

PRETTY MISS NEVILLE

BY E. M. COBBEN

CHAPTER XLII—CONTINUED

THE PROPOSAL

"For I'll believe I have his heart, as much as he has mine." Behold us at the ball and at a large and very gay ball. Everything had been done on a magnificent scale, you could see at a glance. Although there were fewer tents and not so much outside decoration as we found on similar occasions in the warm and sunny plains, yet large suites of rooms had been thrown open, and everything arranged in a quiet, unostentatious way, to promote facilities for flirtation. Chairs, in twos or threes, were grouped or scattered about in the most subtle and sentimental situations. A profusion of flowers and plants met our eyes on all sides. The ball-room itself was enough to compel the most obstinate male "wall flower" to take the floor and the lighting and band were perfection.

The room was already tolerably crowded when we entered, auntie, in black velvet and pointed shoes, the queen of chaparrons; Mrs. Vane, bewitching in gray tulle and scarlet geraniums; and I, as before hinted, in black—black was always becoming to me; at least, so I had been told. "Le noir est si flatteur pour les blondes." The only color about me was my bouquet. I wore my race bracelet and diamond solitaire earrings, and a large diamond star—a most extravagant present from Uncle Jim my last birthday. Poor Uncle Jim! I am sure he thought he was making up to me, in a small way, for all the splendid jewels I had relinquished along with Major Percival.

I glanced round the room and saw Maurice dancing with Miss Ross, of course. I mentally observed. I put him down in my programme for number eight, and then proceeded to fill my card. The first Lancers were Rody's due, as I flatly refused to dance a round one with him, telling him, "that it would be wiser than going into action," for his wild bounds and frantic rushes were a sight, once seen, never forgotten. The square dances were few and far between, and ours was preceded by a couple of waltzes; but the instant "Trial by Jury" struck up, Rody came over to where I was standing with my late partner and almost hauled me off to take my place at the top of the set.

"Do you know, Nora, joking apart," looking round the room and pretending to stand on his tiptoes, and then staring hard at me, "I believe you are about the best-looking girl here to night; really—bar jokes." "You don't mean it, Rody!" I answered, impressively. "Yes, and you took the shine out of them at the races, too. Kilcock forever! I say, I wonder what Sweetlips and Dan and Patsy would think if they could have a squint at you now? They would never know you. Look here," he gabbled on, as we returned to our places after visiting, "you ought to make a good match, you know and marry some heavy swell with heaps of coin, and keeps lots of first class hunters, and offer a perennial welcome to old friends."

"You may consider yourself certain of a welcome and a noun, Rody." "Listen to me, Nora," he said, coming very close, and speaking in a low, mysterious whisper; "you know very well that I am a rough, awkward fellow, but I am your friend, and I look upon you as just as much my sister as Deb."

"Of course you do," I returned with conviction. "It would be very odd if you did not." "Well, I only wanted to say a word in your ear; maybe I'm putting my foot in it, but you won't be offended with me, will you?" apprehensively. "No," I replied laughing, "you may trust me, I won't be offended. You were not always so mindful of my feelings!"

"Yet what was the boy going to say? Vivid recollections of his various social blunders rose before my mind's eye. Wretched Rody had a fearful knack of inquiring after the wrong people, and saying the wrong things to the wrong person."

"Then here goes; Don't set your young affections on Maurice Beresford. He is a rare good fellow. I know—a brick of the first water; but he is going the pace, and no mistake, with that scraggy, black-looking Miss Ross."

Rody, in the character of a mentor, was something new. "Thank you," I replied, inwardly somewhat disconcerted, but with tolerable outward equanimity. "There is no need to warn me. I know that Maurice is engaged, he told me so himself."

"Did he?" ejaculated Rody, staring at me hard with his little, round, intelligent eyes. "Humph," he muttered; "I don't think much of his taste."

"Chacun à son goût. Some day you will choose for yourself, and maybe we won't think much of your taste. Every eye forms its own beauty."

"It would be a queer eye that would form any beauty out of Miss Ross," he retorted, contemptuously. "Come, come, Rody, why are you being so hard to please? even I, a lady, think her very handsome. Now here's the grand chain, and we are outside, and for mercy's sake keep there."

