

PRETTY MISS NEVILLE

BY R. M. CROKER

CHAPTER XVI

THE GORGEOUS EAST

La langue des femmes est leur esprit, et elles ne laissent pas rouler leurs idées.

Hour after hour we travelled through a flat, almost treeless country, and about 7 o'clock in the evening steamed into Mulkapore...

In a few minutes we had made our way out of the crowd of natives (who were waiting for the usual supply of fish and ice) to where a large, imposing-looking lander and pair of boys awaited us...

We drove through streets of narrow bazaars, and then along wide roads, lined on either side with fine, wide-spreading trees...

My first impressions of Mulkapore that bright moon-light night, tired and sleepy as I was, were of amazement and admiration.

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marked fox-terrier was yawning in the sun; while an impudent, dirty, complacent-looking poodle was stepping expectantly round two swarthy, dark-skinned servants...

I was not long in adapting myself to my new life, and soon took my place quite naturally as the daughter of the house.

My first impressions proved correct—I had indeed found a very happy home. I told my aunt everything about my life at Gallow; her face at once invited confidence and soon she was mistress of all my secrets...

"He must have been mad," she exclaimed, "or, rather, quite in his dotage! I never heard of anything so supremely ludicrous; a child of fourteen solemnly betrothed, and promised in marriage before the lawyer and the parson!"

"You have been sent to us, Nora, as the daughter of our old age," she said as she replaced those relics with misty eyes...

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stopped, partook of tea, and related the local "gossip." We breakfasted at ten o'clock; from twelve to two received visitors; at two we had dinner.

I had been very kindly received by auntie's friends, and although not yet, strictly speaking, "out," I knew nearly everyone in the station, and pleasant people and pretty faces were by no means the extraordinary rarity Mrs. Roper had led me to suppose.

A young married lady whose husband was "away in the district" was alone in a small, pretty little bungalow, and very ill with low, wasting fever.

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been red—it was a very dark auburn, something the color of a copper beech. However, I swallowed the remark in silence.

"Look at Mrs. St. Ubes," pursued my companion, eagerly; "her real name is Stubbs, you know—and Colonel Mowbray Gore!"

"A most unscrupulous, dangerous, woman, and an outrageous flirt," said Mrs. Gower, nodding in the direction of the retreating "parson."

"She has four or five children at home, and I believe that she scarcely remembers their names or ages. She is a most unnatural mother."

"How beautifully the gardens are laid out! what splendid crotons and roses there are!" I observed by way of commencing a new topic.

"Yes, not bad. I call coming here coming to the Zoo—you see such an extraordinary and rare collection of creatures. There are the Dobsons (with much animation), 'drowned in debt. He is altogether in the hands of the scouars. I hear they have not even enough ready money to pay their Bazaar bills and the servants' wages, and not one of the shop will give him credit; and yet, look at their turnout and look at the Misses Dobson's dresses! Got out from London—unpaid for, of course. I call such people thieves and swindlers!"

"It would have been worse than useless to have endeavored to stem this current of universal denunciation. I sat by Mrs. Gower, feeling very hot and uncomfortable, as every one who passed was in a very abundant talker; a former was all she required. My occasional exclamations of horror, doubt, or deprecation merely amused her, and whetted the appetite of her remarks."

"You sweet, unsophisticated little Paddy, you don't know what a wicked place you have come to! You had much better have stuck to your native village than have come to such a Gormorrah as Mulkapore. I want to go to the post-office, so we must soon be moving off." Then, bowing sweetly to a lady, she said: "You see that horrid woman, Miss Blank, that we have just passed, walking as usual, with Dr. Fisher, and looking into each other's faces as if they were lovers. Pah! it's disgusting, it makes me perfectly sick! Come, we'll go away, I can't stand it!"

"So saying, Mrs. Gower virtuously whipped up her ponies and drove out of the gardens at the top of their speed."

"This was my last drive with Mrs. Gower. My moral equilibrium was quite shaken, as I descended at my own door; and when, with flaming cheeks, and much righteous indignation, I related second hand to auntie some of the interesting little histories to which I had just been listening, she was perfectly agast."

"Do not believe one quarter of them, my dear child!" she exclaimed, with great emphasis. "Forget everything you have heard as fast as possible. I know that Mrs. Gower was a lady of turning people into ridicule, and a light tendency to exaggeration; but this is really too bad, to try to poison your mind against the whole community. No one fit to know—not a lady in the place!"

