

GERTRUDE MANNERING
A TALE OF SACRIFICE

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BY FRANCIS NOBLE
CHAPTER V.—CONTINUED

Then, both evenings after their long day of sight-seeing, Mr. Man- nering and Gertrude stayed quietly indoors to rest, only going out for a short stroll in the Park for a breath of the sweet evening air. Lady Hunter had guessed they would like best to be quiet and alone these two evenings before their temporary separation, and so had given way to their persuasions that she would not consider herself bound to remain at home and give up her own engagements.

"We shall feel you are making strangers of us, if you do that, you know," Mr. Mantering had said to her.

"Papa," said Gertrude suddenly, as they sat together in the gathering dusk, "I can't believe we have only been in London two days. Why, it seems ten, doesn't it, papa?"

"Because we've done so much, eh, Gerty? Our quiet life at home does not fit us for so much sight-seeing, certainly. We seem to have come quite into a new world, don't we?"

"I should think so indeed, papa. But I'm not sure that when the month is over I shall be sorry to leave it all again and go back to the old world. Indeed, I shall be glad, I know. I don't mean only to go back to you, because that is of course, but to get back to the country and the quiet. You see I've never lived before in a grand modern house like this, and it doesn't feel homely. I long for the dear old solemn Grange."

Mr. Mantering laughed kindly. "Poor little sunbeam! You don't feel nervous about tomorrow, do you, Gerty? You don't intend to stay awake all night practising your curtsy, eh?"

"I don't intend to stay awake at all if I can help it, papa; but of course I feel nervous a bit, you know. Suppose I do anything awkward—O dear! But Lady Hunter is going to make me practise for a whole hour in the morning, she says, before we begin to dress, so that I may get quite perfect at it. You'll not know me, papa, when I come down to you in my grand dress."

Gertrude was awake early next morning, being unable to sleep very soundly in her excitement, spite of her protestations to the contrary. It was to be such an eventful day, not merely that of her presentation at court, but also that of her first ball, and such a brilliant ball too as she knew Lady Hunter was about to give.

"If I could only take it all so easily as you do, Lady Hunter," she said laughingly, as they were engaged on the practicing of which she had spoken to her father the night before. "Were you ever nervous about it, like I am?"

"Like you, my dear? I was about a hundred times worse. I believe I cried over my dressing for my first Drawing-room, and begged to be let off. They said I did; but I was not in a rational state at all that day, and so remember nothing of what happened except that I got through it somehow and came back alive. But I want you to be more sensible, my love, and to enjoy the sight, if you can."

"If I can! Indeed I will, if it's only to please you, Lady Hunter. It is so good of you to take all this trouble!"

"Then reward me by not calling me 'Lady Hunter' any more, but by my name, Julia, like your dear girl. I'm not so dreadfully old, and I'm only your cousin after all; so I mean to claim the privilege of cousinship and to hear you call me 'Julia.' We shall get on better if we drive away every bit of stiffness, shan't we, dear?" she added, with her sweet, fascinating smile.

"Thank you, Julia," Gertrude said, with an eloquent look of her soft eyes, as they prepared to dress for the great event, Gertrude putting herself into the hands of the maid Lady Hunter had assigned to her.

The little country girl hardly knew herself when the operation was over, and she stood up fully arrayed in the elegant, tasteful costume chosen for her. With an innocent vanity she took two or three turns up and down before the full-length mirror, trying to appear quite unconcerned and composed before the maid, but her very eyes dancing all the time with excitement.

"Suppose Sister Teresa could see me now," she thought, "what a lecture I should get on vanity, to be sure! If she could only see my hair in all these plaits and puffs! And it seems only the other day since I was at school, and she would never let me do my hair in any but the old plain way, because, she said, I was vain enough, without having anything to be vain of either. Dear Sister Teresa! I don't think I am quite so plain as she wanted me to be."

And she took another glance at the sweet, bewitching face reflected in the glass, then suddenly turned away with a blush on discovering what her thoughts were. "How silly of me! I really didn't know I was admiring myself like that. How silly of me!" she repeated almost aloud, quite ashamed of her own folly, innocent as it was.