At last it was Maurice's dance. After we had taken several turns we paused for a little, and looked on. We discussed the music, criticised the dresses, and praised the floor. I observed Miss Ross, in a primrose

colored gauze, leaning against the opposite wall, and conversing with her partner—a man with mere whiskers, and no mustache—with unusual animation.

"How well your fiancée looks to night! What a pretty girl she is!" I remarked—the subject of his engagement had a hideous and irresistible fascination for me.

"She is," replied Maurice, glancing not at Miss Ross, but at me with a look of grave, critical inspection.

"If she is as nice as she looks," I continued somewhat embarrassed by his steady gaze, "I am sure you will be very happy, and you have my best wishes." "I had made this little speech with no small effort, but I had said it, and said it with a smile. "Thank you very much," he replied composedly, scribbling vaguely on his programme, with an odd expression on his face.

"She admires this bracelet," holding up my wrist, "and I intend to order a similar one for her at Orr's as my wedding present."

"Your good wishes and present are very kindly intended, Nora. But are you quite certain that you know the lady to whom I am engaged?"

"Oh, yes, of course I do," I answered quickly. "Miss Ross; I know her better as long."

"Miss Ross! Certainly not; she is engaged—that part of the story is quite correct—engaged to the gentleman she is dancing with; he is a naval officer on the China station, and an old schoolfellow of mine. He arrived here yesterday, and as soon as we return to Cheetapore the wedding will take place. And so you thought I was engaged to Miss Ross?"

"I must confess I did; so do most people, you seem such friends." "So we are, I like her extremely. She is a particularly nice girl, and being her father's A. D. C., and her intended's former schoolfellow, we have seen a great deal of each other, and consequently society leaps at the conclusion that we are engaged. I wonder how Rockfield would relish the intelligence?"

"Then if it is not Miss Ross, to whom are you engaged? Surely, Maurice, you will tell me her name. I should like to know her. I should like to be friends with my future cousin."

"Should you really like to see her? Would you care to be introduced to her now—this evening?" he asked very earnestly.

"I should," I replied, firmly. "Yes, very much indeed. Is she here?" looking round with a sinking heart. "Come along then," offering his arm and leading me into the corridor, where dozens of couples were walking and sitting and standing, now that the waltz had wailed out its very last bars. As we proceeded down the lobby, steering in and out among the crowd, I made a rapid mental review of all the girls on the hills.

"Who could it be? Not Laura Jenkins; he had never spoken six words to her. Not Miss Farquhar; he had only seen her twice. Who could it be?"

"I think you will find her in here," said Maurice, pushing open a door, and ushering me into a small boudoir. It was perfectly empty. I looked eagerly round—not a soul to be seen but ourselves.

"Well, where is she?" I asked, impatiently; "you see she is not here."

"Yes, there she is, right behind you," he answered coolly. "Allow me to present you to an old friend." I turned with a violent start, and, in a long mirror between two windows, I confronted a full length reflection of myself—myself, with earnest, expectant expression and parted lips, grasping my fan in one hand and my bouquet in the other. Quietly recovering, I turned round and said, "If you intend this for a joke, Cousin Maurice, I fail to see the point. What do you mean?" I inquired, looking at him indignantly.

"It is no joke, but sober, solemn sense, I assure you," he returned, leaning his arm on the back of a high chair, and encountering my gaze with perfect equanimity.

"Now you have seen my fiancée, come and sit down here," motioning me toward the sofa, "and tell me what you think of her. Is she likely to be as nice as she is pretty? Is there any chance of your being good friends? Come," he said, taking me by the hand, and speaking with unusual earnestness, "come and let us sit down and talk it all over."

"Maurice, how can you?" I stammered, divided equally between a desire to laugh and to cry. "What are you thinking of? You must be mad! I am not engaged to you!"

"No, but I am pledged to you. I gave your grandfather my solemn word of honor to marry you; you heard me yourself; to marry no one else as long as you were single. Nothing but your marriage with another man can free me."