"What a deceitful, treacherous woman! You shall never drive with her again, Nora. In fact, now that Mrs. Warren is so much better, I shall take a short turn of an evening myself, so no offense will be given."

Here was the keynote. No one dared to offend or openly quarrel, with Mrs. Gower. Although generally held in the most profound detestation, she overawed everybody, and held them in slavish bondage, by her terrible weapon—her tongue.

God's words are always words of love, no matter whether they be words of promise or of warning.

Speaking much is a sign of vanity, for he that is lavish in words is a niggard in deed.

I do believe the common man's work is the hardest. The hero has the hero's aspiration that lifts him to his labor. All great duties are easier than the little ones, though they cost far more blood and agony.

Phillips Brooks.

FATHER LADDEN'S CURACIES

It was not as a reward of careful study, surely, that Father Robert Ladden had been transferred with such promptness, from the pleasant waters of the seminary to the assistant pastorate of St. John Baptist's, for Father Ladden was brilliantly careless just as he was brilliantly good and successful.

Most men would call him lucky. If he gave an extra dollar to a beggar—and he never refused anyone—the man was more than likely to turn out to be the Bishop's brother; even in a casual conversation, topics had a way of turning upon subjects with which he was familiar.

With a little information on a subject—and Father Ladden possessed much information on many subjects—and with his own views—which were always striking because he stated them with the force of a positive nature—he could make his conversation a thing to be enjoyed. He was no scholar. He learned too easily.

His seminary days had with a few exceptions been promising and happy. He was a nature to understand and sympathize with the ways of the saints. Nothing short of the highest mark was good enough for him. He had decided that from the beginning, he fell into sanctity as easily as others fall into sin. He absorbed it. He saturated himself with it in the atmosphere of the seminary.

And in whatever he undertook the fruit of his unique way of doing it was wonderful.

When he came to St. John Baptist's things were running very smoothly. The Sodality of the Immaculate Conception was flourishing, its monthly communicants filling two altar rails, while St. Agnes' sodality promised to be its worthy rival.

The younger boys' society, too, St. Raphael's, marshalled a full membership to the altar rails, although they did receive at the 9 o'clock Mass and the fast was for-trying.

And now as the memory of it came back to him, his eye fell upon the white bear rug at his feet. It must go.

Father Hewitt had explained the history of the parish to him. He told him that once, not so many years ago, the district had been a fine residential neighborhood, but that they, the wealthy, had all moved out.

They had gone to St. Vincent's and St. John Baptist's and Our Lady of the Snow.

"I can't imagine this as ever having been even half way respectable, to say nothing of elegance," objected Father Ladden.

"But it was," the older priest had assured him. "However, it's all gone now, though we're within easy walking distance of the Lake Shore Drive. Do you know, it seems to me that when God wishes to bless a parish He often lets the rich move out."

"But surely there was no great increase in blessings in this direction?" Father Ladden had questioned with an amused and almost cynical smile.

Father Hewitt looked at him. "I thought as you once upon a time. My very soul cried out against this place, but I love it now, I have learned that the sins of the poor are on the surface. The rich have their satins to cover them."

Then Father Ladden had opened his heart to this man. He laid before him the hopes he had cherished, the desires he had cultivated. His life was to be spent among the poor. His prayer was that he might serve them. He had begged God to direct his appointment among them, and he told Father Hewitt that from that hour on, his prayer would be to be appointed his assistant.

The old priest listened, and as he drank in the song of unconscious virtue he noticed how very young the other priest was. At the end he had placed his hand affectionately on Father Ladden's shoulder.

"Do you like to eat?" he had questioned, smiling. "I don't mean to excess or anything like that, but do you like to count on three square meals a day? Because there's many a fast here that you'll get no credit for. It's involuntary."

But the Xavier soul of Father Ladden would not be discouraged. "If you can stand it, I can. My intention is fixed. I will pray God that I be appointed here."

He remembered the day he had gone down in the district. It was only a few weeks ago. He had found it uninviting enough, this graveyard for a city's sins, with its houses of old red brick. Truly, it was all so did look dingy, and sordidness is only another name for vice grown old.

There were ill-kept children everywhere—children with their faces saddened and aged by touch with crime. There was heat and dust in the streets that seemed to take the place of the very air.

