LORNA DOONE

B. R. D. Blackmore.

CHAPTER LX

ANNIE LUCKIER THAN JOHN

Some people may look down upon us for our slavish ways (as they may choose to call them); but in our part of the country we do love to mention title, and to roll it on our tongues with a conscience and a comfort. Even if a man knows not, through fault of education, who the Duke of this is, or the Earl of that, it will never do for him to say so, lest the room look down on him. Therefore he must nod his head, and say, "Ah, to be sure! I know him as well as ever I know my own good woman's brother. He married Lord Flipflap's second daughter, a precious life she led him." Whereupon the room looks up at him. But I, being quite unable to carry all this in my head, as I ought, was speedily put down by people of a noble tendency, apt at Lords, and pat with Dukes, and knowing more about the King than His Majesty would have requested. Therefore, I fell back in thought, not daring in words to do so, upon the titles of our horses. And all these horses deserved their names, not having merely inherited, but by their own doing earned them. Smiler, for instance, had been so called, not so much from a habit of smiling, as from his general geniality, white nose, and white ankle. This worthy horse was now in years, but hale and gay as ever; and when you let him out of the stable, he could neigh and whinny, and make men and horses know it. On the other hand, Kickums was a horse of morose and surly order; harboring up revenge, and leading a rider to false confidence. Very smoothly he would go, and as gentle as a turtle-dove, until his rider fully believed that a pack-thread was enough for him, and a pat of approval upon his neck the aim and crown of his worthy life. Then suddenly up went his hind feet to heaven, and the rider for the most part flew over his nose; whereupon good Kickums would take advantage of his favorable position to come and bite a piece out of his back. Now in my present state of mind, being understood of nobody, having none to bear me company, neither wishing to have any, an indefinite kind of attraction drew me into Kickums' society. A bond of mutual sympathy was soon established between us; I would ride no other horse, neither Kickums be ridden by any other man. And this good horse became as jealous about me as a dog might be; and would lash out, or run teeth foremost, at any one who came near him when I was on his back.

This season, the reaping of the corn, which had been but a year ago so pleasant and so lightsome, was become a heavy labor, and a thing for grumbling rather than gladness. However, for the sake of all, it must be attended to, and with as fair a show of spirit and alacrity as might be. For otherwise the rest would drag, and drop their hands and idle, being quicker to take infection of dullness than of diligence. And the harvest was a heavy one, even heavier than the year before, although of poorer quality. Therefore was I forced to work as hard as any horse could during all the daylight hours, and defer till night the brooding upon my misfortune. But the darkness always found me stiff with work, and weary, and less able to think than to dream, maybe, of Lorna. And now the house was so dull and lonesome, wanting Annie's pretty presence and the light of Lorna's eyes, that a man had no temptation after supper-time even to sit and smoke a pipe.

For Lizzie, though so learned and pleasant when it suited her, never had taken very kindly to my love for Lorna; and being of a proud and slightly upstart nature, could not bear to be eclipsed in bearing, looks, and breeding, and even in clothes, by the stranger. For one thing I will say of the Doones, that whether by purchase or plunder, they had always dressed my darling well, with her own sweet taste to help them. And though Lizzie's natural hate of the maid (as a Doone, and burdened with father's death) should have been changed to remorse, when she learned of Lorna's real parentage, it was only altered to sullenness and discontent with herself, for frequent rudeness to an innocent person, and one of such high descent. Moreover, the child has imbibed strange ideas as to our aristocracy, partly, perhaps from her own way of thinking, and partly from reading of history. For while from one point of view she looked up at them very demurely, as commissioned by God for the country's good, from another sight she disliked them, as ready to sacrifice their best and follow their worst members.

Yet why should this wench dare to judge upon a matter so far beyond her, and form opinions which she knew better than to declare before mother? But with me she had no such scruples, for I had no authority over her; and my intellect she looked down upon, because I praised her own so. Thus she made herself very unpleasant to me; by little jags and jerks of sneering, sped as though unwittingly; which I (who now considered myself allied to the aristocracy, and perhaps took airs on that account) had not wit enough to parry, yet had wound enough to feel.

