert himself than any gentleman I have seen yet; so, you see, you need not be afraid. By the bye, I met Agnes White at church this morning, and have promised to call on her. We hardly knew each other at first. She has grown taller and is very elegant-looking now, and she said she would never have known that the fashionable young lady who tapped her on the shoulder was her old friend Gertrude Manning. I am going to write to papa now such a long letter. You know he is with Rupert at the college, and is going into retreat on Wednesday, the very evening that I am going to a terribly grand ball at the Duchess of N—'s, the grandest, most likely, that I shall go to during my stay in London."

"Give my love to Rev. Mother and every one—the girls too, though I have not time to name them specially. Tell them all how I am enjoying my visit, and how worldly I am getting; and don't forget, sister dear, to pray for

"Your ever-loving child,

"GERTRUDE MANNERING

Enfant de Marie."

CHAPTER VII

The ball at the Duchess of N—'s, of which Gertrude wrote in her letter to the convent, was to be one of the largest and most magnificent affairs of the season, and was to be her grace's farewell entertainment, as she was leaving London a few days later. Later Hunter told Gertrude she must consider herself specially fortunate to be in town for it.

"And," she added, "Sir Robert and I shall enjoy it twice as much as we should have done without you, you know, love, in watching you enjoy it. Poor Sir Robert! I know he only goes out half the time to please me; but it really makes him feel young again to have a girl like you under his protection, especially such a famous little dancer as you are Gertrude."

And Gertrude herself looked forward with great pleasure and excitement to the evening, though she was getting used, as she had told Sister Teresa, to gayety and visiting. She was quite unconscious of the interest and admiration she herself excited, being so delighted and amused with the novelty of her new existence that, save for a little girlish passing vanity, it seldom occurred to her to think of herself or the impression she was likely to make on society. Perhaps, in her sweet, genuine unconsciousness, she would have laughed if she had been told that she had made any impression at all in her cousin's fashionable circle; but it was so. Already she was spoken of everywhere as "that sweet little Miss Manning"; and her artless, engaging manners and beautiful brown eyes had gained her no small number of admirers, of whom however, she thought very little beyond the passing moment.

Unconscious and heart-free, she set out with her cousin and Sir Robert to the Duchess of N—'s on the appointed evening, laughing merrily in girlish glee at the anticipation of the grandest entertainment she had yet been present at,

and at Lady Hunter's enthusiastic admiration of her appearance.

"Don't make me vain, Julia, please," she laughed. "It really is this lovely dress that does it all, don't you see?" And she talked on gaily, as the carriage drove on, being her to her fate, dreaming not that the knell was sounding of her careless girlish happiness, of her simple desires and freedom of heart; little dreaming that, after tonight, all these would be hers as they had been, never—never more!

Two or three dances were over, and Gertrude was sitting down during an interval next to a lady friend of her cousin's, talking to her now and then, but more occupied in admiring the brilliant room afresh, now that she had time to take breath and notice more particularly its splendid decorations and appointments. Her eyes wandered over the dazzling scene for some minutes, until they were arrested suddenly and lingered almost unconsciously, fascinated by a face which attracted them. It was that of a gentleman who was leaning against one of the pillars of the room, a complete stranger to Gertrude, for she knew at once that she had never seen that pale, proud face anywhere before, and she gazed at it as she might have done at a beautiful picture or statue.

"What a splendid face!" she thought. "I never saw one like it before! It would do for the picture of a Crusader, or some chivalrous knight in armor; shade no calm and scornful, perhaps hardly fiery enough; but—I don't know, it looks as if it could look fiery, too, sometimes." And Gertrude went on dreaming away quite a string of romantic fancies about the face of the hero on whom she had suddenly lighted, forgetting herself entirely in her innocent admiration. She was recalled to consciousness by her companion, who turned to her with some question about the music, which was just commencing again for the next dance. Gertrude started, blushing violently, and replied to the question as well as she could, her companion wondering for a minute what ailed her.

"Oh! what ever have I been doing?" she asked herself, quite in an agony of confusion. "Surely he cannot have noticed me looking at him so long! Oh no! he never looked this way at all; what a blessing! If I could only get out of my habit of dreaming and romancing so! It didn't matter much to be so often in scrapes for it at school, but here in the world what would people think of me!" And poor Gertrude resolutely kept her eyes away from the part of the room where they had been led into the offence for which she was blushing still.

She had danced again, and was again sitting down, talking to her recent partner and trying to forget the impression which had been made upon her and its consequent annoyance, when, looking up, she saw Lady Hunter advancing towards her, and with her the very gentleman whose face had so attracted Gertrude—"Crusader," her knight in armor," as her romantic fancy had suggested.

Almost before she was aware of it, Lady Hunter came close up to her, and was introducing the gentleman to her, Gertrude blushing again the while, partly with the natural school-girl shyness and modesty which clung to her still, and partly with the recollection of her own "foolishness," as she called it. She would have been still more confused could she have known that the gentleman had, unseen, been watching her intently all through the last dance and for the last few minutes, and that on discovering she was a protegee of Lady Hunter's he had sought out her ladyship and specially requested an introduction to her cousin.

