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GRAPES AND THORNS.

By M. A. T., Author of "The House of York," "A Winged Word," etc.

CHAPTER IX.—Continued.

"Oh! it wasn't a Sister; it was Anita," said Mr. Macon. "My wife went with the child, and stood by her all the time. It was Anita who took all the things from the carriage while my wife was talking with Sister Cecilia in the garden; and the girl counted and examined every package."

"She must have been terrified to death, that poor little lamb!" exclaimed F. Chevreuse, rising to walk about the room "I think I should have been there with her. I would have gone if I had known. You keep too much from me, Mr. Macon. I know that you and others do this from kindness; but you must remember that it isn't for me to be cowardly and shrink like a baby. I'm not sure but I should feel better to be in the midst of it all than to be shut up here suffering the torments of suspense."

"You had a great deal better have nothing to do with it," his friend said decidedly. "You are not needed. F. O'Donovan was in court with Anita and my wife, and there was a body-guard of Catholics all about to make room for them going and coming. It was hard for the poor child; but what she felt most was not being in a crowd, and obliged to speak in public; she did not appear to think of that; but the thought that what she must say might bring trouble on any one almost overpowered her. She excited a great deal of sympathy. While she spoke, you could have heard a pin drop in the room.

"After all," F. Chevreuse said, catching at a consolation, "it won't hurt any of them to see one of God's snow-drops; and she is no more tender than many a martyr of the Church has been."

Mr. Macon's brief story did not give any idea of the sensation produced in court by the appearance of this child, who was as strange to such a scene as if she had been, indeed, a wild flower brought from some profound forest solitude. Her beauty, the dazzling paleness of her face, from which the large eyes looked full of anguish and fear, the flower-like drooping of her form as she leaned on Mrs. Macon's supporting arm—all startled the most hardened spectator into sympathy. Careless and callous as they might have been, feeding on excitement as a drunkard takes his draught, ever stronger and stronger as his taste becomes deadened, each one seemed to realize for a moment how terrible a thing it is to see a human life at stake, and to have influence to destroy or to save it. If she had been a relative or personal friend to the accused, the impression would have been less deep; but the fact that she would have shown the same painful solicitude for any one of them may have stirred in their consciences some sense of their own heartlessness. They made way for her, and listened in breathless silence to hear what she would say. Her very distress lent a silvery clearness to her voice, usually so low and soft, and every word was heard as plainly as the notes of a small bird chirping when its nest is attacked.

"All I know, your honor, is this: Mrs. Macon drove about Crichton to ask for things for the convent; and Mother Ignatia let me go out to bring in the parcels she brought, because it pleased me. I always set down on a slip of paper a list of the articles, and the day of the month she brought them, and some of the Sisters helped me, and looked on. But this time no one but me did anything, for it was the day after Mother Chevreuse was killed, and everybody was in great trouble. Mrs. Macon said, when she came, that she had spent the night before at Madison with her sister there, and started early in her phæton to beg for us, and had heard nothing of the news till she reached Crichton late in the afternoon. Then she drove straight to us; and, when she got out of the phæton, she ran to Sister Cecilia, and they threw themselves into each other's arms, and began to cry. We were all crying, but I went to take the parcels out of the phæton, because I wanted to do something. And I made a list of them, because I always had, and I carried them up-stairs. And I knew just how everything looked, because I tried to think of my work and not of Mother Chevreuse. And I do know surely that the gray shawl which was laid over our lounge was brought that day. I saw the piece torn out of the corner, and, when they arranged it for a cover, they turned the torn corner behind. That is all, your honor, except that Miss Carthusen came to the convent one day, and, when I went into the parlor, she was examining the shawl, and she said she did it because there was one like it missing out of their house. And I hope," said this simple creature, rising, in her earnestness, from Mrs. Macon's arm, and leaning imploringly toward the judge—"I hope that what I have said will not hurt anybody nor be used against anybody. And I ask Mr. Schoninger to forgive me if what I have said displeases him; for, if it should do him harm, I shall be unhappy about it as long as I live."

