

GRANTLEY MANOR.

A TALE

LADY GEORGINA FULLERTON, Author of "Lady Bird," "The Middletons," etc.

CHAPTER I.—Continued.

Henry Leslie had left his child in the care of his parents at Grantley; both had died during his absence, and Margaret had been intrusted to Mrs. Dalton, an old-fashioned governess, whose plans of education were superintended by Mrs. Thornton, who was established at the vicarage, and by Walter Sydney, in whom Leslie had more confidence than in any member of his own family. It was lucky for the little girl that such was the case; for an only child, an heiress, and a beauty, she ran considerable risk of being utterly spoiled. If Walter had not watched over her with a father's care and a brother's tenderness, she soon discovered in her character those impetuous qualities which are equally powerful for good or for evil, according to the direction which they take. The over-indulgent indulgence with which she was constantly treated, had at least, among many evils, one good result; Margaret was the truest of human beings, and from the moment that she first lisped a few words in baby language, no falsehood had ever passed her lips. There was no moral courage in this; it was the result of a frank and fearless nature, and of an education, which, though it had not sufficiently checked the bad, had not impaired the good impulses of her character. There was no merit in it, I repeat, but it was beautiful—as a bright day, as a clear sky, as a pure lake are beautiful. It was something fresh from the hands of God and unspoiled by man; and often, when Walter gazed into the child's blue eyes, or parted the curls which clustered on her fair open brow, the words of commendation which our Lord pronounced on Nathaniel rose to his mind, and he would murmur, as he pressed the little girl to his heart, "One in whom there is indeed no guile."

As she grew older, and became conscious of thoughts which her grandmother and her governess could not comprehend, and of capacities which they knew not how to direct, and therefore strove to stifle—like the unskillful husbandman who would dam up the stream he knows not how to turn—she went to Walter, and to him she revealed them in language which he understood, for genius has a simplicity of its own which appreciates and is appreciated by the simplicity of childhood. When she first perceived that religion meant something beyond going to church once a week, and repeating the catechism by rote—that poetry was not merely versemaking—that conversation was not always mere talk—that life was not child's play, when its forms and its spirit, its realities and its mysteries, appeared to her in a new shape, and with a strange power; it was again to Walter that she turned, and from him that she learned glorious truths which give to one's destiny a meaning, and to one's actions an end. He gave her books, and while he carefully guarded her mind from what might taint, he filled it with high thoughts and noble images. Self-sacrifice in every form, was the theme of his lessons, the object of his reverence; and Margaret listened with a kindling eye and a flushing cheek when he recited deeds of heroism, and lauded acts of self-conquest, the real true courage of the soul; when he spoke of the martyr who dies for his faith, of the patriot who bares his breast to a thousand foes, of the missionary who confesses Christ with the scalping-knife before his eyes, of the sister of charity who braves the horrors of pestilence in the loathsome abodes of disease; and lastly, not least, to those lonely martyrs—to those unnoticed confessors—to those meek souls who in the humble walks of life, in desolation unrequiring, go through a fiery trial, with no witness but that God.

"Who to the wrestlings of the lonely heart, Imparts the virtue of His midnight agony." He taught her that self-denial practised in secret, and pangs endured in silence for conscience sake, no less deserve the palm of martyrdom than the courage that carries a man to the scaffold or the stake. He illustrated his meaning by various examples; he called her attention to those heroic actions which are sometimes performed by the poor with such sublime simplicity, such unconscious magnanimity. For instance, he made her read and compare the historical record of the noble answer of Louis XII. of France, when, in the presence of an assembly of nobles, he pronounced that sentence which has been handed down to an admiring posterity, "It is not for the King of France to avenge the injuries of the Duke of Orleans;" with the police reports of an obscure trial in the newspaper of the day, in which a poor collier, bearded and disfigured by a cruel assault, begged off his brutal enemy all punishment, and refused all pecuniary compensation, simply urging that the man had a wife and children, and could not well spare the money, and that he would himself take it as a great favor if the magistrate would pass it over; and he asked her if the monarch's deed was not of those that have indeed their own reward or earth, and the collier's did not number among those which are laid up as treasure in Heaven—there, where the rest of human applause does not dim, and the moth of human vanity does not consume their merits, and forestall their recompense? The virtues of the poor!—Their countless trials!—Their patient toil!—Their sublime because unknown and unrequited sacrifices! History does not record them. Multitudes do not applaud them. The doors of such deeds travel on their weary journey through life, and go down to their graves, unknown, unnoticed, though perchance not unwept by some obscure sufferer like themselves; but a crown is laid up for them, there—where many first shall be last, and many last shall be first! Weighed or atres who after working all day with aching heads, perhaps, or a low fever consuming them, creep out at night to attend on some neighbor more wretched than themselves, and carry to them a share of their own scanty meal. Mothers who toil all day, and nurse at night sick and peevish children. Men, who with the racking cough of consumption, and the deadly languor of disease upon them work on, and strive and struggle and toil, till life gives way. Parents whose children cry to them for food when they have none to give. Beings tempted on every side, starved into guilt, baited into

