

AMBITION'S CONTEST

BY CHRISTINE FABER

CHAPTER VIII THE COURSE OF INTELLECT FAIRLY BEGUN

Ellen Courtney's letter reached its destination, and was the first to greet Mrs. Courtney's eager grasp as she sought the mail bag on her way to the Mass, which she faithfully attended every morning. Twice, three times she read each word; then she folded the epistle with more than due care, and placing it in a recess of her portemonaie, calmly issued some orders to a domestic in waiting, and passed out into the broad, bright thoroughfare. Once she brushed her eyes as if some defect in them caused the murky appearance there seemed to be in the very sunshine, and frequently she found herself looking at little urchins whom she met, and wondering if they would forsake their mother as her son wished to forsake her—wondering how many of them had mothers, and how the mothers could bear their boys an instant from their sight. She gained the church only to find that her accustomed devotion had departed from her; she could only gaze at the picture of the Crucifixion, which hung above the altar, and whisper, with white lips:

"I could have given him to You, my God! but not, oh! not to the world."

Brother Fabian was again summoned to one of the reception chambers to meet Mrs. Courtney, and again, for explanation of her visit, she proffered Ellen's letter.

His brow darkened, and his eyes flashed angrily as he read. When he had concluded, he asked coldly:

"What do you intend to do?"

"I have come to you for direction," she answered, "for I am weak—God only knows how weak!"

The brother paced the floor with folded arms and downcast head. Mrs. Courtney waited in anxious suspense. He paused at last, saying:

"His sister is determined upon remaining with him, and perhaps it is better so. If you insist upon recalling him, to such a mind as his that course would but hasten the catastrophe you dread. If you permit him to remain, ruin of soul and body may be the result—and a ruin in which your daughter may be also engulfed. The better course for you to pursue is to allow Howard his wish for the present; but for you to join him in Europe and superintend, in person, all arrangements that his hot-brained ardor may induce him to make."

"You know I cannot," replied Mrs. Courtney, in such hollow tones that the monk involuntarily bent his stern eyes upon her. "You know that to be with my children while they are abroad," she continued, meeting his gaze, "is something which I cannot and will not do, till the end for which I am sacrificing myself is accomplished, or all possibility of its accomplishment is no more."

An expression of scorn crossed the religious face, but it vanished in an instant, and he looked again at the white countenance lifted to his. Perchance the unwonted scrutiny disclosed to him details of a character he had but imperfectly understood before, for he turned aside and muttered:

"Oh, wonderful constancy of woman!"

He began to pace the narrow confines of the plain apartment, while his brow darkened again, and his eyes grew stern.

"Permit Howard his foolish course," he said, at length, "since his sister will remain with him; but restrict him in his supplies of money—make but limited amounts payable to him at foreign bankers—and for the rest since you will persist in your determination, be Howard's destruction, should it occur, upon your own head."

He did not wait to see the deadly pallor which overspread Mrs. Courtney's face, nor the frantic manner in which she clasped her hands together, but went hurriedly out, and the broken-hearted woman followed.

"Send O'Connor to me," she said to the maid who had taken Anne Flanagan's place, when at length she arrived almost exhausted in her own room. And O'Connor came, to recount again the tale he had so often told since his arrival from England—all that he knew of Howard's actions and Howard's words; but there were two things of which the old man would not suffer himself to speak—the infidel speech that Howard had delivered to the members of Malverton Grosvenor's club in Paris, and the cowardly blow that had followed it.

Mrs. Courtney, in the blurred reply which she sent to her daughter's letter, gave the permission which Howard desired, and allowed to Ellen, nay, enjoined upon her, the fulfillment of the latter's pledge to watch over her brother.

"Though his wanderings," the letter ran, "should, as you say they will, take you from Lady Grosvenor's home, accompany him! Leave him not, for in you, Ellen, lie my only dependence and my last hope."

