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JUSTICE AND MERCY; OR, THE FEAST OF ALL-HALLOW'S.

CHAPTER XV.—Continued.

'Just heavens!' exclaimed the conscience-stricken Lady Harcourt; 'then Flora was innocent, poor child; perhaps I am too late now to aid her.'

Sir Godfrey had darted forward, directly his brother held up the ring, and a stern smile played upon his lip and his gaze met that of his mother; and he exclaimed,—

'Did I not tell you, madam, that I would stake my life upon the innocence of Flora Douglas, who was as good as she was fair? Nay, madam,' he added, 'the very pride of her nature rendered her incapable of a base act, as it ought to have placed her beyond the reach of suspicion; be it my task to seek out this most injured and unhappy girl; I could not grace my old estate with a better mistress.'

Poor Lady Harcourt was overwhelmed by the grief she felt at the disclosure of her son.—Shame, confusion, and sorrow combined, kept her for a few moments silent; she felt the words of her son keenly, for, spite of his affection for her, they conveyed a reproach; and she needed all the comfort and encouragement she now met with in his consoling glance, to strengthen her under her present trial. The sight of her humiliated elder son, who, in his presence and that of Father Lawford, declared himself guilty of so atrocious an action, overcame him with emotion.—Of all the valuable articles which had been purloined, this ring was the most highly treasured, both because it had belonged to his father and also on account of its intrinsic worth; the single diamond with which it was set being almost unequalled for the beauty of its water. Then, too, the expression of a sorrow and remorse on the countenance of his brother not to be surpassed, softened the heart of Sir Godfrey; but still a proud, pale face rose before his mind's eye—Flora, where was she? Could he hope to meet with her? Might not all his efforts be in vain? How, then, was he relieved by hearing his brother whisper the words, 'Flora Douglas is well and safe; I know where she dwells; a strange chain of circumstances has led to this knowledge.'

And, to the delight of Sir Godfrey, he then related how Flora, after the assistance she had rendered his child, had become acquainted with his wife; and how surprised he was, when in an adjoining room, to catch the tones of a voice which he well remembered; and how sedulously he had avoided meeting with her.

'Heaven be praised,' then exclaimed Lady Harcourt, for her joy, was not less than that of Sir Godfrey, at this unexpected discovery; 'my poor Flora shall ere long be with us again, and I will make her all the amends in my power for the unjust suspicions she had labored under for so long a time.' Then, perceiving large tears falling silently down the face of Seymour, she endeavored to turn the subject; but he divined the cause; and now, taking a hand of each within his cold grasp, he murmured,—

'Mistake not the cause of these tears; they are but the outpourings of a spirit deeply contrite for the wrongs it has committed and the injuries it has inflicted on others. Dearest mother, and equally dear Godfrey—for your mercy I have ill deserved,' added the wretched man; 'and you, too, holy father, cease not to pray for my soul's repose when I shall be no more; for a long, long purgation must be mine.'

The grey shadow of approaching death passed over the features of the penitent as he uttered these words. Retaining in his cold grasp the hands of his mother and Sir Godfrey, whilst the good priest prayed earnestly for his agonizing soul, unlike his self-righteous wife, who, in fact, had quarrelled with him, on the very morning of his departure from London, because he would not consent to part with the bauble, as she termed Sir Godfrey's ring, he did not believe himself secure, yet, with his dying gaze fixed on the symbol of redemption, with the remembrance of Peter and Magdalen and the penitent thief in his mind, and the bright hope with which a divine faith inspired him to sustain him in his last moments, he became tranquil, and ever-cheerful, as his end approached: and those who stood nearest to him could hear him with his last breath utter the holy names of Jesus and Mary, beseeching the former to have mercy on him, the latter to pray for him; and with these names still on his lips, calmly and peacefully the penitent expired.

CHAPTER XVI.

