AN EPISODE IN MR. MANSFIELD'S LIFE.

BY MAURICE F. EGAN.

Mr. Orton Mansfield—he had inherited the whole fortune of the Baltimore Ortons, and had, out of gratitude, prefixed Orton to his name,- was said by everybody who did not know him to be a happy man, and to be happy for three reasons · he was good, he was healthy, and he was rich. His house was the best in New York--or one of the best; he had brought a famous picture from Europe, and nearly everybody spoke well of him. His children had turned out well. Albert in *spite of the slowness of promotions in the army, had gone up* twice in rank since he left West Point; and Alice was about to marry a millionaire, who was, like Mr. Mansfield himself, a convert to the Catholic Church. His niece, a young girl named Louise, an orphan, had come home to his very grand house to spend the Christmas holidays.

Louise seemed smaller than she was; she was just sixteen, very slight and shy, with soft brown eyes, curly hair a little darker, and a complexion that suggested the apple blossoms. She was rather silent. "Reserved," the gay Alice called her. "Proud," Mr. Mansfield said to himself, as he looked closely at her on this Christmas Eve from under his shaggy eyebrows. He had just told her that she might go out that afternoon and buy all the pearls in Tiffany's, if she wanted them, and half a dozen evening frocks, and had thrown between the pages she was reading a blank cheque signed with his weighty signature. "What could be more generous than this?" he asked *himself. Louise had not a cent of her own. Here she had* the whole of an afternoon before her, with unlimited money at her commands. How many girls would be perfectly, deliriously happy if such a gift were to fall to them!

But Louise only let her long eyelashes fall on her cheek and said: "Thank you, uncle." Mr. Mansfield waited a moment, hoping to see the eyelids raise themselves, and a bright flush make the cheeks grow redder. He waited in vain. Then he went off grumbling, under his great white beard Alice never showed any particular elation over his gifts. But, then, she was used to them. Louise on the contrary, had probably never had a finer gift than the new calico frock or an indifferent pair of shoes while her parents were alive, on the used-up North Carolinian plantation.

II.

Mr. Orton Mansfield was to give a dinner on Christmas night to a few men out of his club. He had been busy all Christmas Day in his study after he had come from Mass, whither Alice and Louise had accompanied him. Alice had showered gifts on him—all of them gorgeous and useless things bought with his own money. It was kind of Alice, of course; but it rather bored him, particularly as it was plain that she was thinking more of a smoking cap she had made for her future husband than all the glittering trifles she had spread before her present father after breakfast.

He had watched Louise during Mass. He noticed at the "Gloria" a great gladness in her eyes and a flush of joy in her cheek. The girl was capable of feeling! Why should she appear so ungrateful to him? She had not even taken the trouble to adorn herself with any of the gewgaws that made Alice the most remarked person in the crowd that went up Fifth avenue after the High Mass. Mr. Mansfield never rode to church, and Alice never rode from church—the one following some reverential tradition, the other following her desire to be seen in the well dressed throng which makes Fifth avenue gay after the services in the various churches are over on Sunday. While Alice's attire in every detail plainly showed the touch of the English Redfern—then the most fashionable of ladies' tailors,—Louise wore a plain brown suit, neither quite new nor entirely fashionable.

Mr. Mansfield was vexed. And he had hardly recovered from his irritation when he entered his dining-room and seated his six guests. Neither Alice nor Louise was present. It was strictly a men's dinner. If the rather sombre oaken room lacked the color of ladies' dresses, it was not missed; for there were great banks of pink roses every-where, and above them in the dome glowed a modern stained-glass window of St. Elizabeth and the roses, through which yellow electric light *flowed and mingled with the glow of the candes on the table*

The men were pleasant principally because the cook was exceedingly good.

After much chatter, the host's thoughts returned to the *subject which vexed him much--the ingratitude of the poor.*

"I wonder if St Elizabeth found the poor at all grateful?" he said, glancing at the jewelled stained-glass above him.

Somebody yawned and said he did not know; but a reflective-looking man at the end of the table observed ·

"I presume St. Elizabeth knew how to reach their hearts. But I fancy she did not care whether they were grateful or not," he added.

"But she was a saint," remarked Mr. Mansfield, "and I'm not."

"Well," said the reflective man, "gifts given without love gifts given out of pity only—do not gain anything but a perfunctory kind of gratitude. Why, my dear Mansfield, the hardest virtue to cultivate is a gratitude which is not a lively sense of favor to come."

They all laughed except Mr. Mansfield.

"I don't know," he said, "whether that is cynical or not, but I do know that is my experience."

"Then I am afraid your giving has lacked something important, and that is a little affection."

This came from a young fellow who reddened a little when he felt how sentimental he would seem. But he was thinking of a little souvenir that had come to him that morning, done by his mother on a bed of sickness.

Nobody noticed his speech just then, for a new *entree* and *a new wine came in. But Mr. Mansfield did not forget it.* He thought it over before he went to sleep that night.

III.

Louise sat in her little room the day after Christmas. It was raining—the snow of the day before had turned to rain. She rose and picked up Mr. Mansfield's cheque from the table.

"I shall take it back to him without a word. He, my dear mother's brother, gives me money because I am poor. Money, nothing more! Oh, how insolent the rich are! Am I not dependent enough and poor enough without being constantly reminded of it? I almost hate him! Oh yes, yes," she continued, impatiently brushing a tear from her cheek. "I know I am ungrateful! I supose I ought to show some gratitude; but how can I be grateful for this magnificent blank cheque! He gives things like a banker, not like a man!"

Louise tapped on the pane. A thought occurred to her. Perhaps he had no picture of her mother. She knew that her mother had loved him intensely. There was a faded daguerrotype in her drawer of a small girl in a stiff white frock and red coral armlets. She would leave that in his study with the cheque, and show that at least he was not so ungrateful as she seemed. See brushed the tears from her cheeks, and, tenderly taking the daguerrotype in her hand, she stole down to Mr. Mansfield's elaborately appointed study. She *knocked slightly.*

"Come in!"

Louise entered and then stopped short.

"Oh, come in!" Mr. Mansfield said, a smile showing in his eyes. He had felt rather lonely all the morning.

Louise put one hand on the back of the courteously offered chair, and rather timidly, and, with an utter loss of her presence of mind, held out the picture.

"Why, It's Lucy—dear little Lucy!" said Mr. Mansfield, a glow coming into his face.

"It's a Christmas gift, uncle," stammered Louise,—"the best I have."

"Here's one of those very coral clasps of hers," said Mr. Mansfield, opening a drawer. "I've kept it all these years. And you may have it. Dear little Lucy, how I love her—and," he said in spite of himself, "how I love her daughter!"

Louise clasped his hand in both hers, and they stood for a moment, very happy.

Louise forgot all about the cheque. It was of no importance now—whether she kept it or not. Afterward she remembered it with some pleasure in the new light of a little love.—*Ave Maria.*
