

GRAPES AND THORNS.

By M. A. T., AUTHOR OF "THE HOUSE OF YORK," "A WINGED WORD," ETC.

CHAPTER IX. THE VERDICT.

The arrest was made in September; in November the trial came on. It would have been earlier, but that witness were to be summoned from England. It was understood in Crichton that everything was very soon to be in readiness, and that the trial would be a short one; one side announcing confidentially a speedy acquittal, the other intimating, by a grave but equally confident silence, their belief in a speedy conviction.

"Dear Mother Chevreuse!" sighed Honora Pembroke, who trembled with terror and apprehension as the day drew near, "how far from your heart is all this bitterness! How far from your wish it would have been to see a man hunted like a beast of prey, even if he had done you a wrong! How far from your peace is all this excitement!"

Far, indeed, would such an inquisition, however necessary to the ends of justice and the good of society, have been from that sweet and overflowing heart, where love, when it could not make the wandering steps seem to be searching for the right path, uprose like a flood, and washed out those traces of error from remembrance. Far enough, too, was all this trouble from the changing from that had once held so much goodness. One might guess how Nature had taken back her motherly bosom the clay she had lent for mortal uses, and was slowly fitting it, by her wondrous alchemy, for immortality; purifying the dross from it, brightening the fine gold. While this tumult went on overhead, the crumbling dust of that temple whose ruin had brought such sorrow and disaster was slowly and sweetly going on its several paths to perfection; stealing into violets, into roses, into humble grass-blades, into mists that gathered again in drops to refresh its own blossoms and foliage.

Who can say what countless shapes of constantly aspiring loveliness the dust of the saint may assume before uniting once more and for ever to form that glorified body which is to hold, without imprisoning, the beatified spirit, and transmit without stain the sunshine of the Divine Presence? Yes; far enough from such a progress was the feverish trouble resulting from this sudden and violent dissolution. Friends went to cover anew with flowers and green that grave over which the snows of coming winter had let fall a pure and shining mantle; but the tears they shed were bitter, and their flowers withered in the frost. Voices of those she loved recalled her virtues, and repeated her wise and tender sayings; but they, like all the world, found it easier to admire than to imitate. At humble firesides, where families gathered at night, shivering fear with cold and half with fear, they blessed and mourned the hand that had helped them and the voice that had sympathized with and encouraged; but their blessing was so encumbered with human selfishness that it cast the shadow of a malediction. Pure indeed must be that love in whose footprints hatred never lurks!

On the day the trial began F. Chevreuse lost courage. More fatigued by constant physical labor than he would own, he was still more exhausted in mind. A devouring anxiety had taken possession of him. If he was less sure of Mr. Schoninger's innocence than he had been, no one knew it. Probably he entertained no doubt on that subject. But he was certainly less confident that the accused would be able to free himself entirely from suspicion. He could no longer be ignorant of the fact that there was a very damaging array of testimony against him.

"I must be allowed to be childish for once, if it is childishness," he said. "I cannot perform my duties till this is over. If a priest is needed, go to F. O'Donovan. Don't let any one come near me but Mr. Macon. Above all things, don't let any woman in!"

Mr. Macon was precisely the friend he needed in these circumstances—quick-sighted, clear-headed, prompt, and taciturn. He was, moreover, a man of influence, and could obtain information in advance of most persons. "Make yourself quite easy, F. Chevreuse," he said. "You shall know everything of consequence within ten minutes after it has happened in the court-room."

The gentleman had in his pocket a package of small envelopes, all directed plainly to F. Chevreuse, and each one containing a slip of paper. When he seated himself in the court-room, a boy stood beside him ready to run with his messages.

In the priest's house, F. Chevreuse had shut himself into his mother's room. A bright fire burned on the hearth, the sun shone in through the eastern window, and at the other side could be seen a window of the church with the cipher of the Immaculate

Mother, white and gold-colored, in the arch of it, sparkling as if it had just been traced there by Our Lady herself. All was still, the length of the house being between him and the street, so that only a faint hum of life reached his ears.

"It is hard to believe that misfortune is to come again," he muttered, glancing at the quiet brightness of the scene. "And I will not believe it. I will not think of it. In the name of God, all vain and evil thoughts be gone!"

