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GERTRUDE MANNERING

A TALE OF SACRIFICE
BY FRANCES NOBLE

CHAPTER XXVII.

Lady Hunter had been four days at Whitewell, and the hushed and grief-stricken household were becoming slowly accustomed to the knowledge that their sweet young mistress would never more move about in their midst—that she was dying, peacefully but surely. Her cousin's presence was a real consolation to Gertry, one for which she was never tired of thanking her; for Lady Hunter had such a sweet way of comforting her father by her unobtrusive sympathy, such a quiet art of persuading him to take rest and refreshment when he would have forgotten both, that Gertry saw he had unconsciously learned to lean upon her and confide in her the terrible grief which was too strong at times to bear quietly, but which must be controlled in the presence of her father, because of the ever-threatening fear of agitation for her.

"Julia dear," she said one day to her cousin, if you were not with us, I don't know what papa would do if he had not you to talk to sometimes. It might be too hard for him to bear. I—think, sometimes; it might have injured him, in some way; and then—it would have been—oh! so much harder for me too! As it is, Julia, you see—he—has—grown into—an old man—so quickly. And he bears it so quietly before me, poor darling papa!"

And she wept quietly on her cousin's shoulder. Gertry was right; Mr. Mannering would never be a hale, erect man again; he looked fully seventy now as he sat by her side so incessantly, generally holding her hand in his, watching every fancied change, only stirring reluctantly to take a few hours' rest at night, or when, on the excuse of leaving Gertry alone with Father Walsley for a little while, Lady Hunter persuaded him to try and take a meal with her down-stairs or a short walk with her in the park.

Twice since her arrival Gertry had been able to be carried down when it was very fine and warm, to sit out too in the park, on an easy little couch, supported by her father's encircling arm; and as they sat alone on one of these occasions she had said to him earnestly:

"Papa darling, perhaps—in return for Julia's goodness to us, even for the kind, reverential way she has with Father Walsley, some good may come to her from being here now, though perhaps it may not be yet. It may—be good for her, papa, to see death coming like this to one like me, whom she knew only a year ago to be so healthy and lively—so fond of earth, and thinking so much of leaving it! It may make her see how—vain—it all is, the world, to see one who thought to enjoy it so long called away from it so soon—one who was never very pious either, but so very ordinary, like I am." And the artless humility, so genuine and true, shone out in the sweet, hopeful smile she raised to her father's gaze.

And so it had come to the fourth morning of Lady Hunter's stay, and she sat at breakfast with Mr. Mannering, having decoyed him to a quiet sleep, when the letters were handed in to them as usual. There was one from Rupert, of sad, anxious inquiry, and more of the affectionate notes from N—Convent for Gertry, from her dear, sorrowing Sister, and her old companions, who never tired of writing to ask if they were really hopeless to pray for her recovery, if their prayers must really be only for what they could not bear to think of yet, their darling Gertry's happy death.

But there was another letter too, one for Lady Hunter, a small packet which she glanced at and turned very pale before she quietly began to open it on her knee. A minute later, when Mr. Mannering had read his letter from Rupert, she rose and stood close by his side.

"Mr. Mannering," she said, in a low tone which trembled audibly, "if—Stanley Graham, even thus late, should ever ask forgiveness for the past, and beg for leave to come to Gertry's side before she dies, you—would not refuse the end, you, if she were willing—if it would make her happier and his life less full of bitter remorse than it must be now?"