No one said a word as the girl was led, trembling and half fainting, out of the court-room. The prisoner regarded her with astonishment while she spoke, and when she turned toward him her pitiful face, and made her appeal for forgiveness, he bowed, and a slight involuntary motion of his hands locked as if he would fain have supported her drooping form. Never had he seen so simple and so impassioned a creature. An angel taking its first flight out of the white peacefulness of heaven, and looking for the first time on the miseries of earth, could scarcely have shown a more shrinking and terrified pity than had been displayed by this young girl, drawn from her peaceful convent home to the arena where crime and justice struggle for the mastery. And yet that pure and tender child had given him a terrible blow. Perhaps he felt that her testimony was important, simple as the story she told seemed to be; for his face grew deathly pale, and for the first time during the trial he lost that air of scornful security which he had sustained so far. Averting his face slightly, he seemed to be studying out some problem, and, as he thought, the faint lines between his brows grew deeper, and those sitting near him could see the veins in his temples swelling and throbbing with the stress of some sudden emotion.

The next morning F. Chevreuse went out to make sick-calls after his Mass was over, and returned quite convinced that his friends had been right in advising him to remain indoors. Everybody he met gazed at him, as if trying to read in his face what thought or feeling he might be striving to hide; people turned to look after him; and groups of excited talkers became silent as he approached, only to resume their conversation with increased vehemence when he had passed. He had been obliged to check the wordy sympathy of some and the angry denunciations of others, who thought to please him by wishing ill to Mr. Schoninger; and more than once his heart had been wrung by some loud lament over his lost mother.

"You were right," he said to F. O'Donovan when he went in. "I will not go out again unless there is need of it."

"Then I give you as a task this forenoon to translate ten pages of that book," his brother priest replied. "It is needed, and should be ready for the early spring sales."

F. Chevreuse laid aside his wrappings with alacrity, glad to have a task assigned him. "But I would like to go into the church a minute," he said, making this request with the humility of a child. "Not to pray," he added quickly, as if afraid of receiving too much credit for piety; "I want to go into the gable, and look down to the courthouse."

He stopped for permission, and his face was so worn and troubled that his friend checked the slight smile that unconscious display of obedience had provoked.

"Go, by all means, but do not stay long," he said. "The day is very cold. And, besides, it will do no good to watch there."

What he called the gable was a long, low attic running the whole length of the church, and lighted by a small gable window at each end. A steep stairway led up to a chamber over the altar, but from that the ascent was made by long ladders, very seldom used. The window over the altar gave a fine view of all the eastern and northern part of the city, and looked directly into the square in front of the court-house.

F. Chevreuse toiled wearily up, feeling himself grown old, and stood in the long, dusky room. The floor was covered with wood-shavings left by the builders, and spiders had hung their webs in thick festoons from beam to beam. One side of the southern window, at the further end of the church, was gleaming brightly, where the sun had begun to come in, and the rafters near it glowed as if kindling with fire; but the north window, that felt scarce a touch of sunshine in the winter-time, was covered deeply with frost, piled layer on layer through the cold night.

He put his face to the frame, and breathed on it till the glittering coldness melted, and a drop of water ran down, then another, and presently there was a clear spot in the glass. He wiped this dry with his handkerchief; then, covering his mouth and nose, that his breath might not freeze over the improvised loophole into the outer world, he leaned closer and looked out. For the large panorama of the city, spread out under a clear winter sky, and shot through by the two sparkling rivers, he cared not. Only one spot attracted his attention, and that was the court-house and the square in front of it. Looking there, he drew back, winked to clear his eyes, which had, perhaps, been dazzled by the sharp and tangled lights and shadows of the place; then looked again. The square should have been white with half-trodden snow, and dotted by passers here and there; instead of that, it was entirely black. But the blackness was not of the soil nor pavement; it was the swaying blackness of a crowd. They thronged the streets, pressing toward the square, and stood on the steps of the court-house, struggling to enter. Even at that distance he could see that policemen were forcing them back.