"Perhaps I am beginning to get vain and worldly already, as I soon shall do, with all this dressing and

gayety, and never doing a single good thing all day, except saying my morning and night prayers. O dear! And still I can't help enjoying it, and liking the dressing and the excitement, because, after all, it is no harm." And the convent girl made a quiet sign of the Cross on her heart, unseen by the maid, so that she might not be too engrossed by the coming gayeties, but might enjoy them only in moderation. In another minute Lady Hunter came into the room, dressed, and looking, as she always did, graceful and elegant.

"My dear!" she exclaimed at once, as she saw Gertrude, "you're perfection. If it were not for spoiling your dress I should like to give you a good hug. Only look like that tonight, and always, Gerty, and you'll make a sensation; people will all envy me my little country debutante, a month placing Gertrude's arm in her own she led her down-stairs, where Sir Robert and Mr. Mantering were waiting to "see them off," as her ladyship called it.

"Now, Mr. Mantering, wasn't she worth waiting to see?" And she brought Gertrude forward for him to look at.

The proud father could not hide the almost startled admiration which came to his face as he looked at his daughter.

"Well, she is indeed!" he said smilingly. "But I hardly know my little country girl," he added almost ruefully.

"Never mind, papa; I shall not look like this always, you know. I shall be your little country girl again in a month, you don't be afraid." And she went to his arms and kissed him so heartily that Lady Hunter was in dismay for fear of the damage to her elaborate costume.

"And don't make rash promises, Gerty," she laughed, and she led her away, returning herself a minute to whisper to Mr. Mantering.

"Doesn't she look lovely? Wouldn't it have been a shame to have kept her much longer buried away in the country? Mr. Mantering, she is brighter and more beautiful even than her poor mother," she added, in a still lower and more earnest whisper as she left him.

Gertrude could never tell exactly or minutely afterwards how she got through that day's ceremony—her inauguration, as it were, into fashionable life. From the minute she stepped from the carriage with Lady Hunter at the entrance to the Palace, to the time when she found herself seated in it again, it seemed one brilliant maze of gorgeous dresses, young, beautiful faces, and elderly, bedizened ones. She felt so bewildered with the sight and the genteel crushing that she was hardly so nervous as she had been in the anticipation. She knew that the Queen seemed to smile very graciously, she looked weary, she thought, and she did not think that she herself was so very awkward over her curtsy; but that was all she seemed to know about it.

"Oh! I'm so glad it is over," she exclaimed when they were again seated in the carriage, and she leant back half exhausted among the cushions.

"Of course you are, dear. I don't know who isn't. I really think none enjoy their first attendance at a Drawing-room, unless they are very brave and self-possessed indeed. But you'll remember all about it later, and be able to tell us your first impressions of 'life'; for you are only beginning really to live today, you know." And her ladyship laughed kindly. It is an important day for you today, Gerty, the most important, the most exciting, the most blessed, the day of her first Communion; and as the thought deepened in her heart, he face grew serious until the smile faded altogether.

"Why do you look so solemn, Gerty? Don't you agree with me, love?" asked her ladyship.

Then Gertrude smiled again, and hesitated a moment. Could she tell her thoughts, could she explain her inner feelings, to her worldly though kindly companion? For an instant she felt she could not speak freely to one so devoid of religion, to whom the very word was as a sealed book; and then again it seemed like being ashamed of the thought not to own it, and she spoke out of the fulness of her heart.

"I don't know whether you will know what I mean, if I tell you, Julia," she said, using the familiar name timidly as yet, "but though I know this occasion has been a very important one, it is not the most important yet—oh! no. And I was thinking of the day that I think to have been so, that I know was so, that I must know, as—as a—Catholic, Julia. You won't think I am being light of today, I know, because of course it is the most important occasion, in a worldly sense, that I have had yet; but the one I mean was a different one—a religious, spiritual one; and of course, with us, that is above the other—above everything in the world. That is what I was thinking of, Julia."

"But what was it, the occasion you speak of, Gerty, if you don't

mind telling me, dear?" And Lady Hunter listened eagerly for the reply.

"Well, I meant the day of my first Communion, Julia. You know what that is, don't you? You will have heard poor mamma speak of it, have you not?"