He drew a table near the fire, placed several books on it, and, seating himself, began in earnest to translate a book which he had been sitting at work upon in the brief pauses of nearer duties. It was a relief to him to look thus into the mind of another, and escape a while from his own. "I am fortunate in having this to do," he thought, looking at the bright side of the situation.

The habit of concentrating his thoughts on the subject in hand did much for him; and when Mr. Macon's first message arrived, it found him bending with interest over the written page whereon he had rendered well a happy thought.

"That is better than the original," he said to himself. "The English is a large, loose-jointed language, sprawling slightly, but it is a sprawling Titan. It is rich and strong. For such a work as this, the French is a trifle too natty and crisp. Come in!"

The door opened, and his messenger stood there. Instantly all rushed across the priest's mind again. He stretched his hand for the note the boy offered him, and tore it hastily open. It was short:

"Nothing but preliminaries so far. The court sits again at two o'clock." F. Chevreuse glanced at the clock, and saw that it was "ready noon. Two hours had passed like ten minutes while his mind was thus abstracted. "Were there many people about the court-house?" he asked.

The boy had been instructed to give his notes without saying anything, and to speak only when spoken to; but he had not been told how much to say when he was spoken to. The temptation to relate what he had seen was irresistible.

"Oh! yes, Father," he said, his eyes glistening with excitement. "There was such a crowd that I could hardly get out. I had to hold up the letter, and say it was for you. Then they made way."

F. Chevreuse dropped his eyes, and his face grew more troubled. "Mr. Schoninger was not in court?" he asked.

"No, sir!" The boy hesitated, and had evidently something more to say. "Well?" said the priest.

"Somebody threw a crucifix in at his cell window to-day, and he broke it up and threw it out again," the messenger said eagerly.

The priest's face blushed an angry red. "Have they no more reverence for the crucifix than to use it as a means of insult, and expose it in turn to be insulted?" he exclaimed. "Was it done by a Catholic? Do you know who did it?"

F. Chevreuse was putting on his overcoat and searching for his hat, to the great terror of the indiscreet tale-bearer.

"I don't know who did it," he stammered. "I guess it was some boy. But that was this morning; and now the police drive everybody away from that side of the jail. I am sure they won't do such a thing again, Father."

The prisoner had complained that missiles were being thrown in when the police had received instructions to keep the place clear.

"I have not allowed any visitors in the corridor for several days," the jailer said. "People crowded here by scores. But you, of course, can always go in. They are just carrying in the dinner."

"I am not sure that I wish to speak to him," the priest said with hesitation, but after a moment followed into the corridor. The waiter set the tin dishes containing food into the different cells, through a hole in the door, and retired. The jailer stood near the outer door. F. Chevreuse approached Mr. Schoninger's cell, not with the eager confidence of his first visit, but with an apprehension which he could not overcome. Other footsteps prevented his own from being heard, and he stood at the grating, unseen and unsuspected by the inmate of the cell.

Mr. Schoninger sat on the side of his bed, his face partly turned from the door, looking steadfastly out through the window. A silent snow had begun to fall, tossed hither and thither by the wind. The jail was near the Immaculate Conception, F. Chevreuse's new church, and the stone Christ that crowned the summit of the church was directly opposite the window of the cell. It stood there above the roof of the building, with the sky for a background, its arms outstretched, and now, in the storm, seemed to be the centre toward which all the anger of the elements was directed.

The myriad flakes, tumbling grayly down, like flocks of rebel angels being cast out of heaven, buffeted the compassionate face as they passed, and, after falling, seemed to rise again for one more blow. They roused from east, west, north, and south, to cast their trivial insult at that sublime and immortal patience. A small bird, weary-winged, nestled into the outstretched hand, and the wind, twirling the snow into a lash, whipped it out, and sent it fluttering to the ground. Nothing was visible through the window but that solitary form in mid-air stretching out its arms toward the storm.

On that Mr. Schoninger's gaze was immovably set, and his face seemed more pale and cold than the stone itself. His hands were folded on his knees, the rising of the chest as he breathed was scarcely perceptible, and not a muscle of the closely-shut mouth stirred. His large, clear eyes, and the eyelids that trembled now and then, alone relieved the almost painful fixedness of his position.