He looked up quickly, almost sternly. "Is he likely to make such a request? Does he know she—dying?" Then Lady Hunter told him what she had done, of the letter she had written to Stanley, of how she had felt impelled to it somehow, as to a sacred duty, not only to him, but to Gertry herself; and she showed him the note she had just received with its enclosure. Mr. Mannering trembled visibly as he looked on the handwriting which, though he had never seen it before, seemed to bring him so near to the man who had robbed him first of his daughter's heart, and who was now, as it were, the destroyer too of her life itself; and for an instant the devil whispered again of hatred and revenge, of how easy it would be, and perhaps wisest for his child's sake, to send back Stanley Graham's letter unopened, with a few polite words to the effect that he was forgiven

as far as he could expect, but that to give his letter, whatever it might contain, to the dying girl in her precarious state—which required such avoidance of all agitation, might be fatal to her, or, at least, could work no good, but only disturb her present peaceful calm. But the temptation was rejected almost as soon as suggested. Apart from the thought of his darling's own happiness, apart from the knowledge of the weary yearnings which must be ever in the poor heart, though it hid them so bravely, could he, as a Christian and a Catholic, set an example of such unforbearance and scant charity to this unbeliever, who was perhaps praying to be admitted to a place by the death-bed which might bring grace at last to his proud heart?

Looking at his face again, Lady Hunter saw that he was softened, and she breathed more freely. "Julia," he said, for he always now addressed her so, as Gertry did, "how can it be done? We do not know what it may contain. How can we give it to her without agitating her?"

"Mr. Mannering, you see what he says; it need not be given to her, but read to her first, if that is easier. Suppose we wait until Father Walsley comes—he wants but an hour to his time; and if you think best, let him read the letter first, and then break the news of it gently to Gertry."

"God bless you, Julia! You always know what is best." And Mr. Mannering grasped her hand with a grateful pressure for a minute. Then they sat together silently, waiting for Father Walsley, both feeling thankful in their hearts that Gertry still slept on quietly up-stairs; for their agitation was so great that they would have had difficulty in hiding from her that some new cause for it had arisen.

Father Walsley came at last, and, with trembling hands and still more trembling voice, Mr. Mannering gave him Stanley Graham's letter, telling him briefly what Lady Hunter had already told himself, and his expectation of what it might contain. Calmly, with a solemn, earnest look on his face, but with inward wonder and perturbation, the good priest opened the letter, and as he did so the enclosed ring, twisted in tissue-paper, fell out upon the table, to be carefully taken up by Lady Hunter, who held it on what it was, her heart beating strangely at the sight of it. She and Mr. Mannering sat motionless while Father Walsley stood reading the letter a little apart; and they both started as he laid it down, and turned to them again with a smile sweeter even than ordinary on his face.

"Mr. Mannering, God has chosen to work a miracle of grace in answer to the prayers of your child—to bless her with the knowledge of it before she dies. What your little Gertry might never have accomplished in life has been worked by—her coming death, in the proud heart whose love she gave up for conscience' sake, though she broke her own in the smile she raised to her father's gaze. At last to grace by the force of the blow that brought the news of Gertry's hopeless illness; and—she writes to implore permission to see her, if only once, before the end. There is much in his letter, Lady Hunter, that you will scarcely understand, much less appreciate, which will sound strange, coming from one who so lately was not merely indifferent, as you are, and kindly disposed towards our holy religion, but who hated and despised it. But I think you should stay while I read it to Mr. Mannering—who who have been so instrumental in its arrival, and so great a friend of the writer; because, in any case, you ought to know its contents before seeing Gertry again."

Lady Hunter seemed too bewildered and awe-stricken to speak; she could only make a gesture of assent; while Mr. Mannering sat down and buried his face in his hands. Then in a low, impressive voice Father Walsley read Stanley Graham's letter, and as he paused Mr. Mannering looked up and stretched out his hand for it.

"My God! is it really so—really true?" he whispered. "Who is to tell her, Father Walsley? who is to break it to her? Who can, without agitating her, tell her that her prayers are answered; that he does not ask only to see her again and to be forgiven, but he asks it as a Catholic like herself; that it will be no longer an infidel who has stolen her heart and her life from her father?"

Feeling somehow *de trop* now, and that Mr. Mannering would be best left alone with Father Walsley for at least a few minutes, Lady Hunter stole from the room to inquire if Gertry were yet awake. On being answered in the affirmative, she waited yet a little longer, and then went back to tell Father Walsley, who had, as she hoped, succeeded in restoring Mr. Mannering to outward calmness, and was ready to go up-stairs.