"You are not bound to me in any way," I urged impetuously; "and if you are waiting for your release till I marry, you will wait a long time. I mean to live and die an old maid."

"Really?" looking down on me with an expression of amused incredulity.

"Believe me, Maurice, I am perfectly in earnest. I have, as you know, a happy home and kind friends. Grandfather's bargain no longer applies to me. I am even better off than he imagined I should be. Do not think of me. And if there is any one you really care for, I implore you not to be held back by that rash, foolish vow. I am sure grandfather was doing when he exacted such a promise. I should be miserable—

most miserable—all my life, if I thought I was standing between you and your happiness. Take your release from me. I give it to you in grandfather's name," tendering my bouquet in my excitement.

"I made this long speech with breathless haste, and with all the eagerness and earnestness I could command, Maurice meanwhile surveying me with marked attention.

"Is your decision final, Nora? Are you fully resolved to be an old maid? Have you considered the matter well? You are only twenty."

"I have!" I replied, firmly. "Could no one tempt you to change your mind?" his eyes imperatively fastened on mine.

"I shook my head with great resolution. "No one!" he repeated with emphasis, still standing before me.

Then bending lower, and forcibly removing my fan, to which my eyes were glued, he proceeded: "Look at me, Nora, and tell me 'the truth, and nothing but the truth.'"

I looked up (please be lenient), fully prepared to tell a falsehood.

"Could I?" he whispered.

For all answer, I covered my face with my hands.

"Come," he said, sitting down beside me on the sofa.

"I am not going to take silence for consent this time, Nora, which is it to be, yes or no?"

"Yes," I replied, almost under my breath.

"Then why did you tell me such a story just now—such a flagrant, unblushing fib?"

"Because—because—I did not. I meant that I would marry no one, but to tell you so," I stammered, recovering my senses and my tongue.

"I don't see why you should not; it is a long year," responded Maurice, coolly fanning himself with my property.

"I declare, sir," I exclaimed, between laughing and crying, "nothing like your impudence was ever heard in all the annals of proposals."

"You must remember that this is the second time I have asked you, my dear Nora. The first time I was a little nervous, certainly, but I find that it's nothing when you're used to it."

"Why did you ask me a second time, when I behaved so badly to you the first?" I asked, impulsively.

"Oh, why do people do lots of foolish things? Why, for instance, are you going to give me a kiss, and that door most invitingly ajar?"

"I am not going to do anything of the sort," I exclaimed, flushing crimson, and moving precipitately away.

"Oh, well, I have no such scruples," returned Maurice, calmly suiting the action to the word. "I'm not bothering any one else this time, am I? You are not secretly engaged, are you?"

"Don't I cried, almost in tears. "I know I richly deserve it, but I can't bear it," I concluded, almost breaking down.

"Well, then, we will make a fresh start, Nora," he said, taking my hand; "we won't say how badly you treated me once upon a time, or how frightfully cut up I was—we will let bygones be bygones. When I heard that your engagement was broken off, like the poor, foolish moth, I came back again to the candle to try my luck, and when they told me that you were up and here I threw up the last of my leave and followed you. I was off my shooting altogether too; I could not hold a rifle straight, thanks to thinking of you, so I left the other fellows at Bandipore and came up, just to have a look round and see how the land lay."

"Yes—go on," I said smiling through my tears, and gradually recovering my self-possession.

"Well, I did not think much of my chance, I can assure you, and only yesterday it dawned upon me that I had a faint one."

"If you are going to make bad puns, Maurice, I tell you solemnly that I'll have nothing to do with you. You know what Dr. Johnson said."

"All right, Nora, I'll make a bargain with you. I'll give up making puns—which is by no means a severe deprivation, as they are not at all in my line—and you will give up flirting."

"I never flirt," I replied, sniffing at my bouquet.

"Oh—oh! What, never?"

"Well, hardly ever," I replied, bursting into laughing. "But, seriously, I don't think I ever did flirt intentionally."

"A flirting wife is an abomination," said Maurice, quite gravely, "and as I believe I have enormous resources of latent jealousy in my disposition, we should never get on."

"Make your mind quite easy about me, Maurice. I shall never give you any anxiety on that score, I mean to be a model."