Then followed a detail of the arrangements by which their remittances could be obtained in any part of Europe in which they should chance to make a temporary home. Ellen had mentioned Lady Grosvenor's accident, but not having been aware that the latter was fatal,

she had spoken of it as something from which the injured lady would certainly recover, and the note enclosed to her ladyship, while it was full of sympathy for the latter's suffering, yet conveyed no idea that the writer linked death with the unhappy occurrence. Neither did it contain any allusion to Howard's departure from the Propaganda, because Ellen had written that he wished that fact concealed—nothing but loving little reminiscences of bygone days, and grateful messages for Lady Grosvenor's kindness to the absent dear ones. The pale invalid let the epistle fall from her nerveless grasp when she had read it, saying to her husband:

"Poor Mary Ashland voluntarily absents herself from her darlings, while I am compelled to leave mine."

Lord Stanwix bent to brush tenderly back the bright curls which clustered about her forehead, but he made no reply.

Howard, true to his word, did way-lay Anne Flanagan, and through her found means of frequently communicating with his sister. If Lord Grosvenor suspected these stolen interviews, he affected to be too much absorbed in his wife to care whither or upon what errand Ellen Courtney so frequently left the house. Lady Grosvenor was growing too feeble to manifest an interest in anything but the loving attendance about her, and the Malverton fearing to break through the reserve by which the young girl's demeanor was characterized, hesitated to question her about the excitement under which it was apparent she was painfully laboring.

Howard had read with sparkling eyes his mother's permission for him to pursue the course to which his wild wishes turned, but his lip curled when he saw the arrangements which had been made for his and Ellen's reception of money.

"A mere pittance," he exclaimed. "It looks like an abundance to me," she said simply.

"That is because you are a woman and know nothing about men's work," he replied, shortly.

"Nor would I wish to know," she answered, with an assumption of womanly maturity which sometimes unconsciously to herself entered into her manner, "if such knowledge must be attended by the secrecy with which you have acted since you left the Propaganda."

He strove to laugh lightly, as he had been wont to do in childish years; but the mirth would not respond to his wish.

"Well, we have cast our fortunes together," he said, hastily, "and we must not quarrel at the outset. Forgive me for my hasty speech, and make such preparations as you can without being detected, for in a few days I will send the directions where you and Anne can meet me."

And how am I to leave Lord and Lady Grosvenor? Not in a secret manner, I trust."

"No," he replied bitterly; "you may tell them enough to permit your departure, and show mother's letter, if it becomes necessary. Should they require still further evidence that your brother is acting in his senses, we must wait for another answer across the Atlantic."

But ere Howard's summons to his sister arrived, for the latter and her maid to meet him at some assigned rendezvous, Dady Grosvenor had passed out of this world. So quietly, so unexpectedly had her demise taken place, that not even Lord Stanwix, who knelt beside the bed supporting her head upon his breast, nor Malverton, who sat holding one of her hands, nor Ellen, who knelt holding the other, nor any one of the attendants about, suspected she was dying, till the glazed look in her eyes, and the rigid manner in which her jaw fell after the last gasping breath announced too surely the lamentable fact.

With a savageness of manner, at which the physician in waiting shook his head as something foreboding evil to the peer's mind, Lord Stanwix grasped the fair corpse and held it frantically to his breast; but in a moment he broke down and wept like a child; then, as if abashed that he had so unmanned himself, and fearful lest his dignity had sustained some irretrievable degradation, he went hurriedly from the room, and shut himself in his own apartment.

Ellen's fair fingers assisted in arraying the beautiful corpse, strewn the white draped bier with flowers, and festooned the silken curtains which hung before the arched recess in which the still form reposed.

She anxiously looked for some message from Howard, something which would apprise her of his intended presence at the funeral; but the day of burial arrived, and neither she nor Anne Flanagan had seen nor heard from him. Ellen, anxious and troubled, wore so grieved a countenance that it excited comments among the friends of the deceased. They wondered at the almost filial affection which the fair girl seemed to entertain for the dead lady. She stood, silent and pale, by Lord Grosvenor's side while the Episcopal form of service for the dead was recited. The minister in a black-flowing robe, and deep-hanging white bands about his throat repeated the death liturgy in a simple and impressive tone of voice, eulogizing the many virtues of the deceased when he had finished, and exhorting his hearers to take the solemn lesson which the sad occasion presented to their hearts. To the one Catholic listener present his words were bringing, in painful contrast to the present scene, a vivid memory of the Catholic burial service—the Requiem Mass, with the corpse at the foot of God's altar, and the priest

offering to Heaven Christ's own sacrifice for the repose of the soul—the lights, the sweet, solemn voices of the choir—all which make our service for the dead something that seems to strengthen rather than sever the tie between us and the deceased friends.