"Don't be afraid," he said, as he left the room; "it will not be allowed to agitate her more than God wills, this joy for which she has prayed so long. And if it should, after all care has been taken, if the joy should, by God's will, shorten her life in any way, Mr. Mannering, you could not repine—"

could not grudge this last great happiness to her who is dearer than yourself." And he turned back a minute as he spoke the last words with a strange solemnity which startled Lady Hunter, who made him promise to summon them as soon as Gertry should know all.

Gertry was sitting up in bed, having taken her slight breakfast, as Father Walsley entered. "You look very peaceful and happy this morning, my child," he said to her, with a kind smile. "Don't I always look so, father?" she asked somewhat ruefully. "Indeed, I try to, very hard; but, you see, it is not so easy always, on account of—poor papa." And her voice faltered.

"Gertry, could anything make you feel happier—more peaceful than you do? Is there anything you could wish for before you die—anything which could come even on earth?" And he sat down by her side, speaking in a low, quiet tone.

The color rose to her pale, thin face again for a minute. "Father Walsley, you know what would make me happier if I could hear it before I die, if it were possible; you know what would be almost too great joy for me on earth, though I know it will come some day, however it may." "To hear that you were to see Stanley Graham again, my child—to hear that he was not dying in vain—that he had yielded to God's grace at last?"

She sighed in assent, and then, suddenly looking up at his face, she saw the strange smile upon it. "Father Walsley," she whispered, with her divination too quick for the gradual telling of his news, "if—if you know anything, don't be afraid of startling me. I am quite calm; it cannot harm me. Oh! tell me if you know anything. Father Walsley—if—if there is any hope—of anything like that!"

But her quickened breath and heightened color alarmed him so much that he said very quietly, in a tone of gentle rebuke: "You are not going to be impatient, are you Gertry, to expect to much all at once?" And the kindly reproach had directly the desired effect, for Gertry was calm again in an instant, ashamed of her own impetuosity.

TO BE CONTINUED

A BRAVE LITTLE BOY

The village of Graverolls was on an island of the Seine, inhabited by about forty families. There the vicar of Rigny went several times a week to say Mass in a little chapel. Pierre Hureau, a boy of eleven, always served the vicar's Mass. He was now ready to make his First Communion, after having from infancy shown unusual piety.

On the morning of January 28, when Pierre crossed the bridge on his way to school at Rigny, he remarked that the Seine was rising rapidly, but the village was situated on an elevation above the river, and he had often heard his father and mother say that it was in no danger whatever from a flood. At four o'clock, on his way back from school, Pierre left his companions and turned aside, as it was his custom, to say a few prayers in a small chapel on the way. Thus it happened that he was quite alone when he came in sight of Graverolls. He at once perceived that the flood had made great ravages since morning. As far as he could see before him the fields inundated and on the higher ground, thought to be free from danger, the tops of the trees were all that could be perceived through the broad expanse of dark, pulsating water.

Proceeding on his way, Pierre soon saw the river had almost reached to the bridge. At Graverolls silence and desolation greeted him. His father's house was deserted, the other habitations also. Water began to appear in the roadway. There was no one in sight. Every one had fled. His parents had no doubt counted faithfully on meeting him on the usual route from school. They could not have thought, of course, of the detour he was in the habit of making every day to pray a few moments in the little chapel. And thus they had missed him.

Pierre looked about him. The water had not yet mounted to the floor of the bridge; there was time for him to return to Rigny, where he would be sure to find his family. But as he passed the chapel he saw through the windows that the sanctuary lamp was still burning, and he knew that the Blessed Sacrament must be there. Doubtless the sacristan, an old resident of Graverolls, had forgotten in the haste of departure, and the vicar would not come again until tomorrow. Tomorrow probably he could not come. By that time the chapel would be inundated. For a moment Pierre hesitated, not feeling able to assume the grave responsibility that presented itself. But only for a moment; the Blessed Sacrament must be saved. He resolved to take the ciborium from the tabernacle and carry it with him to Rigny.