crime;—who still resist, who do not kill, who do not steal, who do not take the wages of iniquity, who do not curse and slander—and who, if they do not covet, are indeed of those of whom "the world is not worthy." And we—we the self-indulgent—we the very slaves of luxury and ease—we who can hardly bear a toothache or a sleepless night; we go among the poor, and (if they are that, to be which must require a blither stretch of virtue than we have ever contemplated) give them a nod of approval, or utter a cold expression of approbation. They have done their duty; and had they not done it, had they fallen into the thousand snares which poverty presents, had the pale mother starved for the famishing child a morsel of food, had the sorely tempted and starving girl pawned for one day the shirt in her keeping, stern Justice would have overtaken them, and Mercy closed her ears in their cries. And if they have not transgressed the law of the land, but for a while given over the struggle in despair, and sat down in their miserable garrets with fixed eyes and folded arms, and resorted to the temporary madness of gin, or the deadly stapor of laudanum, then we who into our very homes often admit men whose whole lives are a course of illness and selfish excess, turn from them in all the severity of our self-righteousness; and on the wretched beings who perhaps after years of sear struggles, yield at last—not to passion, not to vanity, but to hunger,—with despair in their heart and madness in their brain,—we direct a glance, which we dare not cast on guilt and depravity when it meets us in our crowded drawing-rooms, in all the pomp and circumstance of guilty prosperity!

Such were Walter's thoughts, such were his sympathies, and though he seldom declaimed on the subject, he felt deeply, and acted accordingly. His influence over Margaret was great, but it effected her way of thinking more than her mode of life. He could inspire her with a love for what was great and good, but it is only by a course of patient and diligent training bestowed on a child, or resolutely practiced in after-life by ourselves, that we learn not merely to feel, but to do, not only to admire, but to imitate.

It is not to be imagined that because Margaret's mind was naturally formed to admire what was heroic, and had been trained by Walter to appreciate the true heroism of patience and self-denial, that at the present time of her life she was either a heroine or a model of self-control. His lessons and his example were so far useful to her, that they presented to her mind an ideal standard, which prevented her from looking upon her own character and habits with the complacency which she would otherwise have indulged; for it must be confessed, that whereas at times her heart beat high at the ideal glories of Joan of Arc or the Maid of Saragossa, at others it beat with a very hurried pulsation at the least appearance of danger threatening the pretty Mistress of Grantley. It must be owned, that though her eyes would fill with tears at the account of two Sisters of Charity setting out on foot from Paris, in one of the coldest winters of this century, to go and nurse the sick at Barcelona, and never leaving the afflicted town till the plague had passed away, she was apt to shut herself up for days together in her comfortable boudoir, with her little feet on the fender, and her graceful figure reclining in the softest and most luxuriant armchair, because it was too cold, or too wet, to venture out to the cottages or the school, and that Mrs. Dalton going alone would do just as well, especially as her grandmamma was so afraid of her catching cold. I wish that it was not on record, that Margaret had been heard to declare on other occasions, that there never was such nonsense as her grandmamma's fancies about her catching cold.

It is true that she read with enthusiasm the lives of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, and St. Margaret of Scotland—those loveliest of women, those gentlest of saints, daughters of a royal race, and the brides of heroes—who with their own hands attended upon lepers, and nursed with a mother's tenderness those from whom their own mothers turned with disgust; but it is unfortunately equally true that she could hardly bring herself to visit Mrs. Jones, an old woman in the village whom Walter had particularly recommended to her notice, because her room was intolerably close, and that she was apt to show her the wound in her leg. It is true, that as she heard the account of Mrs. Fry's first visit to Newgate, when, quietly shutting the door behind her, she advanced alone, the Bible in her hand, among the fierce and reckless women who at that time were controlled only by armed men, and addressed them as sisters and as friends, in those tones and with that expression which none can conceive who have not heard her, and which those who have can never forget—it is true, that as she listened, her heart burned within her, and she longed to go and do likewise; but at the next opportunity of exercising courage, of conquering disinclination, of enduring pain, or overcoming weariness, these high resolves and noble projects were apt to vanish into air, or to swell that amount of "good intention" with which St. Bernard tells us Hell is paved. The fact must be confessed, Margaret was a spoiled child.