"You said you would rather die than marry me," Maurice remarked mischievously. "And now, what do you say? Say something nice, Nora," he added, pleadingly; "I'm sure I deserve it, if ever a fellow did."

"I say—I say—that I believe I would die if you married any one else. Will that suit you?" I answered, turning my head away to conceal my blushes. I have every faculty in earnest. I have, as you know, a happy home and kind friends. Grandfather's bargain no longer applies to me. I am even better off than he imagined I should be. Do not think of me. And if there is any one you really care for, I implore you not to be held back by that rash, foolish vow. I am sure grandfather was doing when he exacted such a promise. I should be miserable—

"We really must go back to the ball-room, Maurice," I said at length.

"Yes, I suppose we ought to make a move," he returned, discontentedly; "but," brightening, "of course you will dance with me for the rest of the evening."

"Indeed, I shall do nothing of the sort. I'm engaged for every dance. If you behave very decorously, I may go down to supper with you—and I may not," I said, rising, and walking over to the glass, and giving myself a last fond look as I turned to leave the room.

"Was she as pretty as you expected?" said Maurice, surveying my reflection with a triumphant smile. "Look here, Nora," he added, with his hand on the door, "my leave is up in a fortnight."

"But you can easily get more," I returned.

"Not so easily as you imagine. Listen to me," he continued, facing me, "I mean to be married in a month. A month will give you lots of time to get your finery; a trousseau is all nonsense in my opinion. However, I'll wait a month," with an air of great generosity.

"A month!" I cried. "Why not say to-morrow, at once?" I added ironically. "I never heard of such absurdity. We have been engaged about ten minutes, and you talk of being married in a month. A likely tale!"

"We have been engaged exactly seven years, and in four weeks' time you will find yourself Mrs. Beresford," he replied, inflexibly.

"Well, I'm sure!" I gasped. "So am I, quit sure," he interrupted, pushing the door wide open in order to permit me to pass out, thus bringing the argument to a conclusion, and denying me the privilege of the last word. The lobby was crowded, and almost the first person we encountered was Rody.

"Now, this is what I call really very nice," he exclaimed, scrutinizing us with folded arms. "Are you aware that you have been absent these four dances, Nora, that all the stewards are out in the compound and looking for you with lanterns, and have gone down to drag the lake?"

"I don't mean to say so. What fun!" I replied, with unusual animation.

"Ha! what have you been about?" he asked, as if struck by some new idea. "To judge from your face you have come in for a fortune!"

"My face is my fortune!" I returned promptly.

"I'm not at all so sure of that. We all know that old Uncle Jim is a rich man, and—"

"I fancy that a glance at Maurice revealed the truth, for he suddenly paused, seized him eagerly by the hand, exclaiming: "I'll see you through it, old fellow; I'll walk you up the plank; I'll be your best man, with pleasure."

"Indeed you won't," returned Maurice, resolutely; "goodness knows what practical joke might occur to your lively imagination. No; very many thanks. I have a steady, respectable gunner in my mind's eye, who will, I hope, fill that arduous post. Our prolonged absence had been noted by Mrs. Vane and auntie; the former gave me a significant look as she floated by, and I was immediately seized upon by an ill used partner, and hurried away into the crowd myself."

I found time to whisper to auntie, during a pause in the waltz. Dear old lady, how pleased she looked! I noticed Uncle Jim and Maurice in solemn conclave in a doorway, and for once I am convinced that the topic of the conversation was not shikar. The evening came to an end as long as I live I shall always have tender recollections of the Club ball.

"Well, who was right?" said Mrs. Vane, following me into my room, holding her candle up quite close to my rosy cheeks, and surveying me most complacently. "This is rather better than the last affair? Eh?" she added, triumphantly. "Well, I won't trample on you now you are down, but I was right and you were wrong, you wicked old antediluvian!"

Now that I have told my story, there is no need to linger over its significant details. It was settled that Maurice was to take six months' leave, and we were to revisit Galloway, Italy and France. Rody (who was also going home on furlough) and Deb were to meet us there, and we were to have a grand "rendezvous" under the old beech-tree, and exhume the bottle! Six of the prettiest girls in Ooty were to be my bridesmaids; and who should be my principal attendant to the altar, to hold my gloves and bouquet?