"Gertrude," began her ladyship, with a bright smile, "I want to introduce you to a particular friend of ours, Mr. Graham. My cousin, Miss Manning, she added to the gentleman, "There no one else you are acquainted. It is quite a treat to get you back again, your truant. I thought you had sworn love to Italy for the next three months at least, and here we meet you, like a ghost, in London. You had not the heart, Stanley, I see, to let a whole season pass quite without your presence." And she tapped his arm playfully with her fan.

"I must plead guilty to the weakness, if it is one, Lady Hunter," and Stanley Graham smiled as he spoke, his smile enhancing the beauty of his countenance, relieving it from the somewhat haughty, scornful expression it wore generally in repose. "It is hardly a week since I discovered that I was tired of it, even though I was at the very time enjoying the beauty of Lake Como, and I resolved that before many days were over I should be once more in the great Babylon." And he smiled again. "There is no place like home, after all; don't you think so, Miss Manning?" he added, turning to Gertrude.

A vision of her own dear home, the old Grange, deserted just now by the two who loved it so, rose to Gertrude's mind as she answered very earnestly, though somewhat shyly: "Indeed I do," looking up at the same time with such a world of expression in her soft eyes, that if Stanley Graham had regarded her with interest before, he did so doubly now, and took a seat by her side.

"Well, Stanley," said Lady Hunter, "I won't stay now to hear

all your news, for you will have to reward us for doing so long without you by giving us a great deal of your society for the next fortnight, remember." And with her bright, sweet smile, she moved slowly away.

Gertrude was engaged for the ensuing dance to the young man with whom she had also danced the previous one; but he, having seen the introduction between her and Stanley Graham, and guessing it was a specially requested one, though Gertrude did not, hardly liked to claim her just then, but went off to console himself, if he could with some other young lady in less requisition. So Gertrude was left there with Stanley Graham, a strange new feeling of contentment, which she did not stop to analyze, pervading her heart in spite of the nervousness which she could not wholly drive away as she found herself powerless to escape from such a complete *tele-a-tele* with this stranger, whose grand-seigneur-like air somewhat frightened Gertrude, even while it attracted her romantic admiration.

"This is your first visit to London, is it not, Miss Manning?" he began; and the rich, low voice was so very kind and gentle that Gertrude's shy alarm vanished entirely, and she looked up again with her own engaging smile into her companion's face.

"Oh, yes!" she answered; "I only left home last Christmas; and my own school is in B—shire, quite in the country. I should not have come up to London at all this year, only that Lady Hunter was so very kind and insisted on it."

TO BE CONTINUED

"KEEP SMILING"

"How's Mrs. Aspel?" asked old Mr. Williams of his nephew, Jack Aspel.

"Oh," the young man answered, while a dissatisfied look overspread his countenance, "she's not at all well of late. I'm worried to bits over her."

"I'm very sorry to hear that. Have you had Dr. Murphy up?"

"Yes. Many times, but all to no use. She gets depressed, and very often breaks into fits of crying."

"Tell me," Mr. Williams remarked, suddenly breaking the trend of conversation, "how is your business during these times?"

Jack Aspel paused and flushed up a bit before answering.

"I work as hard as a nailer all day, and every day, and yet I must confess"—here a troubled look became visible on his young face—"that I do not make much progress. Others outstep me at every turn."

"Man alive! Don't take notice of those things. Don't you know that no one gets along in this world as well as he desires?" expostulated Mr. Williams.

"Quite right, sir," answered Jack, "but I would like to see an adequate return for my labor."

"You have a decent account at the bank, good health, a good home, and a beautiful young wife. Are those not sufficient remunerations?" Mr. Williams ventured to ask.

Then, with that curious non-plussing habit he had of suddenly switching to affairs outside the scope of the moment, he blurted out:

"Are you looking as well now as when you left your wife this morning?"

"No, indeed! Far worse. I've been worried no end all day. The only chance of looking any way pleasant I have is, when I leave home every morning. And then, in truth, I believe, I look glum enough."

"Well, then, Jack"—Mr. Williams laid stress on each word as he spoke—"I don't wonder your wife is beyond the aid of doctor's medicines."

"I really don't understand you, Uncle," said Jack. "I am —"

"Let me explain," interrupted the old man. "Don't you know that worry killed the cat. It is eating the soul out of you, and the health and happiness out of your wife. Remember, try a pleasant wife's mirror. One glance at it, when you arrive after business is over, tells her how you have been doing all day. You say your face looks its worst in the evening after the cares of the day. Mrs. Aspel sees the unpleasant, harsh look, where once happiness dwelt, and she becomes morose, mind-sick, and down-hearted. That is because she is a true woman. If she were one of the other kind, she would get out to theatres or other places of amusement, and let you and your glum looks go hang. Here is my advice to you: Life is not everlasting. Place your trust in God. Tell Him your worries and troubles, and be a smiler, man. Leave business and its profit and loss behind you when you lock up your store each evening. Remember, try a pleasant, smiling face for your wife."

As he finished speaking, the old man turned and walked away.

"Tell poor worries to God, and be a smiler."

Yes, he would try and carry out his uncle's advice. He would do anything to bring happiness to the young wife he loved devotedly. It would be easy to confide his worries to the Saviour of men, who had asked that such things should be confided to Him; but to smile when he felt depressed and weary in spirit—that was easier said than done. However, he remembered the advice, as he placed his latchkey in the door of his pretty residence in the suburbs.

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"Well, Stanley," said Lady Hunter, "I won't stay now to hear

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