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GRAPES AND THORNS.

BY M. A. T., AUTHOR OF "THE HOUSE OF YORK," "A WINGED WORD," ETC.

CHAPTER XI.—CONTINUED.

"Your carriage has come," whispered the Sister, and looked quickly away from the face turned toward her, it was so white and worn. In that half-hour she seemed to have grown ten years older.

"Must I go now?" she exclaimed, with an air of terror, and for a moment seemed not to know where she was. Then murmuring an excuse, she recalled herself, and, by some magic, threw off again the look of age and pain. "You need not call Sister Cecilia, only say good-bye to her for me," she said. "I have really not a moment to spare."

This Sister was almost a stranger to Mrs. Annette Gerald, and was quite taken by surprise when the lady turned at the door, and, without a word of farewell, kissed her, and then hurried away.

"Drive to the office, John, for Mr. Gerald," she said; and no one would have suspected from her manner that she trembled before the man to whom she gave that careless order.

Lawrence came running lightly down the stairs, having been on the watch for his wife, and John, holding the carriage-door open, winked with astonishment at sight of the bright greeting exchanged between the two. He could maintain a cold and stolid reserve, if he had anything to conceal; but this airy gayety on the brink of ruin was not only beyond his power, but beyond his comprehension.

Stealing a glance of scrutiny into the young man's face he met a glance of defiant *hauteur*. "You need not go any further with us, John," Lawrence said. "We shall not need you. Jack, drive round to Mrs. Gerald's."

And John, with his coat down to his heels—a costume in which nothing would have induced him voluntarily to take a promenade—was forced to walk home, comforting himself with the assurance that it was the last order he should have to obey from that source. Perhaps, indeed, he would not have obeyed it now, had they not driven away and left him no choice.

The sun was declining toward the west, and touching everything with the tender glory of early spring, when they drew up at the cottage gate, the sound of their wheels bringing Mrs. Gerald and Honora to the window, and then to the door.

"We can't stop to come in, Mamma Gerald," Annette called out. "We are going off on a little visit, and only come to say good-by. Isn't it beautiful this afternoon? The trees will soon begin to bud, if this weather continues."

The two ladies came out to the carriage, and Mrs. Gerald caught sight of her son's face, which had been turned away. It had grown suddenly white. She exclaimed: "Why, Lawrence! what is the matter?"

"Oh! another of those faint turns," interposed his wife quickly, laying her hand on his arm. "He has no appetite, and is really fainting from lack of nourishment. The journey will do him good, mamma. We are going entirely on his account."

"Oh! yes, it's nothing but a turn that will soon pass away," he added, and seemed, indeed, already better.

"Do come in and take something warm," his mother said anxiously, her beautiful blue eyes fixed on his face. "There is some chocolate just made."

"We have no time," Annette began; but her husband immediately opened the carriage-door.

"Yes mother," he said. "I won't keep you waiting but a minute, Ninon."

The mother put her hand in his arm, and still turned her anxious face toward him. "You mustn't go to night, is you feel sick, my son," she said. "You know what happened to you before."

"But the journey is just what I need, mother," he answered, trying to speak cheerfully. "Of course I won't go if I feel unwell; but this is really nothing. I have not quite got my strength up, and, as Annette says, I have eaten nothing to day."

Those little services of a mother, how tender and touching they are at any time! how terrible in their pathos when we know that they will soon be at an end for us for ever! How the hand trembles to take the cup, and the lip trembles to touch its brim, when we know that she would have filled it with her life-blood, if that could have been saving to us!

"Sit here by the fire, dear, while I get your chocolate," Mrs. Gerald said, and pushed the chair close to the hearth. "There is really quite a chill in the air."

She stirred the fire, and made the red coals glow warmly, then went out of the room.

He looked round after her the moment her back was turned, and watched her hastening through the entry. The temptation was strong to follow her, throw himself at her feet, and tell her all. He started up from the chair, and took a step, but came back again. It would kill her, and he could not see her die. He would let her live yet the four weeks left her. Perhaps she might die a natural death before that. He hoped she would. At that thought, a sudden flame of hope and of trust in God rose in his heart. He dropped on his knees. "O my God! take my mother home before she hears of this, and I will do any penance, bear anything!" he prayed, with vehement rapidity. "Be merciful to her, and take her!"