Who but Miss Ross!

Different people said different things—a great deal too kind and much undeserved, as far as I was concerned; and presents were showered on us by many generous hands.

Uncle was delighted; "it was too good to be true," he declared ten times a day. Mrs. Vane said, "she always knew how it would be." Mrs. Fox said, "That it was no great matter after all! Only a captain at the Horse Artillery, and by all accounts, as poor as a rat." Rody said, "It bore Banagher." Mrs. Gower said, "That Miss Neville was engaged to a different man every time she went to the hills, and she would believe in no wedding unless she saw it!" Maurice said—No. You can't expect me to tell you what Maurice said. I say, that I am the happiest girl under the Southern Cross, and that after next week there will be no longer such a person as—Pretty Miss Neville.

THE END.

"No one who loves misunderstands."

Three years had passed since the divorce had been declared, and, only

HER FAITH

Theodora Kent woke to the remembrance of the words that had rung through her mind late into the night until they had finally been silenced by a restless sleep: "If you were a man, I would call you a coward and wait for you to give me the lie." She saw again the face of Bruce Barnard, whose anger struggled with the tenderness of passion as, having finished speaking, he had turned and left the room; and she felt again the weakness that seized her when the door closed upon him and upon the vistas of happiness down which he has besought her to look with him.

"I would call you a coward." She rose to the rhythm of the words, she dressed to it, she ate (or tried to eat) her hastily prepared breakfast to it, and then sought her easel for freedom from it. In vain! The voice of her art, which usually drowned all other voices, was dumb, and, although she wooed it with all the strength left in her, no response came, and she finally threw down her brush and palette.

So it had been day after day. Day after day? Each day was not a day merely; it was an eternity. What was the use? Was there any use in giving up the only thing that would make her future life worth living? Would such a terrible atrophy as this in regard to everything always continue? If so, was she not willfully destroying the one talent entrusted to her? And would not the day of reckoning surely come? Which should she do, follow a course that seemed contrary to conscience (and perhaps only seemed) and increase her talent tenfold—or, a hundredfold (for such must be the outcome of a life guarded and inspired by the love of the man whom she loved with her whole being, or should she become an unprofitable steward for the sake of saving her soul?

She turned to the window, and stood with unseeing eyes looking at the river, whose half-veiled waters, crossed now and then by lazy little steamboats, was wont to hazy her in its thrall. But had the river entirely disappeared in the night she would not have been aware of it. As she heard only one sound—the voice of the man she loved—so she saw only his face as he looked when his anger flared forth, or more often as when he had told her of his love, before doubt had had time to creep into her mind as to whether she should accept it. Ah if it were possible to do so and live in peace with the dictates of that religion which had hitherto been her comfort!

For one mistake must a man suffer a whole lifetime? And not only he, but the one who had unconsciously been waiting for him, each incomplete without the other? There was no justice in it! It was the other woman who should do the suffering—she who was now playing the part in life that she desired, without let or hindrance, "starring" it in the character of her choice; while she, Theodora, accepting for stage-manager the Church instead of her heart, was meekly taking what was designed to her, the highest right. It was intolerable!

The moments ticked by unheeded. How long she had stood there she could not have said, when suddenly, as if moved by a power outside of herself, she sat down to the desk and hurriedly wrote a few words like one at dictation; after which, thrusting the paper into an envelope and addressing the latter, she donned her walking suit and proceeded to the nearest subway station. And not even for a second had she heeded the pitying face on the crucifix that hung just inside the desk.

Theodora was only one of the numberless young artists whose ambition was guiding for the conquest of success—that chimera which ever beckons but is so seldom reached. In her case the god in the struggle was not pecuniary want, but the spur of the spirit. Love of the beautiful and the depicting it had become her life; and, left without kindred, no other duty had called her to other thoughts or occupation. Hitherto everything had become a help to her aspiration; or, rather, she had turned it into one—every disappointment and loss as well as joy and previous achievement; but this renunciation brought strange paralysis.