Wealth, beauty, youth, and health; what more is there to be desired—cannot these bring happiness? Alas, no! for 'there is no peace for the wicked,' saith the sage of unerring truth. Like a gay butterfly, Inez Fortescue flew hither and thither, the belle of the fashionable world. Ad-

mired, courted, caressed, sought after, was not this enough? No; she needed more than this. She had no virtue, and she possessed the homage of the lips of others, but not that of the heart. There were none to love her! there was no one friend in the whole wide world who cared for her or for whom she cared. Her husband was a gay spendthrift, whose one aim was how to gratify himself at any cost whatever. Too indolent to resist him, her amply filled purse was ever at his command. There was no one tie to bind them together save the same thirst of dissipation which consumed them both, and to gratify which either would have sacrificed the other if at any time their inclinations were thwarted. That never-dying worm, remorse, haunted Inez perpetually, and beneath that outward guise of happiness she carried a heart ill at ease: and the face wreathed in smiles was, when alone, often bathed in tears.

Seven years had elapsed since her arrival in England, and, burning with a desire of change, she resolved to visit her paternal estate; and, accordingly, early in the following spring, she bade farewell for a time to England.

Few, indeed, there were who recognized in the beautiful Mrs. Fortescue, in her twenty-fifth year and in the very prime of her womanhood, the pale, and we might almost say, awkward young girl who was sent from Madrid seven years previous, in order to be confided to the care of her English relations; and her father's friends shrugged their shoulders, exchanged significant glances together, and felt their Spanish gravity offended by the levity of Inez's manner. People said that the estates, large as they were, would soon pass from the grasp of so imprudent a mistress; and finally forbade their wives and daughters to cultivate her acquaintance.

The land of her nativity became, then, far more unendurable than that of her adoption;—but in neither could she hope for peace, for she carried a vengeous serpent within her own breast.

It is the eve of Corpus Christi, and all Madrid is in preparation for the feast of the morrow. Alone, in one of the apartments of a noble mansion, that former residence of her late father, Inez listens to those sweet bells which give notice that the hour of the Benediction is at hand. It is a burning summer night; in the distance—for the castle is situated in the environs of the city—she can see vine-clad hills and orange-groves, and fertile vales, the towers of palatial residences, and spires of cathedrals—stately, and grand, and imposing as man should make them when raising temples for the Most High. Now, too, emerge from a lowly valley hard by, a troop of young girls veiled in white, and two by two they pass beneath the porch of the adjacent convent church. Inez feels a desire to go also;—yet she wavers, and decides on not visiting the church until the morrow. On the morrow an English priest would preach, prior to his return to his native country; and as curiosity principally, in lieu of devotion, led Inez to think of going, she decided on attending at the High Mass of the following day, instead, as was her custom, merely satisfying the obligation of the Church by assisting at one of the early masses.

Not quite dead to the feelings which actuated her in the days of her youth, Inez entered the church with a more reverential step than usual, on the following morning. Always of a cold nature in matters appertaining to religion, her residence in England had rather tended to make her more tepid than ever; but on this day the outward circumstances around her powerfully affected her, and she melted into tears as she knelt within the splendid cathedral, and bowed in lowly adoration, with the silent multitude around.

But now a voice sounded in her ears, the full, deep tones of which she well remembered; a thrill ran through her frame, and a by-stander might have seen her start, so visibly was she affected. The theme of the discourse was 'in the love of Jesus, in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar; and the impassioned fervid eloquence of the orator penetrated to the hearts of all.—Transfixed—rooted, as it were—to the spot, the dark eyes of Inez were fixed on that well-remembered countenance. For what, then, had she so deeply sinned? oh, what agony in the thought that there had been no cause for all her jealousy and envy! Oh, her bitterest enemy would have pined her for the feelings with which, regardless of all around, she now thought over the past; yet not so much in a spirit of repentance and of sorrow, as of vexation, and humiliation, and wounded pride, that made her seem so little in her own eyes as her thoughts recurred to years gone past.