He heard her step returning, and hastily resumed his seat, and bent forward to the fire.

"You look better already," she said, smiling. "You have a little color now. Here is your chocolate, and Annette is calling to you to make haste."

She held the little tray for him, and he managed, strengthened by that desperate hope of his, to empty the cup, and even smile faintly in giving it back. And then he got up, put his arm around his mother's waist, in a boyish fashion he had sometimes with her, and went out to the door with her so. And there he kissed her, and jumped into the carriage, and was driven away. It never occurred to her, so sweetly obedient had he been to her requests, and so expressive had his looks and actions been, that he had not uttered a word while he was in the house nor when he drove away. He had accepted her little services with affection and gratitude, and he had been tender and caressing, and that was enough. Moreover, he had really looked better on leaving, which proved that her prescription had done him good.

How Annette Gerald got away from home she could not have told afterward. Her trunks were sent in advance, and she and her husband chose to walk to the station in the evening. Some way she succeeded in answering all her mother's charges and anxious forebodings. She promised to sit in a middle car, so as to be at the furthest point from a collison in front or rear, and to have the life-preservers all ready at hand in the steamer. She took the basket of luncheon her mother put up, and allowed her bonnet to be tied for her and her shawl pinned. And at last they were in the portico, and it was necessary to say good-by.

"My poor mamma! don't be too anxious about me, whatever happens," Annette said. "Remember God takes care of us all. I hope He will take care of you. Whenever you feel disposed to worry about us, say a little prayer, and all will come right again."

The darkness hid the tears that rolled down her cheeks as she ended, and in a few minutes all was over, and the two were walking arm-in-arm down the quiet street.

"This way!" Lawrence said when they came to the street where his mother lived.

It was out of their way, but they went down by the house, and paused in front of it. The windows of the sitting-room were brightly lighted, and they could see by the glow of the lamp that it stood on a table drawn before the fire. As they looked, a shadow leaned forward on the white curtain. Mrs. Gerald was leaning with her elbow on the table, and talking to some one. They saw the slender hand that supported her chin, and the coil of her heavy hair. They saw the slight movement with which she pushed back a lock of hair that had a way of falling on to her forehead.

Annette felt the arm she held tremble. She only pressed it the closer, that he might not forget that love still was near him, but did not speak. There was nothing for her to say.

"Let's go inside the gate to the window," he whispered. "Perhaps I can hear her speak."

She softly opened the gate, and entered with him. The moonless night was slightly overclouded, and the shadows of the trees hid them perfectly, as they stole close to the window like two thieves. Lawrence pressed his face to the sash, and listened breathlessly. There was a low murmur of voices inside, then a few words distinctly spoken. "And by the way, dear, I forgot to close the blinds. Oh! no, I will close them. Don't rise!"

Mrs. Gerald come to the window, opened it, and leaned out so close to her son that he heard the rustle of her dress and fancied that he felt her breath on his cheek. She was silent a moment, looking up at the sky. "The night is very soft and mild," she said. "Those children will have a pleasant journey." One instant longer she rested there, her hand half extended to the blind, then she sent upward a word of prayer, which brushed her son's cheek in passing. "O God! protect my son!" she said.

Then the blinds were drawn together, and the son was shut out from her sight and sound for ever.

"It is our signal to go," Annette whispered to her husband. "Come! We have no time to lose."

He held her by the arm a moment.

"Isn't it better, after all, to stay and have it out here?" he asked desperately. "I'd rather face danger than fly from it. Running away makes me seem worse than I am."

"You have no longer the right to consider yourself," she answered, with a certain sternness. "I will not submit to have a convict for a husband. I would rather see you dead. And your mother shall not visit you in a felon's cell. Besides, no one is to be profited by such a piece of folly, and you would yourself repent it when too late. Come!"

He said no more, but suffered himself not be drawn away. He could not complain that his wife treated his heroic impulses with a disrespect amounting almost to contempt, for he could not himself trust them.