Mr. and Mrs. Thornton, who were perfectly unlike each other in every other respect, concurred in one line of conduct, that of indulging and flattering her to the utmost extent. He was one of those gentle, kind-hearted persons, who can see no imperfections in those they love, and though not himself deficient in understanding, would praise his wife's singular good sense, and Margaret's extraordinary docility, in a way which severely tried the patience of his old friend, Mr. Sydney, Walter's father.

Mrs. Thornton was a good woman—nobody could deny that; but to her goodness she joined a profound conviction of her own wisdom; a steady, simple-minded conceit, which carried her through every circumstance of life with an amount of self-gratulation, and through every conversation with a degree of authoritative folly, that was inexpressibly amusing. She was unbouedly credulous, and had a habit of adopting opinions put forward by others as her own, and of maintaining them dogmatically, in happy unconsciousness of their incompatibility with those she had herself advanced a quarter of an hour before. She was never startled at anything, never surprised, never puzzled by the grossest inconsistencies, or embarrassed by the most direct evidence. Between her and Mr.

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Sydney there was a close alliance joined to a little tacit enmity. She kept him in a state of mingled irritation and amusement. There never was any occasion of meeting, whether at dinner, luncheon, picnic, or party, that she was not by his side, pouring into his car oracular sayings, political axioms, mysterious predictions, theological denunciations, and scientific discoveries, to all of which he responded by a short, sudden laugh, or if she looked for further encouragement, by an assenting growl. On the subject of education, Mrs. Thornton adopted in turn the most contradictory theories, but they succeeded each other so rapidly that they usually evaporated in talk, and as nothing insures success so much as fixity of purpose, Margaret's very fixed determination not to be managed, outlived all the systems of management which her grandmother successively adopted. (To be continued.)

FOR IDLE MOMENTS.

A farmer in St. Albans, Vt., used five casks of cider in a fruitless effort to save his house and barn from fire. Now he's an out-cider, so to speak.

The surest way to bring one.—A man addressed a passionate love letter to a lady, adding, postscript: "Please to send a speedy answer; somebody else is in my eye."

Miss Passy—"I dread to think of my 30th birthday." Miss Budd—"Why; what happened?"

It is now thought that what was regarded a few days ago as Biela's comet was only the price of coal.

"If we should become financially embarrassed," said George, "do you think your father would help me out?" "Yes, George. He said he was going to the next time you showed your face in our house."

"You must not be discouraged, George," she said. "Papa may be abrupt, but his heart is as warm as a June day."

"Yes," replied George, "I've noticed that his manner is very summary."

"Dey is a mighty good temperance sermo in a freight train," says Uncle Mose. "No matter how much de cars dey gets loaded de ingine w'at does de work gets along strictly on water."

Teacher: "Andrew, what happened about that time to Captain John Smith?" Andrew (glibly): "One of his enemies tried to poison him, but he swallowed an anecdote and recovered."

Little Lucy had been naughty and her mamma had spanked her. Lucy was still unrepentant and mamma tried reason. "Don't you know, dear, it makes mamma feel very sorry to have to whip her little daughter so much?" "Why don't you quit it, then?" was the unexpected reply.

Tradesman (gently): "I see you have transferred your custom to my rival across the street, sir." Mr. Highhead (with dignity): "Yes, sir, I have." Tradesman (more gently): "May I ask, sir, what I have done to deserve this." Mr. Highhead (with added dignity): "You sent in your bill."

"I am so pleased," said young Mrs. Warble to her perspiring husband, "that you succeeded at last in matching that pattern! Don't you think the design is wonderfully cheap?" "I should say so," replied Warble, "I ran all over town after it."



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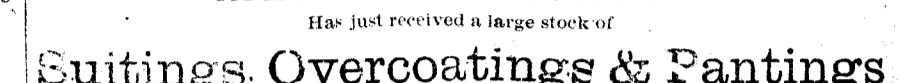
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