Whether, absorbed in his own affairs, the direction his eyes took was merely accidental, or whether the statue itself had drawn and held that earnest regard, was not easy to decide. But a Catholic, ever ready to believe that images, whose sole purpose is, for him, to recall the mind to heavenly contemplations, will suggest holy thoughts even to unbelievers, must also necessarily hope that no eyes will for a moment rest on them in entire unconsciousness.

F. Chevreuse, after one glance, drew noiselessly back. Mr. Schoninger's strong and resolute calmness, which hid, he knew not what, of inner tumult or repose, disconcerted him. Besides, he had not forgotten that those white hands, so gently folded now, had within a few hours broken in pieces the symbol of man's salvation, and flung them from him in scorn. He would offer no explanations nor assurances to one who seemed so little in need of them, and sighed heavily, he turned away, and sought refuge again in his own home.

Yet a faint gleam of light had penetrated his sombre mood of that visit, and when he had closed the door of his room, he stepped hastily to the window looking toward the church, and glanced up at the statue above him. It had been wrought in Italy, and brought to America in the good ship *Cometa*, and had on the voyage come near being thrown overboard to lighten the ship during a storm. Bales and barrels of merchandise had gone by the board, costly oils had floated on the waves, costly wines had perished them, but the heaviest thing in all the freight, the stone Christ, had been left undisturbed in spite of the sailors. The captain was a rough man, and cared little for any form of religion; but somewhere within his large, rude nature was hidden, like a chapel in a rock, a little nook still bright and fresh with his youth and his mother's teachings.

"If Jesus Christ did really walk on the sea without sinking, then He can keep this image of Himself from sinking, and us with it," he said. "I'll put it to the test. If the ship goes down, I'll never believe in any of those old stories again."

And he held to his resolution through a terrific storm, in spite of a crew on the brink of mutiny, and finally sailed into port with the sacred image, which had, he believed, miraculously preserved them. And ever after, as they sailed, a little image of Christ sailed with them, fixed in the bows; and at night, during storms at sea, the sailors, albeit no Catholics, would bow their heads in passing it, and mutter a word of prayer for aid; and one old sailor, to whom for thirty years the land had been strange and the sea a home, used to tell how on one terrible night of that long storm when the stone Christ had been their sole freight light, the crew, lashed to mast and spar, and looking every

moment for destruction, had seen a white form glide forth from the hold, and standing in the bows, stretch out its hand over the waves, which, with the gale, sank away to silence before them, leaving only the gentle breeze that had wafted them on their way home.

"I leave him to you, O shadow of my Lord!" the priest said. "Speak to him! call him so that he cannot resist you!"

He then returned to his work, somewhat relieved. "No trial is insupportable to him who has faith," he thought. "And may be all this trouble has come upon him in order that he might lift his eyes and behold that Christ whom he has denied standing with arms outstretched to receive him."

But notwithstanding this faint comfort, the second message did not find F. Chevreuse so absorbed as the first had. He could with difficulty command his thoughts, and was constantly lifting his head to listen for an approaching step, or starting at a fancied knock at the door.

Near the close of the afternoon the boy came, when the light was so dim that the note could be read only by taking it to the window.

"They have opened the case a long way off," Mr. Macon wrote. "They have proved that Mr. Schoninger has a large fortune. It costs him every dollar he can raise, his opponents being an established family of wealth and influence, who have for years been in possession of the property he claims. They have proved that during the year ending last April his lawyers received from him fifteen hundred dollars in quarterly payments, and that in April they wrote that, without larger advances of money, it would be impossible for them to carry on the claim. In May, then, he sent them five hundred dollars, in June five hundred dollars more, and on the first of September a thousand dollars. That closes the business for this afternoon."

"And what is the impression made?" F. Chevreuse asked Mr. Macon, when that gentleman called on him in the evening.