After having closed the window, Mrs. Gerald returned to her place by the fire. A round table was drawn up there between two arm chairs, in one of which Miss Pembroke sat, knitting a scarf of crimson wool. The shade over the lamp kept its strong light from her eyes, and threw a faint shadow on the upper part of her face; but her sweet and serious mouth, and the round chin, with its faint dent of a dimple, were illuminated, her brown dress had rich yellow lights on the folds, and the end of a straying curl on her shoulder almost sparkled with gold. Her eyes were downcast and fixed on her work, and crimson loop after loop dropped swiftly from the ivory needles scarcely whiter than her hands.

"As I was saying," Mrs. Gerald resumed, "six months of the year they were to pass with Mrs. Ferrier have gone and next fall they will have an establishment of their own. It will be better for both of them. I am sure Annette will make a good housekeeper. Besides every married man should be the master of a house. It gives him a place in the world, and makes him feel his responsibilities and dignities more."

"Yes, every one should have a home," answered the young woman gravely. "It is a great safeguard."

Mrs. Gerald leaned back in her chair, and gazed into the fire. There was a smile of contentment on her lips and an air of gentle pride in the carriage of her head. As she thought, or dreamed, she turned about the birthday ring her son had given her, and, presently becoming aware of what she was doing, looked at it and smiled as if she were smiling in his face.

"I never before felt so well contented and satisfied with his situation," she said, her happiness breaking into words. "His marriage has turned out well. They seem to be perfectly united, and Lawrence is really proud of his wife; and with reason. She is no more like what she was when I first knew her than a butterfly is like a grub. She has developed wonderfully." She was silent a moment then added: "I am very thankful."

She drew a rosary from her pocket, and, leaning back in her chair with her eyes closed, began to whisper the prayers as the beads slipped through her fingers.

Miss Pembroke glanced at her and smiled faintly. It was very pleasant to see this mother happy in her son, yet how trembling and precarious was her happiness! This woman's heart, which bruised itself in beating, was always ready to catch some fleeting glory on its springing tide; like the fountain which holds the rainbow a moment among its chilly drops.

While one woman prayed, the other thought. She had often dwelt upon this subject of woman's lives being wrecked from love of friend, husband, or child, and the sight of Mrs. Gerald has been to her a constant illustration of such a wreck. These thoughts had troubled her, for she was not one to judge hastily, and she did not know whether to pity or to blame so ruinous a devotion. Now again the question floated up, and with it the wish to decide once for all before life should thrust the problem on her, when she would be too confused to think rightly. She was like one who stands safe yet wistful on shore, looking off over troubled waters, and Mrs Gerald and Annette seemed to her tossing far out on the waves. She even seemed to herself to have approached the brink so near that the salt tide had touched her feet, and to have drawn back only just in time.

Gradually, as her fair fingers wove the glowing web, a faint cloud came over her face, and, if it had been possible for her to frown, that deeper shadow between the brows might have been called a frown. Her thoughts were growing stern.

"Were we made upright, we women, only to bend like reeds to every wind?" she asked herself. "Can we not be gentle without being slavish, and kind and tender without pouring our hearts out like water? Cannot we reserve something to ourselves, even while giving all and even more than our friends deserve? Cannot we hold our peace and happiness so firmly in our own hands that no one shall have the power to destroy them?"

Each question as it came met with a prompt answer, and resolution followed swiftly: "Never will I suffer myself to be so enslaved by any affection as to lose my individuality and be merged and lost in another, or be made wretched by another, or to have my sense of justice and right confused by the desire to make excuses for one I love. Never will I suffer the name which I have kept stainless to be associated with the disgrace of another, and never will I leave the orderly and honorable ways of life, where I have walked so far, to follow any one into the by-ways, for any pretext. Each one is to save his own soul, and to help others only to a certain extent. I will keep my place!"

That resolute and almost haughty face seemed scarcely to be Honora Pembroke's; and she felt so surely that her expression would check and startle her companion that when she saw Mrs. Gerald drop the rosary from her fingers, and turn to speak to her, she quickly changed her position so as to hide her face a moment.