But now another situation was to be faced. The key of the tabernacle was kept in the sacristan's house. It would be necessary to get it. The water was rising; it was fast growing dark. Pierre ran as quickly as he could to the deserted dwelling. He could not find the key for sometime; there seemed to be no matches. At last he laid his hands upon it, and, closing the

door, he ran back to the church. The wind was blowing fiercely; the water dashed against the buttresses of the bridge with an ominous sound. The road was submerged. The boy ran through water above his ankles. Fortunately the chapel was some steps above the street, besides being built on a slight elevation of the ground. He entered; the water began to follow him. He ran toward the tabernacle, opened it and seized the ciborium. But when he reached the chapel door he found himself in the water almost up to his knees. The inundation was advancing every moment; he found it impossible to take a single step.

He closed the door and re-entered the chapel, placing the ciborium on the altar, and looked about him. The sanctuary was three steps higher than the floor of the church; the platform of the altar two steps above that; and the water had already reached the level of the first step of the Communion rail. He turned to the altar, whereon, hidden in the ciborium, reposed his Lord and his God. For a moment a spasm of anguish convulsed his soul. Must he perish, there, all alone? No, our Lord was with him. Tears began to roll down his cheeks. He knelt close to the altar, in front of the ciborium. He prayed but time passed slowly—oh, so slowly. And it was dark and cold.

The water was now creeping into the sanctuary. Pierre climbed upon the altar shelf, where he remained for some time. Hours passed, he thought—it might have been only moments. The water was now rising above his feet. It crept along the shelf where he crouched. With a desperate effort, the ciborium in one hand, he mounted to the top of the tabernacle. There he sat, with it pressed to his heart, still praying. At length, his head fell upon his breast and he slept, without letting go his hold of his treasure. Meantime the water remained stationary. Next morning, when the flood had somewhat subsided, a small boat containing a priest with two oarsmen, made its way to the submerged village of Graverolls. They advanced towards the chapel, the door of which they found open, forced by the winds and the waves. The water was still so high that the little boat could ride upon it easily. All they could see as they passed the aisle, was the tabernacle, on top of which sat a pale, boyish figure, his head sunken on his breast. In his hand was clasped the ciborium. "Pierre!" cried the vicar. "There was no answer. The boat came nearer. 'My dear Pierre,' again spoke the vicar. 'In a moment one of the boatmen had the boy in his arms, lifting him into the bottom of the boat, while the priest took the ciborium from his loosening clasp. Pierre slowly opened his eyes. There was a heavy blanket in the bottom of the boat—a large, warm blanket, on one-half of which they laid him, throwing the other half over him. Oh, how delicious it was the feeling of warmth, of release, of companionship! He opened his eyes slowly and gazed into the kind face of the priest above him. 'Pierre, are you cold?' asked the vicar. 'Not now, Monsieur l'Abbe,' answered the feeble, tired voice, in a whisper. 'Are you hungry?' 'No, Monsieur l'Abbe,' came faintly from the trembling lips. 'Will you have a morsel of bread and a sip of wine? We have a supply with us. We thought perhaps to meet some poor sufferers on the way, but had no idea we should find you here. Your parents are searching for you everywhere. We came for the Blessed Sacrament. A few drops of wine now, my little Pierre.' 'No, no—not that!' murmured the boy. 'What, then?' 'That, if I may,' pointing to the ciborium—'if you will, mon Pere, before I die.' 'Ah, my child,' said the priest, bending over him and marking the glassness of his eyes, the exceeding paleness of his face, the blueing of his trembling lips. Again the boy pointed to the ciborium. The priest raised his eyes to heaven. They were full of tears. 'Yes,' he said, 'you have deserved it well—the bread of angels, I will give you the God for Whom you have given your life.' He opened the ciborium and laid the Sacred Host upon the tongue of the dying boy. He closed his lips softly with a smile of gratitude. They heard a murmur of prayer, while his face shone with a light not of earth. 'Come,' said the vicar, 'let us hasten back to Rigny that his parents may see him once more. They are in great grief.' The boat floated out of the chapel into the broad stream that had once been the main street of Graverolls. The sun shone out radiantly. Pierre opened his eyes to its soft, ineffable rays. The priest lifted the boy's head to his knee. 'I feel so happy now, mon Pere,' he murmured, with a sweet smile and a look of gratitude. That night at Rigny in the midst of his family, the priest kneeling at his bedside, the boy opened his eyes for the last time. The mother sobbed aloud. Pierre felt for her hand and laid his own upon it; then, closing his eyes he heaved a faint sigh, and his pure soul took its flight to heaven.—The Sentinel of the Blessed Sacrament.