A feeling of home-sickness entered her heart—a wild desire to make some outcry. She grew faint, and leaned heavily against Lord Grosvenor's arm. The nobleman was so absorbed in the grief with which his own stern soul had been shaken, that he did not feel the pressure against him until she fell an inanimate form by his side. The occurrence created some excitement, which continued till the unconscious girl was borne to her own apartment; then the service was resumed, and in a short time the imposing funeral cortege departed. Among the mourners who followed to witness the depositing of Lady Grosvenor's remains in the abbey which contained the family vault was Howard Courtney—disguised by a cloak that almost completely hid the rest of his costume, and a hat, pressed low upon his forehead, screened his face from too close an observation. He walked fearless of detection. He attended the funeral, as he had done a desire to behold, unobserved, Lord Grosvenor, of whom report spoke as being slightly insane since the death of his wife, and partly with a hope of being able to transmit into Ellen's own hands a note containing information of his future plans. When the coffin was placed on some hastily improvised stand, preparatory to being placed in the vault, Howard pressed with the friends who gathered about for a last inspection of the lovely remains—not to view the latter but to gain the side of Ellen, whom he supposed had accompanied Lord Grosvenor and Malverton. Not seeing her, yet confident of her presence he approached till he stood beside the pall covered coffin, those immediately about him giving way because they deemed by his eagerness that he must be some near connection of the deceased. Still not beholding her, in a moment of forgetfulness he pushed back the low crowned hat, and stood fully revealed to the burning gaze of Lord Stanwix, directly opposite. The nobleman's pallid, grief-worn countenance assumed an expression of fervent hate, his eyes had such a look as writers have described to be in the eyes of wild beasts about to spring upon their prey; his mouth quivered, and one could see by the snapping motion of his lips that he had locked his teeth together to prevent the outburst of some violent emotion. When he had looked thus for a moment, he crossed to Howard's side, stooped, and whispered in such hushed tones that the sound of his voice was hardly audible to any but Howard's own ears:

"How dare you insult the remains of my poor wife now, when you did not come before? But for you she would not be in her coffin to-day."

"What do you mean?" asked Howard, in tones of surprise, as the nobleman's own whisper had been, but with less caution of tone.

"Hush!" said the peer, his eyes flashing malevolent glances on the indignantly flushed face before him. "Dare not to make a scene here! Another time and place and I will compel from you the deference which is my right."

"Yes; another time and place," replied Howard hotly, "and Lord Grosvenor will find his superior in Howard Courtney."

The preliminaries of opening the vault had been concluded, and the nobleman, keenly observant of outward surroundings, had caused the face to assume its wonted expression, and was turning to resume his place, when Howard asked:

"What have you done with Ellen?"

The peer did not resist the desire which impelled him to give a parting thrust to the lad, whom henceforth he would consider his bitter enemy. He stooped again, and whispered:

"Your sister is lying ill at my house—the victim of her brother's apostasy."

With the speed of a frightened deer Howard started through the groups of mourners, regardless alike of what interpretation they put upon his strange interview with "my lord," or the comment they passed on his hurried exit. He hastened to Grosvenor Square, where he found Ellen, having just recovered from her swoon, sitting pale and tearful in her room, attended by Anne Flanagan.

"It's time for you to come," was the salutation from the latter; but, without deigning to reply, he at once repaired to the easy chair in which his sister reclined. Speaking in a hurried, impulsive manner which was his wont when excited, he at once burst forth with:

"Have I made you ill, Ellen? Is it grief for me that has prostrated you so?"

She smiled upon him, and strove to swallow the lump in her throat, which she knew was a premonition of more tears, but she did not answer.

"Tell me, Ellen," he urged, dashing the cloak from his shoulders and kneeling in front of her chair. "Tell me; because it is enough that I wreck my own life, and break my own heart, without involving yours in the ruin. I will send you home. You will be safe at mother's side, and I—I can struggle alone."

She bent to him, resting her hand on his head, while she replied:

"You have promised to remain with you, and I have promised to remain; neither of us can break this compact. If I grow homesick for times—if I grow lonesome for the

observance of our dear faith, which it is so difficult to practice here—if I grow troubled about the strange course you are pursuing, is it not natural, dear Howard? But such feelings never detract from my love and care for you."