"The impression, or rather the conviction, is that Mr. Schoninger is in a condition to make a man desperate in his wish for money. An immense fortune might be secured by expending a few thousands then, and would certainly be lost if he had not the few thousands. They brought in a crowd of small tattlers to show that about the time he received this letter, and after, he was in great distress and agitation of mind; that he lost his appetite, and was heard walking to and fro in his chamber at night. Furthermore, it is evident that the money was obtained in some way after the first of May, though it was not all sent at that time. People naturally ask where the money came from since he was not known to have any in bank, and was supposed to have sent before all he earned above what was necessary for him to live on."

"Poor fellow!" said F. Chevreuse pityingly. "What a trouble there is all the time under that calm exterior! For I never saw him otherwise than calm. Why, people might comment on my walking my room at night. I frequently walk so when I am thinking, and always when I say my beads."

"I do not imagine that Mr. Schoninger was saying his beads," Mr. Macon said rather dryly. "He was undoubtedly in trouble. He certainly had always an air of calmness, but to my mind it was not an air of contentment. He gave me the impression of a person who has some secret locked up in his mind. This affair of the contested inheritance explains it."

"Poor fellow!" F. Chevreuse said again, and leaned back in his chair. "He has got to have all his private affairs dragged up for discussion, and his looks and actions commented on by the curious. That is the worst of such a trial. A man fancies that he has been living a quiet, private life, and he finds that he has all the time been in a glass case with everybody watching him. The simplest things are distorted, and a mountain is built up out of nothing, and that without any wrong intention either, but simply by the curiosity and misconceptions of people."

Mr. Macon said nothing. He respected the priest's charity, but, for himself, he reserved his decision till the judge should have pronounced. He was not enthusiastic for Mr. Schoninger, nor prejudiced against him; he simply wanted to see what would be proved, and had no doubt that the truth would triumph.

On the second day the trial progressed rapidly, approaching a vital point. Mr. Schoninger had not slept the night before the death of Mother Chevreuse, but had been heard walking and moving about his room till morning. Miss Carhusen, whose chamber was next his, gave this piece of information, and added that the next morning the prisoner looked very pale, and scarcely tasted his breakfast. She spoke with evident reluctance, and subjoined an explanation which had not been asked. "I noticed and remembered it, because I had heard of his suit in England, and was afraid it might be going against him."

She glanced nervously at the prisoner, and met a look wherein a softer ray seemed to penetrate the searching coldness. Perhaps he was touched to learn that one for whom he had cared so little had, without his suspecting it, sympathized with him, and been kindly observant of his ways.

On being questioned, she said that Mr. Schoninger had not come home the

next night. They had expected him, because he usually told them when he was to be absent; but did not think very strange of it, as he was due early the next day at the town of Madison, where he went every week to give lessons, and where he sometimes went overnight. The last she saw of him that night was at Mrs. Ferrier's. They had a rehearsal there, and he had excused himself early, saying that he had an engagement, and left alone before any of the company.

Being further questioned, she admitted having seen that he took with him from his boarding-house the shawl that he habitually wore on chilly evenings.

A shawl was shown her, and she was asked if she recognized it.

"It was not easy to recognize any one among all the gray shawls there were in the world," she replied rather flippantly, "but Mr. Schoninger's was like that; she should think it might be his."

As she went out, the witness passed quite near the prisoner, and looked at him imploringly; but he took no notice of her. She paused an instant, then, bursting into tears, hurried out through the crowd, clinging to the arm of her adopted father. Lily Carhusen found herself far more deeply involved than she had intended. In a moment of pique and jealousy she had entertained and encouraged this accusation, and even insinuated that she could tell some things if she would; but it was one thing to suspect privately, and make peevish boasts which attracted to her the attention she so dearly loved, and quite another to face the terrible reality where a man was being tried for his life and she swearing against him.

Yet even while grieving over her haste, and repenting it after a fashion, her anger arose again at the remembrance of that cold glance which had averted itself from her when all in the court-room could have seen that she had been obliged to say.

"I hope this will teach you to guard your tongue a little," her father said in deep vexation, as he extricated her from the throng. "It's about the last place for a lady to come to. And, moreover, I hope it to about the pale looks and bad appetite of young men who do not trouble themselves about you."

"Oh! yes, papa," says Miss Lily; "since I've had a bad time, be sure you add a scolding to it. It's the way with you men."

Mr. Carhusen wisely kept silence. He had learned before this that the young woman who called him father had a remarkable talent for retort.