Among the others with whom she had been thrown, and who belonged to the same cult as she, was Bruce Barnard, a man perhaps five years her senior, in some respect; a Bohemian, but called by his friends Galahad—the title serving to show that, though he was in that world, he was not of it. As his tastes and ideals were similar to those of Theodora, a comfortable comradeship had sprung into being between them, grown and matured devoid of sentiment; for she had known from the beginning that he was a married man. The tragedy of his life had curiously been told her before she met the man himself—his marriage when scarcely of age, after only a few weeks' acquaintance with the girl, or woman, older than he, and his swift disillusionment when acquaintance became knowledge; then the bitter years, stoically born, of living with a nature utterly foreign to beauty in any line, most of all character, during which time he met with constant remonstrance from his friends because he did not put an end to the relationship. His yielding to such a course had come only when his wife, after leaving him, refused to return to the shelter of his good name—a return which he had not only made possible but had urged.

Three years had passed since the divorce had been declared, and, only

a few days since, Theodora had realized that the line of friendship had been crossed, and that not only she held Bruce passing dear, but that his flaming love surrounded her and would not, could not, be extinguished; not that its cessation would be her desire, but she belonged heart and soul to that Faith that refuses recognition of absolute separation.

Bruce had come to her pleaded with her, and made demands of her; and then, having failed, had left her in wrath at what seemed to him the needless sacrifice of the happiness of both for "a mere religious whim, a vagary of a sect." She did not know the real meaning of love if she could accept such a dictum, that would keep apart two people as mortal as they. Surely no purer love than theirs could exist, and by yielding to so arbitrary a rule she cast aspersions on herself. To all of which and more she had listened, almost suffocated by the longing to be able to believe, as he believed, that their marriage could be according to conscience, but never quite losing the sustaining breath drawn from a lifelong belief; until finally, when all her soul was going out to the man in his anguish at giving her up, he had left her with his bitterness for good-bye. She paced up and down the platform at the station in another world than that in which the people about her waited. Her mind seemed capable of only one line of thought, "Bruce or the Church," which grew more and more insistent.

As the rumble of the coming express was heard, she yielded to the greater love within her. Then a woman brushed against her, recalling her to her surroundings; and for the first time she noticed, not far from her feet, a child's hat which the woman was pursuing. And then, as she turned in her restless pacing, she suddenly saw a hatless child, perhaps a little over three, fall off the platform onto the track. The bystanders, including the woman who had picked up the hat, saw, too, and were as if petrified. Theodora alone rushed to the edge of the platform, jumped down, raised the child, set her as far back as she could reach, and stepped across the third rail to the space between the tracks—all in a second. The express thundered by. A white faced official rushed to her and helped her back to the platform, where she became the unwilling center of an excited group, she alone unmoved and undisturbed.

The guard's questions and requests for information as to her identity, Theodora smilingly refused to answer, lest she should become a headline in the newspapers. No, she would not give her name; she rather despised the Carnegie medal. It was enough to know that the child was alive and uninjured. As quickly as she could, she withdrew to the edge of the crowd, eager to escape the expressions of praise and admiration that were forthcoming, yet desirous to take the train for which she had been waiting.

Just then a hand was laid on her arm almost roughly, and she looked up into the frightened face of Bruce Barnard.

"For God's sake, Theodora, you had no right to risk your life like that—you of all others!" He almost staggered and leaned against a pillar for support. "I get here in time to see you between the tracks." His voice was scarcely audible; and she felt, as even that ghastly night she had not, the contact of a strong man's agony. "You of all others!" he repeated, gaining his composure. And for that child—her child!"

Following his glance, Theodora saw the tawdrily dressed woman, once perhaps pretty, who had pursued the lead, leading away the child whom she had rescued. A swift intuition told her who the "her" was, and her gaze came back to Barnard, filled with understanding, mingled with a great pity for him. But the resentment as to the former's existence felt a few hours ago was gone.

Barnard went on, his words gaining impetus as his strength returned. "That night I called you a coward—no! Please let me finish!" (The blood surged through his face.) "And I said I would wait for you to give me the lie" (then, as she attempted to correct him), "qualified, it is true, by the words 'if you were a man.' But it amounts to the same thing. You did not keep me waiting long. Can you forgive me for trying to force you into doing what you thought evil?"