He answered passionately: "But I will not have you troubled for me. If you share my fortunes you must promise me not to weep, nor be anxious about me."

She bent lower to him, clasped her hands about his neck, and with her face pressed against his, replied:

"Ah! Howard, you ask a pledge which I am powerless to give. Would I deserve the name of sister if I could look indifferently upon your career, and, as you desire, care but little whether its course tended? I would not, neither would I deserve the trust mother has placed in me. Oh, my brother! if I am troubled, if I weep for you, it is lest your soul may not gain its desired reward. What are all the honors which the world may give to your talents, your splendid mind? One day you will lie as Lady Grosvenor lies to-day; and then—"

She was powerless to speak further. Her vivid fancy was picturing her brother's soul wandering through the dome of an eternal unrest upon it—fancied his great, lustrous eyes were the wild look of such a doomed soul, and that his face was distorted with the agony of eternal pangs. She hid her face on his shoulder, and moaned as a child who was intensely suffering might have done.

"Don't!" he said softly, and speaking as if her words had subdued all the wild passions of the previous hour. "Don't, Ellen! Perhaps I am not quite so wicked as you think me."

"It is not that," she said, lifting her face; "but I fear for your future—fear the end to which these strange actions of yours may bring you."

He laughed—a forced effort of mirth, which jarred on the nerves of the sensitive girl—and answered lightly as he rose from his kneeling posture:

"We will permit the future to answer for itself, and waive all unnecessary fears for the present. But now for our future life; you can be sufficiently well, and have all preparations completed to leave this place to-morrow, can you not?"

He turned to Anne Flanagan, who had been an interested and, at one time, affected spectator of the whole scene.

"I don't know," she answered, a little gruffly, "for I'd like to know where you're taking us to first, before I commit myself."

Howard laughingly crossed to her, and patted her on the shoulder in a playful manner, while he said:

"Ah! Anne, I am going to take you where my sister and you shall have an opportunity of seeing life as neither of you have ever seen it before; and where your dear, cross face shall have numerous chances of frowning down the peccadilloes of unrestrained lives. Is not the picture charming?"

Miss Flanagan drew herself up in offended dignity, and was about to reply to the "impertinence," as she deemed Howard's speech had been, when he said, with a total change of voice:

"I cannot wait to know your wishes; you must be ready to-morrow. I will send a cab—possibly come with it myself, sometime in the afternoon—and afterwards the roses must come to those cheeks again."

He playfully pinched Ellen's pallid face, kissed her hastily, and, without waiting for a reply, hurried out. But in the street his gait became slower, and his manner gloomy. His sister's earnest, heart-spoken words had made an impression upon his mind, but, alas! so light a one that the very first burst of conviviality among the companions with whom he was sojourning, banished even the thought of her pale face, which had haunted him all the afternoon.

Lord Stanwix was in his library, attending to some necessary, though disagreeable item of business, as it was to him in his sorrowful state of mind, when Ellen sought him to inform him of her intended departure. He put his pen down slowly, and looked up at the trembling girl for a few moments before he spoke; then he motioned her to a seat.

"Permit me to ask, Miss Courtney, where your brother intends to take you?"

Her face became suffused. "I do not know. He has some mode of his own by which to conduct his studies—he is not going to college again."

Lord Grosvenor suddenly wheeled his chair about, so that he might gaze directly into her countenance, while he asked sternly:

"Is your mother fully aware of this erratic course about to be pursued by your brother, and does she consent to his wild plans?"

"Yes, sir," answered Ellen, simply, proffering him the letter in which her mother had distinctly stated such permission.

He waived it haughtily back, replying:

"Your assertion is sufficient, and comment from me is unnecessary; but I will say this much: your brother is a wild, wayward lad, and one who requires a stronger guiding hand than yours can be. I know not what your mother can be thinking to sacrifice you to the whims of such a reckless boy, and I am sorry for you!"

He arose, and looked kindly down on the frail, trembling form.

"Thank you," she answered again in her simple way; "but neither mamma nor I think it is sacrificing me to have me remain with Howard."