Where, then, did Mr. Schoninger spend the night the priest's house was entered? Not in Madison; for he had driven himself there early in the morning. He had waked a stable-keeper at 6 o'clock in the morning to give him a horse and buggy to drive to Madison. The man had wondered at the prisoner taking so early a start, even if he had to begin his lessons at 8 o'clock, and had thought that something was the matter with him. He looked pale; and several times, while harnessing the horse, the witness had glanced up and seen him shivering, as if with cold, though it was a beautiful May morning. Mr. Schoninger had seated himself on a bench near the stable-door while waiting, and leaned his arms on his knees, looking down, and had not uttered a word before driving away, except to say that he would be back at 7 o'clock in the evening. He looked like a man who had been up all night.

Being questioned, the witness testified that the prisoner wore at the time he saw him in the morning a large gray shawl, such as gentlemen wear; and, on still further questioning, he said that he had observed there was a little piece torn out of one corner. He had noticed and remembered this, because the shawl hung over the wheel when Mr. Schoninger started, and he had stopped him to tuck it up. His first passing thought had been that it was a pity to injure a new shawl; that, after all, the shawl was not a new one. He would not, perhaps, have remembered such trivial circumstances but for what he heard immediately after. Some one came in and told him of Mother Chevreuse's death. It occurred to him that Mr. Schoninger must have heard of it already, and that it was that news which had made him so sober and silent. He recollected, too, having heard that F. Chevreuse and the Jew were quite good friends, but that the priest's mother did not like they should have any intercourse. He had observed, too, that Mr. Schoninger's boots were muddy, and wondered at it a little, as the roads were where.

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ware not bad, and as the always been nice in his When Mr. Macon vi reuse the evening of he found the priest haggard. You have written m the worst of the bad, the moment the door w There must be some balance all this nosen to add, Mr. Macon rep "Johnny couldn't p crowd at the last," I make way for him." "Well?" the priest They had seated the fire, and the red lig into one face turned full of shrinking inqu into the other face, eyes seemed to shun be "Mr. Schoninger wandering about the night," Mr. Macon sa seen and recognized persons, all of whom n odd in his manner. the lane back of the h as 11 o'clock, and a going toward the rive to the street on t observed. He was n night, nor at any of sight. Moreover, the of the tracks near r responds with the siz work. "I don't want to h exclaimed F. Chevreu and hid his face in h His companion glai him, then looked into mained silent. After a moment, the face. "You don't mean case is going again in a low voice that ex and incredulity. "It looks a little lik the quiet reply. "I know what to morro forth." "I believe Jane w F. Chevreuse rem moment. The other nodded h "I hope she beh added painfully. Another nod. "Y could expect her to." "The Ferriers, too, "Yes; but their t of any great consequ The testimony of t was, however, entir the prisoner, and the him with such respect to visibly affect him sort of diversion in wealth and style of manner in which they as it were, of the several gentlemen c before them, made When they went o looked at them with they passed. Annet turn, and Lawrence pulous respect and Mrs. Ferrier, rustlin silks, down which slipped loosely, lea and, in the face of the crowd of spectators, Mr. Schoninger, and bit to the whole com his an appointment strangely between the absurd. "Come to my hou are out of this terrib "Don't go anywher flounced out, wipin tossing her head di judge, the lawyers, whom she held to c collectively, to blam and impertinent pr "You know, mam and it isn't his fa accused. And Mr. to make out his case a great many thin things that seem to have a good deal of caselike this. You m a law court is quit drawing-room, wh be too inquisitiv checked." "I shall take care come to my drawin torred that Mr. W at my house to din try to remember know I had forgotte tell! You may de nette, that man h poor Mr. Schoninger day that he is r against him. I sho if the scamp were lies about him. I it. And then, to what Mr. Schoini shoulder when he and what time it away, and to show old gray shawl! If of the law, I don more majesty. The ridiculous and sla too—is to find ou as fine a gentlem broke into a prie deder a lady and a little package of d That's what they find out; and wh out in the p needn't take 'em l But no! they mu into people's priv "Clear Hav upon having these So other Saraspari ination. Proportion makes Hood's Saras