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UNABLE TO AGREE ON CREED

Prague, Sept. 22.—The "Czech-Slovak Church" which has just held its first Council in Prague, has been unable, after five years of existence, to agree upon a creed which it can ask its devotees to accept as authoritative. While a catechism of the schismatic church has been drawn up by the "Patriarch" Dr. Farsky and Mr. Kalons, it was not accepted by the Council nor was any definite declaration of belief adopted. The most definite things done were the appointment of committees on doctrine, financial affairs, and discipline, and authorization of preparations for another Council to be held, probably, in January.

"Patriarch" Farsky celebrated Mass and delivered a sermon in the Church of St. Nicholas prior to the first session of the Council. He took occasion to explain the reasons for the meeting which he enumerated as: a definition of doctrine, the evolution of Christianity, and carrying on the Hussite Reformation. Representatives of other sects who were present to announce their good will toward the "National Church" included: Dr. Sukl, of the Protestant Union of Constance; Mr. Kafka, representing the Protestant Church of the Moravian Brothers; Dr. Cervinka, representing the Czech Orthodox Church; Dr. Bartek, representing the Methodists; and Mr. Norbert Caspek, representing the Unitarians.

Mr. Spisar, professor of Olomouc, summed up his conception of the doctrine of the National Church, in an address to the special meeting called to consider doctrinal questions. The church, he said, does not acknowledge the binding force of tradition although not rejecting it entirely. The authority of the first seven ecumenical councils is denied. The Bible is held to be the sole source of doctrinal belief. Only three of the Gospels are accepted. A scientific revision of the Bible is held to be necessary in order to conform with the teachings of John Huss. Freedom of conscience and belief is upheld, and the church itself is described as the defender of freedom of thought. Mr. Spisar declared the "National Church" does not believe in the existence of Purgatory nor in the Resurrection of the Dead. In fact, he declared everything, he said, which cannot be explained by natural science. However, he does believe in the Holy Trinity although denying the divinity of Christ. "Patriarch" Farsky announced that hereafter Bishops of the "National Church" will be merely appointed and not consecrated. He also announced that the ceremony of ordination of priests would be retained, notwithstanding an effort on the part of an element in the church to abolish ordinations.

THE CAUSE OF CANCER

Sir W. Arbuthnot Lane of London, one of the foremost surgeons of the world has written to the London Daily Mail, and he has also a letter in a recent issue of a Canadian Medical Journal, charging that cancer is caused by our idiotic refinement of our chief food, the grains. He lays special blame upon white flour and refined cereals. Dr. Robt. G. Jackson of Toronto, Editor of the Dietetic Age of New York City, a Journal circulating among physicians, has been teaching this for years, and, because he was convinced of this fact and also able to trace deficiencies caused a lot of other of the diseases of civilized peoples, he invented Roman Meal, a food made from whole wheat, whole rye, flaxin and bran, these blended scientifically in proportion to make a balanced human food. It supplies the deficiencies of flour and other refined "ghost cereals" and should be used in some form daily, or at least several times each week. It prevents indigestion and positively relieves constipation. Because of its growth-promoting properties, it is especially valuable in feeding nursing and expectant mothers and children from the 10th month. At grocers.

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