Mrs. Gerald's voice had changed while she prayed, and seemed weighted with a calm seriousness from her heavenly communion; and her first words jarred strangely with her young friend's thought.

"How uncalculating the saints were!" she said. "Our Lady was the only one, I think, who escaped personal contumely, and that was not because she risked nothing, but because God would not suffer contempt nor slander to touch her. He spared her no pang, save that of disgrace; yet she would have accepted that without a complaint. How tender He was of her! He gave her a nominal spouse to shield her motherhood; it was through her Son that her heart was pierced, and the grief of a mother is always sacred; and He gave her always loving and devoted women, who clustered about and made her little court. She was never alone. But she is an exception. The others were despised and maltreated, and they seemed to be perpetually throwing themselves away. I do not doubt that those saints who never suffered martyrdom nor persecution were still, in their day, laughed and mocked at by some more than they were honored by others. They never stopped to count the cost."

Miss Pembroke felt at the first instant as though Mrs. Gerald must have read her thoughts, and her reply came like a retort. "It is true they did not count the costs," she said; "but it was God whom they loved."

"Yes," Mrs. Gerald replied gently, "that was what I meant."

She was too closely wrapped in contentment to perceive the coldness with which her companion spoke. It seemed to her that all her cares had floated away, and left only rest and sweetness behind. She no longer feared anything. There comes to every one some happy season in life, she thought; and hers had come.

When the next day, she received a note from her son, which he had written from their first stopping-place, she was scarcely surprised, though it was an unusual attention.

It was but a hurried line, written with a pencil and posted in the station-house.

"My darling mother," he wrote, "if you should find your violet-bed under the parlor window trampled, blame Larry for it. He saw his mother's shadow on the curtain when he was on his way to the station last night, and took a fancy to go nearer and peep through the window. But he didn't mean to do any harm then, nor at some other times, when he did enough indeed. Forgive him for everything."

Mrs. Gerald immediately went out, letter in hand, to see what marks had been left of this nocturnal visit; and, sure enough, there, on the newly-turned mould, was the print of a boot—well she knew her son's neat foot—and, on the other side, a tiny and delicate track where Annette had stood! But not a leaf of the sprouting violets was crushed.

Miss Pembroke smiled to see the mother touch these tracks softly with her finger-tips, and glance about as if to assure herself that there was no danger of their being effaced.

"Such a freak of those children!" she said gaily. "Do you know what I am going to do, Honora? I mean to sow little pink quill daisies in those two foot-prints, and show them to Lawrence and Annette when they come back. It was a beautiful thought of them to come to the window, and it shall be commemorated in beauty. The ground is nearly warm enough here now for seeds. When they come back, the tracks will be green. I wish flowers would blossom in three weeks."

Mrs. Ferrier also heard that day from the travellers.

"I have a particular reason for asking you to be very careful about my letters," Annette wrote. "Don't let any one see or know of them. I will tell you why presently. We are very well. Write me a line as soon as you receive this, and direct to New York. We shall not stop there, but go right on out West, probably. And, by the way, if you should wish ever to hear from Mrs. Gerald's relations, seek in New York for a letter directed to Mrs. Julia Ward. Say nothing of this now. I will explain."

"And why should I wish to hear from Mrs. Gerald's relations?" wondered Mrs. Ferrier. But she said nothing. The secret was safe with her.

Meanwhile, the travellers had lost no time on their way; and three days from their leaving Crichton, they were on the ocean. Every stateroom and cabin had been taken when "Mr. and Mrs. Ward" went to the office of the steamer; but the captain, seeing the lady in great distress on account of the sick friend she was crossing the ocean to see, kindly gave up his own stateroom to the travellers.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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Written for the CATHOLIC RECORD.

DIVORCE.