Did she wish to speak to Father Eustace? No, there was agony in the thought; for she knew that he had overheard her conversation with Sir Robert the night previous to his departure; Lady Harcourt had told her this. And had she now a desire to remain in the land of her nativity? Not the faintest. Ah! how do our feelings change as our years pass by? Not un-

frequently, indeed, do we turn carelessly away from that which has been long the object of our aspirations, as does the child when after many tears he has obtained possession of some coveted toy; but even when our youth has passed in vain efforts to acquire some real or fancied good, and the prime of life has come, and sober thoughtfulness has taken place of all those warm and ardent hopes and aspirations—when we begin to look at things with the calm, quiet eye of more mature years, then we think over the past; feel it was indeed well that such and such a prayer was not granted; look with a careless eye, sometimes even think with disgust, on that which formerly seemed so desirable; and believe that our tender Father, who holds in His hands the hearts of all His creatures, has dealt with us like a fond mother, who, seeing her child allured to the edge of a precipice by some bright flower which grows on its summit, snatches him away just as his hand is extended to gain possession of the prize, heedless of his temporary sorrow, so she but save him from destruction. Inez, now solitary in her noble palace, thought over the time when, on her first arrival in England, she had so ardently desired to return to Spain: these were the desires of a girl anxious to emancipate herself from the thralldom of others—of one who shrank from the strange faces in her new house, to whom everything then wore a chilling aspect. Now, she as eagerly desired to return to England; and as to will and to act was one and the same thing with Inez, a few very days elapsed before she again bade farewell to her paternal estate, and commenced her journey to England.

CHAPTER XVII.

'Do pray take care of my daughters; I must insist that they are not left for a single moment,' exclaimed the sharp, querulous voice of a tall, masculine, ill-made woman, about forty years old, whose complexion could be termed neither dark nor fair, but rather resembled a piece of worn-out parchment than anything human, and whose sharp nose, added to a very acrimonious expression of countenance, rendered her anything but a pleasing specimen of the fair sex.

Involuntarily three or four persons on the deck of the vessel turned as these words were uttered in a louder key than ladies generally use in a public place, and one old gentleman raised his glass and eyed the speaker from head to foot as she prepared to return to her cabin; and then, with others of his party, his eye fell upon the daughters and their governess or companion; for one of these situations she undoubtedly filled.

Two ill-formed, awkward girls, too, they were, strangely unlike their mother, with cheeks like a full-blown damask-rose and eyes as black as night; good-humored, too, they looked, and were, no doubt,—being in the possession of health, wealth, and youth; also full of animal spirits—a little too much so, indeed, for a delicate, fair woman of some five-and-twenty years of age, who had the charge of these sylph-like damsels confided to her care.

'Preposterous—quite preposterous,' muttered the old gentleman, as he let his eyeglass fall; he forgot that he was not in his own counting-house in Lombard-street, or in his quiet parlor in a pretty cottage at Clapham; but with strangers near him, on the deck of a vessel, for he started as a person he stood by uttered the words,—

'What is preposterous, my dear sir?'

'That a delicate creature, such as that lady,' replied the old gentleman, pointing, as he spoke, to our old friend Flora—for she it was, 'should constitute herself the attendant of those who can so well look after themselves,' was the somewhat surly reply: 'but my little bird, my own little god-daughter, what brings you here?' he added, with a brighter expression of countenance, as a child about eleven years old, not pretty, but whose face was very pleasing, and whose features were melancholy in their expression, now ran upon deck, and who started with surprise on recognising the old banker.

'We are going to spend some time in Paris,' replied the girl, 'and—'

'We; and who are the we, I should like to know?' replied the old gentleman, whose name was Macdonald; 'for the last I heard of papa was that he was going to spend six months in London.'

'Then you do not know that—that my father has—has married again,' murmured the girl, in broken accents. 'See, Mr. Macdonald,' she added, pointing to the spot on which the two young ladies were standing with Flora, 'those are my stepmother's daughters; my new mother has just left the deck. Ah! I feel the change very much,' sighed the girl, her eyes now filling with tears.

'And that lady, who is she?' asked Mr. Macdonald, pointing to Flora.

'Oh, that is Miss Douglas,' replied Alice; 'I am very fond of her; she is the only thing I like in my new home.'