F. Chevreuse turned hastily away from the window, and descended to the church, heartsick at the sight. He threw himself one moment before the altar then went into the house. As he entered, Jane, who was on the lookout, hid herself in her room till he had passed through the kitchen. Since the trial began, they had not met. She felt sure that he did not approve entirely of her conduct, and he allowed her to be invisible without asking any questions.

F. O'Donovan looked at him anxiously as he re-entered the sitting-room; and, when he went and leaned on the mantel-piece, hiding his face in his hands, approached and touched him kindly on the shoulder.

"It isn't your way, Raphael, to break down so," he said in that sweet voice of his, still sweeter with pity and tenderness.

That name, the name of his boyhood, when he and O'Donovan were at school together; when he was so over-flowing with happiness that he could never be still, but had to be for ever at work or at play; when he knew no more of care than what the getting of his lessons involved, no more of sin than the little faults he recounted at his confessor's knees and forgot the next moment, and no more of sorrow than the changing of one beloved professor for another who speedily became as dear. O'Donovan, the beautiful boy, the youngest at school, had been his pride and idol in those days. He turned to him now, and, in the old way the English boys used to mock at him for, kissed his friend and school-fellow on both cheeks; at which the Irishman laughed a little and blushed a good deal.

"You're not much changed from the boy you were," said F. Chevreuse. "You had always a way of seeming to coax, while you were really commanding. Well, you're almost always right. How the wind whistles!"

It was a cutting north wind that broke multitudinously against the church, and seemed to splinter there into separate sharp voices. They went up from the narrow passage between the church and the house, they rang from the chimneys, and sighed and whimpered about the feet of the stone Christ, as if some wounded creature, invisible to man, had crawled there to seek for pity.

"What a day!" repeated F. Chevreuse, looking out. "December is certainly an ugly month, and January is a worse one. February would be worst of all, but that it is so near spring you can snap your fingers in its face."

He seated himself at the table, drew the books towards him, and glanced round at the fire, as if to assure himself that there was something shining in his vicinity, then took up a pen, and laid it down again, shivering, not because he was cold, but because he knew there was so must cold about.

F. O'Donovan, seated near the window, with his finger between the leaves of his Breviary, to keep the place, had observed his every movement. He dropped the book on his knee, and spoke in a gentle, dreamy way that was the very essence of soothing.