"Choose well, and your choice is
Brief, but yet, endless."—*Goethe.*

The vertiginous advances of the intellect have so permeated society, deeply ingulfed in the boisterous billows of wordly pursuits, as to preclude a lengthy theological discussion. It is expedient to fathom this subject in all its bearing. I must confine myself to the vital points and rigidly avoid important cor-relative developments. Still, to do justice to the subject engaging our attention, I must follow, on every battlefield, the aggressors of this divine truth, to try conclusions. Let us see if the law of divorce will stand the test of Revelation.

UNMERCIFUL ATTACKS.

Modern thinkers are playing havoc with Catholic dogmas simply because they have never penetrated the divine harmony of Christ's teaching Church. They unmercifully attack, not only speculative truths, but even moral dogmas of the most sacred import. The very foundation and stability of society is the aiming point of their concerted action. Revolutionary writers are endeavoring to stifle the voice of conscience, to eradicate the primordial laws of marriage, to destroy domestic tranquility and upheave social order. They well conceive that divorce, once introduced and sanctioned, will dissolve Christian love, and upon its heartrending ruins, erect the shameful theories that haunted Rousseau, Voltaire, Ingersoll and their adepts. The social contract is their empty dream. Unfortunately these hideous, immoral teachings of divorce, polygamy, polyandry and Mormonism are making inroads into the moral heart of the commonwealth. This profligate doctrine of divorce has a resting place in the Statue books. Judges, who should re-echo antique wisdom, preconise divorce as a salutary emancipation. The laws of divorce, a poisonous source from which flow the tyranny of the father, the abjection of the mother, the desertion of the children, public immoraiity, the decadence of society, sullies the pages of our civil code. To counterpoise this polluted influence, we, believing children of Israel, true soldiers of Gedeon, must acquaint the reading public with the beneficent teaching of Revelation. The light of truth must enlighten the ignorant, feed the intellect with more congenial food and restore man to his pristine healthy state. I shall therefore endeavor to establish that divorce cannot stand the critical test of Revelation and therefore the indissolubility of Christian marriage.

Promulgated in the garden of Eden, this law protected the sanctity of the family, and procured happiness so long as primitive Revelation was held sacred. To the vague and incoherent theories of the admirers of divorce, I shall oppose the invulnerable force of Revelation that contains an adequate exposition of the Primitive, Mosaic and Christian law of marriage.

PRIMITIVE LAW.

The Catholic Church condemns divorce. Free thinkers proclaim it. On what grounds are we to discuss this vital theme? We will discard the legal phase of the question and strictly confine the discussion to its doctrinal and theological bearings.

Let us go back to the very dawn of creation and contemplate the living image of the Trinity. Man, like the Father not generated, nor proceeding from any one, was alone. "Let us make man to our image and likeness." (Gen. i., 26.) The Lord could have made Eve from the earth like unto Adam. But God took a rib out of Adam's body, and made unto him a life-long companion. She then came forth from Adam, because she represented the Son coming from the Father. God could have arranged the laws of nature so that all mankind would have come forth from the earth like Adam, so we would all be of the neuter gender, like the angels, like the mind. But He chose to make man and woman, and that from the union of both the child would be born. The child represents the Holy Ghost coming from the Father and Son. So the Trinity is found in the family of which it was a prototype. God, therefore, present at the wedding of Adam and Eve, gave the model after which all marriages should be contracted. God made Eve out of the flesh of Adam, to show all generations that the wife should be bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife and they shall be two in one flesh." (Matt. xix., 5.) Can a man separate from his bone and flesh? Certainly not! Therefore man and wife can never separate. Divorce, then, is evidently contrary to the very nature of the first marriage.

This inference is evinced and rendered more emphatic by God's expressed declaration. When the Jews retorted, "Moses granted divorce," Jesus Christ replied, "Because of the hardness of your hearts * * * * but from the beginning it was not so." (Math. xix., 8.) The evil of divorce was, therefore, only tolerated by Moses to avoid a greater evil. Moses had in view the moral equilibrium of society, and simply tolerated the ghastly monster of divorce, to shield society from a complete disintegration. He endeavored, like a good seaman, to pursue a safe course through Charybdis; but modern legislators, to shun the dangers of Charybdis, fall into the deadly whirlpool of Scylla. Such is their fate!

CANCER OF DIVORCE.

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