The eyeglass was again raised, and lowered immediately: for the two young ladies, curious

to know whom their half-sister had picked up acquaintance with, now hastened forward and were introduced to papa's old friend, as the child termed Mr. Macdonald.

'And that lady, is she your governess Alice?' asked the banker.

'She is governess to Alice, Mr. Macdonald,' replied the elder sister; 'but merely our companion or attendant.'

'Hem, hem,' replied the old gentleman, taking a pinch of snuff, and regarding with much interest the now flushed face of the young woman, whose quick ear had caught those words. 'So that elegant lady is your attendant, is she?—Why, old friend Somers, you have made a great mistake in your choice of an attendant, however.'

'It was not my stepfather's choice, sir, but mamma's,' replied the young lady, her color now deepening from very mortification; and as she turned away, she exclaimed, 'Miss Douglas, come down into the cabin; we are going there directly; adding, in an imperious tone, which showed that she was accustomed to be obeyed, 'Alice, come with me directly.'

The old banker's heart bled as the poor little girl gave him a last look, and then followed, as though frightened, the unamiable Jemima. He was thinking of old times, when he had vainly hoped that the mother of Alice would have become his bride; and as he caught the sad expression of the child's face, it brought to his mind the mother's features, such as they were when he saw that death had marked her for its prey.

'Pray, who is that rude old man, Alice?' demanded the young lady, after she had related to her mother's private ear, when quite alone, the cause of Mr. Macdonald's offence.

'Papa's oldest and best friend,' replied the child; adding, with somewhat of asperity, 'I am sure Mr. Macdonald did not want to offend you; but you should not have called a lady your attendant.'

'Silence, miss, or I will send you to bed,' replied her stepmother, in a tone which always enforced compliance, and which on this occasion sent Alice to seek a refuge in the affectionate care of Flora, who, amidst her own private sorrows, could yet find it was in her power to comfort this desolate child. Pause we, however, for a few moments in our narration, whilst we relate how it was that all the efforts of Sir Godfrey and his mother to track Flora had proved fruitless.

On the morning following the death of Mrs. Seymour, Flora had returned with a heavy heart to her lodgings, and there found a letter awaiting her from the very lady in whose family she was now located. Her distress was so immediate, her pecuniary wants so urgent, that she regarded the offer almost as a direct interposition of Providence in her regard, and was only too thankful for the prospect of immediate relief, to demur for a moment complying with the request of Mrs. Somers that she should at once enter on the duties of her new situation. Nearly a fortnight had necessarily elapsed ere Sir Godfrey could take any steps through which he might trace Flora; and when he called at the humble abode in which she had resided, the only information he could glean, was, that she had left in order to enter a situation some days previously, where or with whom the people of the house could not inform him. For the present, then, every clue seemed to be lost, and Sir Godfrey returned with a heavy heart to the Elms.

Flora's new situation was far from a happy one; her employer possessed in no small degree pride of the purse; in her estimation, vulgar woman as she was, every thing and every one ought to bow and give place before wealth; as to sensitive feelings, or fine sentiment, or high spirit, such a thing should not be tolerated for a moment in a poor person; and with a zeal worthy of a better cause, Mrs. Somers, with a readiness which she considered truly angelic—for she persuaded herself that her sole wish was to make all her dependents paragons of humility,—was ever on the watch to furnish them with occasions for practising her favorite virtue.

The result of her trials was, that amongst her menial servants the greater part of them turned out a set of abject, servile scoundrels, as long as they felt it conducive to their interests to continue in her service; and of the poor young ladies who filled the position of governess and companion to her daughters, not one turned out as she could wish.

Her first lesson with Flora was quite unique in its way, a se rich a specimen of a proud worldling attempting to force contrary sentiments on others, that we cannot forbear giving verbatim the conversation.

'It is a very sad thing, Miss Douglas,' commenced this humble lady, 'that people who by their position in society have no pretensions at all to pride, are very often those who are carried away most fearfully by this dreadful sin.'

'It is, indeed, madam,' replied Flora with the

greatest sang froid possible. Poor girl! she was too simple to see that the denunciation was levelled against herself.