"Yes, this is now for a while one of the cold spots on the earth; but we have only to climb a little, in spirit or in memory, to have a different idea of December and everything else. How many years ago to-day is it that you and I saw oranges ripening in the sun in December, and roses blooming, and people pushing back their cloaks for the heat? It is an anniversary, for I have some little reason to remember the date. We were in Rome. I had been shivering in a bare, sunless room at the Propaganda, when I looked up and caught a glimpse through the window of a bit of miraculous blue sky over the roof of San Andrea's. It was four o'clock in the afternoon, and time for a walk. I called you, and we started on a little exploring expedition; for we had neither of us seen much of Rome at that time. We muffled ourselves well, and went out into the Piazza di Spagna. I recollect you saying, as we came to those great stairs, that they must have been modelled by some one who had Jacob's dream-ladder in his mind. You said, too, that one reason why Rome is so much more beautiful than any other city is not because it is more artistic, but more natural. Each part grew for itself, instead of being cramped by some dominating idea that spoilt all in trying to direct all. You were delighted with the perfectly cool way in which a whole street would go up-stairs or down-stairs. Well, there was the whole side of a piazza going up-stairs. We went up, past the group of models, you know, who stand there to be stared at; the bearded old man who stands for S. Peter or Moses, the brigand and the brigand's wife, and the little brown gypsies. The calendar said it was December; yet in the piazza below the air said it was April. When we paused at the first landing, and began to wish we had left our cloaks at home, it was May, and up in front of the Trinita de' Monti it was mid-June. The fruit-sellers left their large baskets of oranges in the sun while they sat in the shade and waited for customers; there were baskets of flowers, with heaps of half-open roses on the stone rail of the balustrade, and streams of rich verdure flowed wide or trickled brightly between the gray sweeps of stone. In the east was that unimaginable blue that can only be compared to a gem; in the west, a dazzle of unclouded sunshine; and between the two, Rome floated in a silvery mist. You leaned on the balustrade, and—wretch that you were!—your first thought was a pagan one. You said that the goddess of beauty had sunk into the midst of the city, and left her drapery of cloud clinging all about it, and that, when she should withdraw, there would be a vision in the sky, but Rome would be nothing but ashes. That was the best image that Raphael Chevreuse could find, with the city before him all a-bubble with the domes of Christian churches. You may recollect that I gave you a very pretty lecture on the subject. Then you pointed out to me a pillar of smoke wreathing slowly up into the sky, showing between the bold front of the Pincian Hill and the twin cupolas in the Piazza del Popolo, with the distant forest and mountain for a background, and you said that we were nothing but cloud-people living in a cloud, and that the only realities were Moses and the Israelities out there offering up sacrifice in the wilds between Egypt and Chanaan. Well, December being too hot for us then, we walked off toward Santa Maria Maggiore. Do you remember the great orange-tree, as large as an apple-tree, that showed over the convent walls, and how thickly the golden oranges were set among its green foliage; and the symbol over the convent door of two lions trying to get at a bird that was safe in the top of a palm-tree; and the vane that you said could have been thought of nowhere but in Italy—a rod with a cross at the top and a bird's wing swinging round as the wind changed? And when we walked on among the ruins, what superstitious young man gathered dandelions, because gold-colored flowers always brought him some happy chance, he said; and then, in the next breath, looking at those mountains before us, swimming, it seemed, in a sea of rosy-purple vapors, broke out with a psalm, "Montes exultaverunt ut arietes; et colles, sicut agni ovium?" You declared vehemently that the mountains were dancing, and I had to hold you to keep you from dancing too. A pretty sight it would have been to see a young Christian priest twirling *pirouettes* among the ruins of the temple of Minerva! Doubtless, while we are in the midst of the snows and frost of a northern morning, the sun is just going down over that same warm and glowing scene. And, doubtless, too," said F. O'Donovan slowly, coming to the point he had started to reach, "outside this pain and confusion there is peace and happiness waiting to come in and give us our soul's summer in this world even. The storms are short, but the peace is long, and for ever waiting over-head."

"But life is not long," concluded F. Chevreuse, "and it behooves me to be about my work."

He drew the books toward him, and began to work in earnest. He had been comforted in one regard that morning: he would not himself be called into court, the only points on which he could give evidence being better known to others. Jane and Andrew had both seen the condition of his little study, with its bolted window and locked-up desk, after he left the house that fatal night, and both F. O'Donovan and Mr. Macon saw it in the morning before he came home. The other point, relating to the sort of bank-bills he had lost, was of no consequence, as the bankers could not say what sort of money Mr. Schoninger had paid them. Every disposition was shown to spare him unnecessary pain, and they even strained a point for that purpose.

He was not needed, indeed, and the case was being brought rapidly to a conclusion, as his first despatch showed him.

"Old Mr. Grey, from the pond farm, with his grand-daughter, have been brought in," Mr. Macon wrote, "and by their help the story has been made to assume form. Mr. Schoninger returned to Crichton that day past their place. He got into a rough road and broke his harness somewhere, and went to their house to borrow a rope to mend it. He had a shawl on his arm when he went up to the door. While the young girl was gone for the rope, he folded the shawl, and put it into my wife's phæton among the other packages. My wife was then with old Mrs. Grey in the house. Mr. Grey was at work in the garden, and saw what was done. The girl also saw the shawl on his arm when he came, but did not notice it afterward. It islikely to go hard with him."

F. Chevreuse had a very red face when he looked over this note. But he handed it to F. O'Donovan without a word, and resumed his writing again. If he knew well what he was writing is doubtful. That color did not leave his face, and now and then he pressed his hand to his forehead, as if confused.

"Mr. Schoninger has roused himself at last," the next note said. "He seems for the first time to comprehend that he is in danger. He looks like a lion. I hope he may prove to have some of a lion's strength, for his chances are small."

F. Chevreuse handed the paper to his brother priest, who had been out and come in again, and watched his face while he read it.

