

GRANTLEY MANOR.

A TALE

LADY GEORGINA FULLERTON, Author of "Lady Bird," "Ellen Middleton," &c CHAPTER VIII. Continued.

"Can you persuade yourself," she one day said to Walter, "that Ginevra is only seventeen?" "Why she looks very young, does she not?"

"Yes; but she is so wise! I wonder if it is all real. She is like somebody in a book; and yet I should as soon think my Italian greyhound affected, as my new sister. Such strange thoughts come into my head, Walter, while she is talking to me. Sometimes I think of the scripture text, about entertaining angels unawares; and then again she puts me in mind of that beautiful stanza of Coleridge:

"Her slender palms together pressed, Heaving sometimes on her breast; Her face resigned to bliss or bale— Her feet, O call it fair, not pale— And both blue eyes, more bright than clear And each about to have a tear."

Margaret had read this passage out loud, and as she put down the book, these two lines caught her eye— "He who had seen this Geraldine Had thought her, sure, a thing divine."

"What an extraordinary poem! Christabel is," she exclaimed—"like a dream!" Her head rested on her hand, and with the astonishing rapidity of thought, her mind reverted almost at the same instant to Mand Vincent's mysterious hints and advice to herself. "What could she mean by 'opening my eyes'—and why did Lucy seem so vexed at her saying so? Lucy is the best of the two, though not the cleverest; but Maud is the most affectionate,—at least the fondest of me. She used to wish me to marry her brother; perhaps Lucy wants him to marry Ginevra, and Maud meant that all the time. And then, the next link in the chain of thought brought her to wonder (not for the first time) that several days had elapsed, and that Edmund Neville had not re-appeared, or, as far as she knew, written to announce his return. She felt some curiosity about his relations to the Warrens, but neither her questions, nor Mrs. Dalton's investigations, drew from Ginevra more than the assurance that they had been very kind to her; whether she liked them, whether she wished to see them again, what sort of people they were, and many other similar inquiries met with nothing but evasive and unsatisfactory answers.

One morning as she was coming out of her room, she saw Ginevra at the end of the gallery on which her own opened, with a letter in her hand. She was reading it attentively, with one knee resting on the edge of the window-seat. She seemed very much absorbed with its contents, and there was a speck of color in her pale cheeks. Margaret walked up to her and put her hand on her shoulder. She gave a violent start, and turned quite pale; and when her sister said, with a smile, "I am afraid I have startled you very much," the color flushed back into her face, and she trembled visibly.

"I hope you have had no bad news from Italy," said Margaret, while Ginevra hastily folded her letter in her hand and thrust it in the folds of her dress.

"O, no," said Ginevra, mournfully. "I have no news to get from Italy my only remaining friends left Verona some months ago; and since my uncle Leonardo's death, and Father Francesco's departure for America, the links that bound me to my native land have been severed one by one, and Italy"— she continued, with a voice of more emotion than she had ever yet betrayed, and Italy is nothing to me now, but a tale that is told—a dream that has been dreamed—a prelude to the life that is now beginning."

"A happy life, I trust," said Margaret. "Thank you, sister, thank you," answered Ginevra, in a voice, that without any apparent reason to herself, affected Margaret; her manner was at once tender and abrupt, and she left her suddenly.

That day, at breakfast, Colonel Leslie told his daughters that he had written to Mr. Warren to propose to him and his wife that they should come to Grantley for a few days, and that he had just received a letter announcing that they would arrive the next day. Ginevra gave no signs of interest at this intelligence; but Margaret looked earnestly at her father, with the expectation that some communication about Edmund would follow. She was not disappointed. "Neville," he said, after a pause, "has also written to say that he will return here to-morrow. He has been delayed, day after day, at Earlton, on some matters of business." Walter looked up from the "Times" at that moment, and saw the flush of joy in Margaret's eyes,—sudden, bright, and glowing, it played on her face, and seemed to vibrate through her frame.

Margaret entered the drawing-room that evening, she found her grandmother already seated in her armchair; Mr. and Mrs. Warren, who had nearly arrived just in time to dress, came down a few minutes afterwards. She was a plain, insignificant-looking woman, with a soft voice, and a common-place manner; a long residence abroad had given both to her and to her husband a distaste to their own country, without attaching them to any other. She was, on the whole, a kind and good-natured man, but had fallen into the pernicious error of supposing that to be virtuous was a proof of refinement, and she had thrown himself into an arm-chair, and bowed coldly to Mr. Thornton and to Walter when Colonel Leslie introduced them to him, and seemed to doubt, for a while, if he should treat Margaret with supercilious indifference, or with condescending familiarity. Her eyes probably decided the question; and as he took her into dinner, he said to her, as if he had known her for years— "Don't you quite adore your sister?"

and then, scarcely waiting for an answer, he addressed Ginevra in Italian across the table. "Ask your sister a question; for I want her to look this way." "Nonsense! she is talking to Walter, and I will not disturb them. I wish them to be great friends." "Really! do you think they will suit?" "O yes, I am sure of it; but he is so shy, and she is so reserved, that they have not made much acquaintance yet." "She is reserved, is she?" "Yes, in some ways she is. There is no making her talk of herself." "That is not a common fault," said Edmund, with a smile. "Is she not beautiful, Mr. Neville?" "How can I tell, if you will not make her look this way?" "You must have patience till after dinner, and then I shall introduce you to her."