Theodora's color also came and went.

"When one is loved, one does not need to ask forgiveness," she answered gently. And then drawing from her pocket a letter, she slowly tore it to pieces. "I wrote you, perhaps an hour ago (it may be a year, for all I know) that you were more to me than my faith. After—that—I know differently" (her voice growing lower). "But it does not make it any easier. That" (looking over the track)—"that just now was nothing compared to these pieces of paper."

And from her eyes the love which, surprised when she was off her guard, he had faintly discerned, now in its unscreened power fairly blinded him. He looked away, awed; but the unsoftened light had done its work; the Galahad in him became dominant again. Theodora felt him rise to the measure of manhood which had always been markedly his—the manhood which imposed no burden on womanhood, but rather removes every vestige of it, every shadow.

"In your risking your life, your confessor will tell you that you saved it. Perhaps you saved mine, too" (simply, and trying to speak lightly). "At any rate, you have made a man

of me. I will at least play the part of one, which is more than I did the last time I saw you. But, Theodora, it is as impossible for me to stop loving you as it would have been for that train not to have crushed that child had you not intervened. Be sure that my love for you is safe, despite time, space, loneliness—now and forever."

"Safe from stain, too," added Theodora, taking his outstretched hand and smiling unflinchingly. "Your good-bys now will help me down through the years as nothing else could."

And she boarded the train, leaving him standing with head still uncovered.—Jane C. Crowell in "Ave Maria."

THE GIFT OF FAITH

LESS EASY THAN THE MULTIPLICATION TABLE

That faith, like every other virtue, has its difficulties is admitted. It is because of these difficulties that we pray for the gift of faith, as we pray for meekness or continence, meaning the grace to exercise these virtues. Where does the difficulty of faith occur? The answer is: It may often be difficult to believe without doubting whatever God has revealed, in spite of apparent difficulties arising from our fragmentary knowledge of physical science, history, or what not. At bottom the virtue of faith consists in trusting Christ and the Church of Christ (after a man has sufficiently established their trustworthiness), in holding one's conviction that our Lord will not lead us astray, either directly or through His Church, in spite of, maybe, an appearance to the contrary. In fact, faith, like any other virtue, consists in preferring God and Christ to any other motive.

But there is another difficulty in faith which occurs to our Anglican fellow-Christians, which adds enormously, indeed, to its difficulty, which did not before the Reformation occur to any human being. Namely, they not only have the difficulty, common to all who accept a revelation of believing that revelation at any cost; they have the further difficulty of not being sure what is revealed. Now this is quite a new point, unknown to Catholics, to any old Church in Christendom, even to Jews or Moslems. It is often hard enough to believe what you are told. What must it be not even to be sure what you are told? Consider the parallel case of any other virtue. We know quite certainly what the law of chastity enjoins. Its merit consists in obeying that law, in spite of temptation. So it is with every other virtue. But who could serve faithfully, if apart from all temptation to break it, he did not even know what he is commanded to do? Such a difficulty as this occurs in no case. The Fathers, all Christian antiquity, realized clearly enough that it may be difficult to believe the revelation of Christ, in spite of apparent reasons for doubting it; they had no idea that a Christian was to be further harassed by men who contend in obeying that law, in spite of temptation.

So it is with every other virtue. But who could serve faithfully, if apart from all temptation to break it, he did not even know what he is commanded to do? Such a difficulty as this occurs in no case. The Fathers, all Christian antiquity, realized clearly enough that it may be difficult to believe the revelation of Christ, in spite of apparent reasons for doubting it; they had no idea that a Christian was to be further harassed by men who contend in obeying that law, in spite of temptation.

So it is with every other virtue. But who could serve faithfully, if apart from all temptation to break it, he did not even know what he is commanded to do? Such a difficulty as this occurs in no case. The Fathers, all Christian antiquity, realized clearly enough that it may be difficult to believe the revelation of Christ, in spite of apparent reasons for doubting it; they had no idea that a