"Yes, of course, I must have done, Gerty, and I know it is the same as receiving the Sacrament to Protestants; but I know little more, for your mamma never liked to speak much of her religion to me, because I was very giddy in those days, and always made great fun of her about it, and never cared to listen to her explanations. I think at last she got to keep it as something quite sacred from me, Gerty. I'm afraid I don't care very much more about it all now, love, though you'll be shocked at me for saying so; but still I could not laugh at it now in any one who is earnest about it, like you are, dear."

"I wish you could be in earnest about it too, you would be if you only knew, if you got grace from God!" exclaimed Gertrude impulsively, almost unconsciously, while Lady Hunter looked at her kindly, half in admiration, half in wonderment as to her meaning.

"And our Communion is not like what you think—like the Protestant one," Gertrude went on quietly, so earnestly as to be careless of what Lady Hunter might be thinking of her. "It is so infinitely greater than—that it cannot be compared to it at all, we cannot speak of them together. If you have ever been to the Sacrament in your life, Lady Hunter, you only thought, didn't you, that you receive bread? But we—we Catholics—know that in our Communion it is our Lord Himself—Jesus Christ I mean—who comes to us in the form of bread, becomes our very food, and is one with us for the time. Of course no one can pretend to understand it—it is a mystery; but we believe it just as firmly as if we saw it all plainly with our own eyes, because God Himself instituted it and taught the doctrine to His Church, the Catholic Church—the only true one, we know, Julia, though you don't. You're not offended, are you?" she asked affectionately. "You see you are so kind that I can talk to you quite easily, as if I had known you all my life. And you see now why I think my first Communion day more important than today, why I know it to have been the grandest and best altogether that has been in my life; don't you, Julia?"

"Of course, dear, of course; and thanks to you for telling me all about it, I'm afraid I don't think me very irreligious Gerty, very—what shall I say?—worldly altogether; but, you see, I have never brought up to it at all. I have never thought of such things. I have never read a Catholic book in my life. But I wish well to all religions; I think them all good, and suppose some day I must choose one myself, Gerty."

"There is but one, Julia, for don't you see that two opposites cannot be true? Oh! I wonder how every one does not see it, that there can only be one Truth, and that God has given it to His Church, the Catholic Church to teach!" Then, blushing as she became conscious of her own earnestness, she added more calmly: "I'm afraid you must think me tiresome talking in this way to you, Julia; but you see I feel it all so much, it seems so plain to me, as to all Catholics, that—I can't help wishing it could be the same with you. And you see I have always lived among Catholics; our very home, our dear old Grange, is a relic of the days when our family suffered so much for the faith that it seems strange at first that it is not the same everywhere—that I must get used to being with Protestants, and mustn't be surprised if they don't care to hear about us. You don't mind me, Julia, do you? You are not offended at me for talking so plainly to you, are you?"

"Offended, Gerty dear! How could I be? I like to hear you speak so earnestly; I envy you, love, do really. I envy your faith, though I cannot understand it, or hope that I could ever partake of it; I never could, Gerty. But some day you must let me come and stay with you at the Grange, and you shall show me all the old nooks and corners you are so fond and proud of. I shall be able to appreciate them better now than when I stayed there with your poor mother; though I prefer to live in a more modern world, for it is a very pleasant world too, Gerty, and I should not like to leave it." And its brilliant though kind-hearted votary sighed rather sadly.

"Nor I either, Julia, I'm afraid, though I am a Catholic. I'm always afraid of getting too fond of the world, because I know it is pleasant. I have to pray against that more than anything. A worldly Catholic is so much worse than a worldly Protestant—I mean, will have so very, very much more to answer for, because we know so much better, oh! so much more than you can!"

"What a strange girl you are, Gerty!" And Lady Hunter looked curiously, but very kindly at Gertrude, who noticed that she became silent and abstracted until they reached home again.

"How very solemn we have both got, Gerty!" she said as they entered the house. "No one would think we had been to a Drawing-

room, would they? Now you must have a good rest when you have got rid of your finery, so as to be ready for tonight, you know; and I can promise, you, dear, rather more enjoyment than you have had this afternoon."