The little church of St. Bernardine of Siena came back to his mind as it had first met his eye. It, like the surrounding houses, was of red brick, dull and gloomy looking, but within its walls, he knew, dwelt the One Who made life worth living, and the heart of Father Ladden had felt a joyous throb at the thought, for love knows love.

He had leaped up the steps and given the door an undignified pull, only to find it locked, though it was then early in the afternoon. Sadness, he had walked slowly away, wondering as he went how days and weeks and lives could be lived without the Blessed Sacrament, when the loss of one visit caused him the disappointment he felt that day.

At the end of the church on the Pearl Court side he had noticed the rectory. It was a wooden affair, surmounted by a cross. Wooden steps with a backward slant led up to it. He ascended them, pressed his finger on the bell, and waited a few seconds. Receiving no answer he pressed it again. Then he read the sign over it, "Bell don't ring," so he knocked on the window.

In a few minutes the door opened and he stood face to face with a priest. "I tried to get into the church," he explained, "to make a visit, but it was locked."

"Well, well," the older one smiled, of all the churches in Chicago to select in which to make a visit! It's not saying much for your taste."

Father Ladden looked at him—this hero, the priest didn't look at all as heroes are supposed to look. Father Ladden himself looked more like one. Father Hewitt was tall and stooped, and almost bald. His face was lined more from hardship than from age. His accent was a beautiful English one, and with easy courtesy he had invited Father Ladden in.

"You must visit with me a while," he had said, "then I'll bring you into the church, since you will look at it."

And Father Ladden had entered a parlor which was almost after his own heart. Almost, not quite, for there was a few old sofa pillows around which smacked of comfort, and Father Ladden would have dispensed with them.

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love of God there. Go and put some there," and how well the little cure had obeyed. Not only Ars, but France the whole world, not only for that time but for all times, had been benefited. So long endures the dream called life! Father Ladden felt his heart throb with the spirit and the very old spiritually may feel.

Secretly he had hoped that the Bishop would say to him: "Father Ladden, here is a parish down to wards town. I know it's not a sinecure exactly, but it will serve for a few years to take off the new edges—the daily contact with humanity—not a silk and satin humanity, mind you, just a sinning humanity—a priest's humanity. Now I'm going to send you there. See if you can bring a little love of God down there into that poverty and sin-stricken district." It was a nice speech only it was so very different from what His Lordship had actually said.

"We have decided that you are to go to St. John Baptist's. He remembered the pang of disappointment he had felt. "True, you won't be overburdened with work, for the parish is not a new one, and as for the spiritual condition of the people—you will, you'll find them saints if Father Costello had lived, for he did wonders there."

Truly, St. John Baptist's was a grave for the soul of a Francis Xavier. Father Ladden took out his breviary and read the remainder of Vespers.

As the Angelus finished ringing, he heard a step in the hall. "Come in," he answered to a knock on the door, and Father Egan entered.

"Everything comfortable?" inquired his pastor affably, even graciously, considering that he was the pastor.

"Far too comfortable, Father," came the answer.

But Father Egan paid no attention to the remark. Instead he announced that a saint had once occupied the room.

"Who? Father Costello?" "Yes."

"Tell me about him, Father." Father Ladden had never outgrown his love for stories. "Everybody says he was a saint," he ventured by way of encouragement.

"Well, if ever one lived on this earth, he was," said the pastor. "He seemed like another Christ. Everybody loved him. He's dead two months—two months yesterday."

"And his month's mind? Crowded I suppose?" Father Egan changed the subject. "So you don't like the room, eh? You think it's too comfortable, eh?"

"Well it's not exactly the facsimile of the one used by the Cure of Ars," Father Ladden answered. He was really sorry that he had protested against his luxury at all, for he thought that he detected an injured one in the voice of his pastor.

Father Egan drew forth a large white handkerchief from the folds of his cassock. "Do you think there's any hope of the Cure of Ars occupying this one?" he questioned.

Father Ladden hesitated. "I didn't mean that, but it's not the replica of what one might imagine a priest's room to be?"

"The what?" questioned Father Egan with great attention. He passed his handkerchief over his face, but the handkerchief did not smother the tones of his voice.

Father Ladden flushed more deeply. "That is," he stammered, "it's rather luxurious for a priest, it seems to me."

"Are you going to found an order?" Father Egan asked with great gravity.

Father Ladden was becoming redder and he knew it. It was far from pleasant to be deliberately misunderstood; to have his motives, which were of the highest, pigeonholed as ambitious.