"Will you tell me frankly your opinion of this?" he said then.

F. O'Donovan dropped his eyes, having, evidently, no mind to be frank on the subject. "I cannot have a settled opinion on a question of which I have heard but one side," he said. "I have been in court this morning, and talked with some people there, and the chances at present seem for a conviction. But we cannot tell the strength of the defence as yet."

In spite of his reserve, there was no mistaking his belief in the prisoner's guilt.

F. Chevreuse shut his book decisively.

"Since I am not needed here, I may as well go and see the bishop," he said. "I was to have gone this week to settle important business with him, but he excused me on the supposition that I would not be allowed to leave Crichton. Can you take care of my people a few days longer?"

"A week longer, if you wish."

"Four days will be enough—two to go and come, two there. You will know where to telegraph for me, if I should be wanted. I will go straight to the bishop's house, and stay there."

"How glad I am that you did not say 'episcopal residence!'" remarked his companion.

F. Chevreuse was already making his preparations for the journey. He glanced up rather imperiously from the valise he was packing.

"Why should I say it?" he demanded. "Never used such an expression in my life. And this reminds me that you have been criticising me before to-day, calling me superstitious and I don't know what else. In one little corner of my mind I have been thinking the matter over ever since, and have arrived at these conclusions: superstition, being nothing but erratic faith, should be treated with great tenderness; and, besides, you will recollect that I was at that time reading the pagan classics; forthermore, Rome herself was not born in the faith, but is a converted pagan, and she stands there, a Christian Juno, with all Olympus kneeling about her feet; and well so, for any form is good that is capable of holding a Christian soul. Still further, I have concluded that young O'Donovan, whose hair still looks, across the room, quite black, should show a becoming reverence for Chevreuse, who has long since ceased to count his white hairs and begun to count his black ones. I said an elder soldier, not a better. Did I say better? Good-by. God bless you!"

And he was off, glad of the noise and speed of the cars, of the changing faces and scenes, of anything that would help to ease his mind by a momentary distraction. Yet, in spite of every effort, the thought haunted him of Mr. Schoninger rousing himself to do battle for his life. Call up whatever image he would to entertain his mind, that one intruded. He pictured to himself the first dawn of apprehension in the prisoner's face rapidly intensifying to a flash of angry terror, the reddening or the whitening color, the gathering storm of the brows. He tried to guess what he would do and say, by what grand effort he would at last fling off in scorn the accusation which he had not believed could cling to him—if he should be able to fling it off. That doubt was like a thorn, and he hastily called to mind something to banish it. He remembered what F. O'Donovan had been saying of Rome, and tried to recollect something of that old picture-book part of his life, to see again in fancy its shady streets and sunny piazzas, to enter in spirit some dim church starred around with lamps, and lined with precious marbles; but when he had laboriously fashioned the scene, a hand was outstretched to put it aside like a painted curtain, and again he saw the Jewish gladiator, alive and alert, fighting desperately for his life.

"You can see that I have run away to escape disagreeable scenes and talk," were his first words on reaching his destination. "And now to business."

It was quite understood, then, that no one was to tell him anything relating to the trial, nor mention the subject to him; so that when, on the evening of the third day, he started for home, he knew no more of the progress or result of it than he had known on leaving Crichton.

There were but few passengers that evening, and F. Chevreuse established himself in a corner of the car, put his ticket in his hat band, that he might not be disturbed by the conductor, leaned back and shut his eyes, that he might not be talked to by any one else, and took out his beads to exercise troublesome thoughts and invoke holy ones. It was a saying of his that the beads, when rightly used, had always one end fastened to the girdle of Mary, and were a flowery chain by which she led the soul directly to the throne of God.

They proved so to him in this case, and one after another the Joyful Mysteries were budding and blossoming under his touch, when presently he found himself somewhat disturbed by the voices of two men who were talking behind him. At first the sound reached him through the long vista of that heavenly abstraction; but soon the distance lessened, and then a

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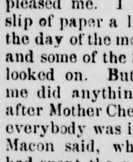

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