He is all we have, you know." She looked up with such touching guilelessness of manner, that Lord Stanwix involuntarily placed his hand on her head, and answered:

"You are so truthful and trusting, that it will be difficult to make you understand how much wrong there is in the world, and it will be a bitter experience when the suffering, which must accrue from your brother's erratic course, comes upon you."

Hastily withdrawing his hand and standing erect, he resumed his usual cold tones:

"Do not allow my words to disturb you; and now, good-night. To-morrow, I suppose, we must say farewell."

She placed her hand in his light grasp for a moment, and passed through the arched entrance, the door of which he gracefully opened.

Howard accompanied the cab which came on the next afternoon for Miss Courtney and her maid; but he refused to enter the house, writing on the card which he dispatched by one of the servants, an injunction to hurry, and he paced impatiently while he waited, the open space in front of the house.

Ellen had been ready since early morning, save to don her outdoor garments, and now she had only to wait for Miss Flanagan, who, with her wonted dissatisfaction, was grumbling at the brief time Howard had given them for preparation.

But both were ready at last, and the excited girl tripped down the stair to say "good-by" to Lord Stanwix and Malverton. The latter was in the aviary tending his mother's birds; but by his manner was listless and discontented. It was such lonesome work tending her pets—so sad to listen to the chirrups to which her voice was wont sweetly to respond.

Trice he had, by a mighty effort, subdued the girl-like grief; but now, when he turned on Ellen's entrance, his eyes filled again. He held out his hand, but did not speak till he had gulped the tears back.

"Going so soon? Father told me he thought your departure would not take place till late in the afternoon."

She smiled, replying: "Howard is waiting. Will you see him?"

"Yes." He put back into the foliage the chirping pet which had been perched on his finger, and accompanied her to the library, where they found Lord Stanwix writing. The latter rose at once, saying:

"I will accompany you to the cab." With a hand within the arm of each she walked slowly down the carriage path to where Howard stood impatiently waiting her arrival. He advanced as the trio approached, bowed with mock deference to Lord Grosvenor's graceful salutation, clasped Malverton's outstretched hand with a cordial pressure, and hurried Ellen's adieu that he might at once assist her into the cab.

"Always remember me as one of the most sincere among your friends, dear Miss Courtney," whispered Malverton, as he stooped to conceal the agitation which he felt was visible in his face.

Her answer was too low for him to comprehend its import, but her grateful smile assured him. Lord Stanwix said naught but a simple "good-by," till Ellen and her maid were seated in the cab, and Howard was about to follow. He paused, with his foot on the step, to wring Malverton's hand again. Lord Grosvenor proffered his.

"No," said Howard, with a passionate sparkle in his eyes, "I clasp no hand save in friendship—between us there is an eternal enmity."

For one moment the peer's face wore an expression which made Ellen shudder and turn her eyes away; but the next instant it had disappeared, and his countenance wore only its habitual, haughty look.

"Be it so," he said lightly; "but, slightly lowering his voice, "when you become a man, we will be able to adjust our difficulties."

"I shall not forget," answered Howard, scornfully, as he sprang to the seat beside Ellen.

The porters finished their work of strapping on the trunks, the driver whipped the horses up, and the vehicle started at a rapid pace down the street, while Lord Grosvenor turned immediately to the house; but Malverton watched it sadly till it had disappeared from view.

TO BE CONTINUED

"MY PEACE I GIVE UNTO YOU"

TRUE STORY OF A CONVERSION

It was a great grief to Mrs. Moore, when, very gently, Marion broke the news that she could not in conscience accept as her own the Baptist religion so dear to her mother. It was Mrs. Moore's suggestion that the girl study other branches of the Baptist faith, there were any number of them, surely she could find one that would satisfy her needs.

Marion endeavored to do so. Patiently she poured over different "confessions" and considered the rival claims of Free-will Baptists, Anti-Effort Baptists, Menonites, Christian, Seventh-day Baptists—and many others—but all seeming to Marion as withered broken branches without fruit or foliage.

Later, work called her from home to a large city. There, away from family disapproval, she attended churches of other denominations, listening to various and many discourses, but with merciless logic

seeing many discrepancies; while the lack of unity and positiveness in teaching any doctrines, whatsoever troubled, disturbed her. One church only she avoided with scrupulous care—with something of horror—the Catholic Church—she had been taught was the Church of the evil one.