'Yes, it is too true,' resumed Mrs. Somers, after a moment's pause; 'those who fill dependent positions painfully exhibit their sensitive feelings on every possible occasion. I had a poor girl here, Miss Douglas, who filled the position you now occupy; poor thing! I knew her when her father was a well-to-do merchant, then she was a humble, quiet well disposed girl; but sadly, incomprehensibly changed when the reverse took place. I never could understand how Elizabeth Ashby could be so humble and meek when surrounded with every luxury, and behave as she did in poverty, when a person surely has nothing to be proud of. The folly of the girl, she called herself a finished governess, it is true; but what then? She truly showed the extent of her pride, when on my requiring that she should wash my children, she forgot herself so far as to say to the servant who delivered my message; 'Give my compliments to your mistress, and tell her that I came here to educate her daughters, and not to act the part of a nurse-maid.' Now, Miss Douglas, is not such pride quite unbearable?'

'Certainly not, madam; on the contrary, I admire the feelings which prompted the message. Miss Ashby was not a nursery governess; you allow, yourself, that she was highly educated; the young ladies surely could not respect the instructress who performed menial offices for them; besides, I think it speaks well for Miss Ashby that she was humble and unassuming in the days of her father's prosperity; her pride, as you call it, can scarcely be called pride; I term it self-respect.'

'Ah, I fear you are a little touched, yourself, by this naughty feeling,' said Mr. Somers with an air of badinage; 'but it showed itself, Miss Douglas, in a thousand ways, which were really quite unpardonable. I asked her one day if she ever weighed the words which she uttered in her prayers, in which we sometimes tell God that we will try to love to be despised, and she positively made answer that she always paused when she came to such words as those, as she would not offend Almighty God by uttering what in her case would be a falsehood. What have you to say to such ideas as these?' added the lady, turning up her eyes and folding her hands so demurely together, that Flora's risible faculties were set in motion? for she could think only of Moliere's play 'Le Tartuffe,' or our own comedy of the 'Hypocrite,' which is taken from the original, and Mawworm, his hands folded demurely on his breast, and his eyes turned upwards, uttering the words 'I likes to be despised,' rang in her ears.

'I am astonished, Miss Douglas, that for a moment you can laugh at such a subject,' replied Mrs. Somers, the Tartuffe in petticoats, as Flora rightly deemed her; 'think you that these were words fit for a Christian and a Catholic to utter?'

'Quite so, madam,' returned Flora, her countenance a little pale, and yet perfectly calm and collected; 'most assuredly do I believe and think that the majority of those who utter words like these pronounce them only with their lips, but not in the depth of their hearts; therefore do I think that Miss Ashby's prayer was more acceptable; because, feeling she did not possess such self-abnegation, and perhaps shrinking at the very mention of it, she would not utter such words. Such sentiments, I do believe, are only felt by the most self-denying ascetics in their cells, where, by the way, if their prayer to be despised is answered, the contempt they would be subjected to could not, as it would not, extend to the outer world, and, beyond the walls of their cloister, have the effect which it would produce on persons in general.'

'I declare I feel quite shocked at hearing such opinions,' Miss Douglas, replied Mrs. Somers; 'I do hope that you will never discuss such a subject before my daughters, especially before that unfortunate step-child of mine. Her mother brought her up in a very bad way. I have much work to do before I shall be quite able to crush her proud spirit, and make her as humble as I wish to see her: but really I am quite surprised that so good a Christian, as I thought you, should utter such sentiments. Is it possible you ever really omit a single word from your prayers?'

'Quite possible,' coolly replied the now imperturbable Flora. 'Weak and imperfect and faulty as I may be, whilst my conscience tells me that I am striving with God's help to do my duty to Him and my neighbor, I will not say that I think myself one of the vilest of mankind; not till I feel that I am raised to such a degree of humility as to wish that men should despise me, when I really am so imperfect as to desire to make all happy, and gain their love, will I utter such a falsehood before Him who reads my heart as to say, 'I wish to be despised.''

'I shall go and pray for you, my dear friend,'