"O no, thank you, I hate a formal introduction. You will see that I shall contrive to introduce myself. How have your grandfather and grandmother received her?" "O, as kindly as possible—particularly grandpapa; and yet, he had a great deal to get over. He could not endure that papa should marry a Catholic and a foreigner."

"Prejudices are stubborn things, no doubt," replied Edmund, "but affections are stronger; and when they clash, they first go to the wall—How do Walter's stand?" "They are quite of a different sort from grandpapa's; but, I believe, he fancied he should not like Ginevra, and—"

"I think he likes her very much, now; don't you? Look how they are talking. Can you hear what it is all about?" "Cathedrals, I believe. Tell me, how did you like the Vincents, yesterday?" "Which of them?" "Maud."

"About as much, I suppose, as you liked her brother."

"I liked him very much."

"Exactly: I thought so; well, I liked her very much. She is a sort of person who would toil to gain her end, and never rest till she had gained it; and I honor such people."

"Why, that should depend on what their aim is."

"Not entirely. There is something great in fixity of purpose, in a strong will and a dogged perseverance, even when there is nothing good or great in the object aimed at."

"Such a will as that might make a man more criminal than great," answered Margaret, with some animation. "There is nothing admirable in mere strength of purpose, when it is the result of pride and the instrument of tyranny."

"Moral strength may be the result of pride, but not the occasion of crime—not of debasing, mean crime, at least."

"O, Mr. Neville!" exclaimed Margaret; "isn't everything that is wrong, more or less vile?—is not guilt always selfish, and selfishness always mean?"

"I do not call that a mean selfishness, which makes a man trace out for himself a destiny, and be true to it and to himself, even though he may have to sacrifice others in his efforts to reach his end. There is something that belongs to a high order of character in the determination to conquer obstacles, and to sweep away whatever lies between us and our object. Depend upon it, Miss Leslie, a scrupulous nature is never joined to true greatness; a man who weighs every word before he utters it, will never be eloquent, and he who debates upon every action before he performs it, will never be great. There is a moral instinct that carries a man through life far better than what are generally called principles."

"How different your ideas are from Walter's! He, too, admires the strength of will, and steadiness of purpose, but he says that the will of man is a fearful power for good or for evil, and, if not rightly directed, may start aside like a broken bow, and destroy himself and others."

At the mention of Walter's name, Edmund had rapidly glanced at the side of the table where he sat, and it was some moments before Margaret obtained his attention, and the conversation was resumed.

"Do you think," he asked her after a pause, "that one person can long withstand the will of another, when there exists that fixity of purpose which we were speaking of just now, in one of the parties engaged in a trial of strength? Don't you suppose that intense volition, even if it stops at any guilty means of success, must triumph in the end over passive resistance?"

"I do not understand you."

"Suppose, for instance, that the happiness of my whole life depended on conquering the will of those I had to deal with—in obliging them to act according to my ideas, and not according to their own—do you not think that, granting equality of mental power, my indomitable will must conquer in the end?"

"Walter would say that it depended on the justice of your cause, and, failing that, on the nature of the resistance you met with."

A dark shade passed over Neville's face, and he said abruptly— "For heaven's sake, tell me what you think, and not what Walter says."

"I think as he does; but I am not as good as he is, and that is why I quote him. I hate talking as if I was better than I am; it is like hypocrisy, though not so really. Living with a person of very high principles and of exalted goodness, is apt to make one good in theory; we fancy ourselves like them, till something proves to us that we are only electrotyped," she said, pointing with a smile to a piece of plate of that description which stood before them.

"You are right," answered Neville; and there was another pause. "Miss Leslie, if somebody you cared very much about, whom you loved with all your heart, was to thwart you on the point nearest to your heart, would it alter your feelings?"

With a trembling voice she answered— "If I loved any one with all my heart, I should have no heart to set on any thing else."

"The usual bright glance of her eye was changed to one of timid and diffident anxiety, as she looked at Edmund's thoughtful face. He seemed more absorbed in his subject than in her, and went on—

"Your devotion, then, to the person you loved would be such, as to conquer all obstacles?" "Always supposing that nothing wrong was required of me."

"Oh, of course," rejoined Edmund impatiently. "Let us always suppose that, and not make conventional speeches."

(To be Continued.)

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