Sometimes she asked herself if she were seeking the impossible, in all the world was there no Church that could satisfy her needs? Was it only in heaven one could find true peace? What then was the meaning of Christ's words: "My peace I give unto you?"

As a forlorn hope and frankly curious, she turned at length to Spiritualism, only to turn away repulsed, disheartened. A religion that claimed to reach into the Great Beyond, to be in touch with immortality should necessarily be to mankind a stupendous message of strength, hope, courage. And to Marion Spiritualism was a thing of grotesque nothing. Always, too, she found herself expectant that presently she would discover it all to be a sham, an imposture. And now she will allow Marion Moore to tell her own story.

With something of a revulsion of feeling as offering help to every day needs, I took up the study of Christian Science. It seemed to be so big so brave, a word, a touch, and all suffering would cease. At the "readings" came disillusionment; many people attended them, in each and every face one thought, one eager desire, just to escape from pain. Did this constitute a good reason for joining a religion? Not to my soul. A yearning, sorrowful, deeply stirred my heart; so inadequately had they interpreted the life of Jesus of Nazareth! Again, Christian Science denies the Divinity of Christ, claiming for human hands the power of healing which the Christ hands had held. Could I believe as they did? Rose up as in protest the scene of Christ before Calvary, affirming with His own sacred lips His Divinity. His words seemed to sound in my ears, as a message to my soul today; and then the words of the high priest in reply: "What further need have we of witnesses?"

Little children were present, some of them fever flushed, heavy eyed, but rejecting with horror the idea of illness: an evil thing, an error of mortal mind; they were only tired! Scientists are permitted to become tired. Adults were there also whose faces bore unmistakable signs of disease; yet striving with lips at least to form the mocking lie: "There is no pain." And again, as in protest seemed to rise before my soul the cry of the shrinking Christ in Gethsemane: "Thy will, not mine, be done," and the bitter chalice of suffering drained to the dregs. What meaning for scientists, dwelt in Gethsemane's anguish, in the Precious Blood drops, the Crown of Thorns, the height of Calvary? What meaning could there be other than the way of love through suffering?

So it was that Christian Science failed utterly in any message of peace or hope to my heart's yearning for God. I was weary now of seeking some definite religion. All religions, I told myself, were merely human things, filled with imperfections, each of them fitted for certain individuals, but not for me. Why not then take for myself any beliefs I felt the need of? Beliefs or laws that would govern my intercourse with others; that would prove serviceable for every day wear. So it came to pass that after deep thought I took the Golden Rule for my own, and was almost happy. In the eyes of men my life and work rang true. I said artlessly: It is good when we try to grow tall; and the Golden Rule is very tall. In reality it is a form of the cross, needing the figure of Our Lord to rest upon its golden surface.

Thus unconsciously I have taken the Cross into my life. But alas, I had not taken the Saviour. And suddenly the Golden Rule failed me, was shattered forever. For it now happened that a storm of terrible temptation swept over me. No question here of what I might do for others. It was my own soul that cried out, and O, so unavailingly, for aid. In shrinking horror I stood alone with God, my soul bared before Him, evil passions surging over it, evil desire urging it toward the evil deed. Instinctively I knelt to pray; but prayer had become a meaningless, less jargon of words, and my little room at home a place of torture. With some faint hope of escaping from the evil thus rising in my own heart, I rose and passed out of the house, into the street, heedless where my swift pace should take me. But did it matter? did anything matter in the least? What use to struggle towards the light? henceforth there was no light, no hope; only darkness and death everlasting.

Little did I dream that a good angel led me. I wandered far, when at length I became conscious of my surroundings, I found myself in a part of the city unfamiliar to me. Close by was a church and the gleam of dim light from its hospitably open door seemed to beckon to me. I was very weary and lonely, feeling the need of human beings near to me. But I paused in the doorway of the building, realizing that it was a Catholic Church; which meant for me every evil thing the world has ever known, and then my eyes fell on a statue of the Blessed Virgin placed in the vestibule; a stately gracious figure. It represented, indeed, Our Lady. It represented, crowned, smiling of the Assumption, as if queen of heaven and earth. And now this happened to me: On it was as though a hand had been

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