And so the great event was over, and the simple, convent girl was fairly launched now into the great world.

TO BE CONTINUED

MRS. DORAN'S VISIT

She was a small woman, Mrs. Doran, with quiet ways and unassuming manners. The Moores had met her in California the previous winter, and in gratitude for several kindnesses she had invited her to visit them if she ever came East. They had exchanged letters since, but had really never expected to see Mrs. Doran again, when one day Mrs. Moore received a wire saying their chance acquaintance was on her way East and would be with her in a few days for a little visit.

"Yes, those were her very words!" exclaimed Mrs. Moore to her husband two months later. "A little visit!" And here she is yet and no sign of stirring! What shall we do, Den? That's what I'd like to know."

"Don't ask me," said her husband for the hundredth time. "Of course it is a long visit, but she—uh—tries to pay her way, anyhow." "Tries to?" "Yes, she's very good," said Mrs. Moore, "if she'd only frankly pay me instead of cluttering up the house with a lot of impossible stuff—birds, and gold fish and horrible pictures! Actually the house looks like a second-hand store!"

Den grinned. "We can sell 'em off—after she goes." "Don't be silly! Besides, I don't think she has any intention of going." This with a despairing sigh.

Man-like Den was not greatly exercised. "Oh, yes she will. She'll be moving along one of these days. She'll have to. Waere'd she say those friends of her lived?"

"That's it. Sometimes she says Detroit, and again she talks about New York and her relatives there. It's my opinion she hasn't any friends, or relatives either!" "Poor old soul," Den murmured. "Bertha, I'd hate to be alone in the world, wouldn't you?"

Bertha rejected the appeal tartly. "Well, if I ever am I hope I'll have better sense than to plant myself on perfect strangers for an indefinite period and bore them to death!"

Den held up a warning finger. "Sh-h! Don't tell that to the door? I wonder—his expression became boyishly eager—"what she's got this time?" For no matter what his wife might say, Mrs. Doran's gifts were to him an endless source of amusement.

In spite of herself, Mrs. Moore's severe expression relaxed. "It was a bread-bag the last time," she interposed him briefly. "From the 10 cent store. Come in," she called in response to a timid knock.

"Oh I beg your pardon," said the little woman at the door. "I didn't know Mr. Moore was home—I forgot it was Saturday."

Mr. Moore hailed her in heartily. Come on in, Mrs. Doran. Always room for one more. Here, let me relieve you of that big package. What is it, a picture?" She smiled at her kindly.

Mrs. Doran cast a deprecating glance at Mrs. Moore as she seated herself gingerly on a chair, breathing rather quickly. She looked warm and tired.

"Thank you. Yes. It's a picture. I bought it for Mrs. Moore. She's so kind to me."

There was a simple dignity in the statement, though the look divided between the two was wholly wistful in its appeal. It was as though Mrs. Doran had said to the man of the house, "I'd like to give you something, too; but of course she comes first."

Mrs. Moore groaned to herself. "Another picture? Washington crossing the Delaware, I suppose, by the size of it!" But as usual in the face of these gifts she found herself saying gently: "Mrs. Doran, you shouldn't do things like this! I won't have you buying me things—really, now, I mean it."

The visitor smiled apologetically. "You mustn't scold me," she said. "Will you unwrap it, Mr. Moore? I hope you'll both like it."

Mrs. Moore, expecting the usual cheap affair, was amazed at the first sight of the picture. "Why, it's a beauty!" husband and wife exclaimed rapturously. Den added: "You must have paid a lot of money for this, Mrs. Doran. It looks like a French print."

"Yes, it is. The man said it was. He said anybody would be glad to have it. Yes, that's what he said it was."

For, Moore, who knew something about prints, said gravely that this was a very fine one. "But you shouldn't spend so much money on a little gift for Bertha, Mrs. Doran," he added with a kind smile at the little woman.

"Oh, it wasn't so much," she disclaimed evasively, fingering her purse with nervous fingers. It struck the Moores that she had grown thin and worn in the past week. Bertha battled with the curious pity which she always felt for her and the hostess's resentment at a lingering guest. The latter feeling was always paramount in the guest's absence, for in

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