Now any one who does not know exactly how mothers feel and think would have expected my mother (than whom could be no better one) to pet me, and make much of me, under my sad trouble; to hang with anxiety on my looks, and shed her tears with mine (if any), and season every dish of meat put by for her John's return. And if the whole truth must be told, I did expect that sort of thing, and thought what a plague it would be to me; yet not getting it, was vexed, as if by some new injury. For mother was a special creature (as I suppose we all are), being the warmest of the warm, when fired at the proper corner; and yet, if taken at the wrong point, you would say she was incombustible.

Hence it came to pass that I had no one even to speak to about Lorna and my grievances; for Captain Stickles was now gone southward; and John Fry, of course, was too low for it, although a married man, and well under his wife's management. But finding myself unable at last to bear this any longer, upon the first day when all the wheat was cut, and the stooks set up in every field, yet none quite fit for carrying, I saddled good Kickums at 5 in the morning, and without a word to mother (for a little anxiety might do her good) off I set for Molland parish, to have the counsel and the comfort of my darling Annie.

The horse took me over the ground so fast (there being few better to go when he liked,) that by 9 o'clock Annie was in my arms, and blushing to the color of Winnie's cheeks, with sudden delight and young happiness.

"You precious little soul;" I cried; "how does Tom behave to you?"

"Hush!" said Annie; "how dare you ask? He is the kindest, and the best, and the noblest of all men, John; not even setting yourself aside. Now, look not jealous, John; so it is. We all have special gifts, you know. You are as good as you can be, John; but my husband's special gift is nobility of character." Here she looked at me as one who has discovered something quite unknown.

"I am devilish glad to hear it," said I, being touched at going down so; "keep him to that mark, my dear, and cork the whisky-bottle."

"Yes, darling John," she answerd quickly, not desiring to open that subject, and being too sweet to resent it; "and how is lovely Lorna? What an age it is since I have seen you! I suppose we must thank her for that."

"You may thank her for seeing me now," said I; "or rather," seeing how hurt she looked, "you may thank my knowledge of your kindness, and my desire to speak of her to a soft-hearted, dear little soul like you. I think all the women are gone mad. Even mother treats me shamefully. And as for Lizzie ——" Here I stopped, knowing no words strong enough, without shocking Annie.

"Do you mean to say that Lorna is gone?" asked Annie, in great amazement, yet leaping at the truth, as women do, with nothing at all to leap from.

"Gone. And I shall never see her again. It serves me right for aspiring so."

Being grieved at my manner, she led me in where none could interrupt us; and in spite of all my dejection, I could not help noticing how very pretty, and even elegant, all things were around. For we upon Exmoor have little taste; all we care for is warm comfort, and plenty to eat and give away, and a hearty smack in everything. But Squire Faggus had seen the world, and kept company with great people; and the taste he had first displayed in the shoeing of farmers' horses (which led almost to his ruin, by bringing him into jealousy, and flattery, and dashing ways) had now been cultivated in London, and by moonlight, so that none could help admiring it.

"Well!" I cried, for the moment dropping care and woe in astonishment; "we have nothing like this at Plovers Barrows; nor even Uncle Reuben. I do hope it is honest, Annie?"

"Would I sit in a chair that was not my own?" asked Annie, turning crimson, and dropping defiantly, and with a whisk of her dress which I never had seen before, into the very grandest one; "would I lie on a couch, brother John, do you think, unless good money was paid for it? Because other people are clever, John, you need not grudge them their earnings."

"A couch!" I replied; "why what can you want with a couch in the daytime, Annie? A couch is a small bed, set up in a room without space for a good four-poster. What can you want with a couch down-stairs? I never heard of such nonsense. And you ought to be in the dairy."

"I won't cry, brother John, I won't; because you want to make me cry"—and all the time she was crying—"you always were so nasty, John, sometimes. Ah, you have no nobility of character like my husband. And I have not seen you for two months, John; and now you come to scold me?"

"You little darling," I said, for Annie's tears always conquered me, "if all the rest ill use me, I will not quarrel with you, dear. You have always been true to me, and I can forgive your vanity. Your things are very pretty, dear; and you may couch ten times a day, without my interference. No doubt your husband has paid for all this with the ponies he stole from Exmoor. Nobility of character is a thing beyond my understanding; but when my sister loves a man, and he does well and flourishes, who am I to find fault with him? Mother ought to see these things; they would turn her head almost. Look at the pimples on the chairs!"

"They are nothing," Annie answered after kissing me for my kindness; "they are only put in for the time indeed; and we are to have much better, with gold all round the bindings, and double plush at the corners, so soon as ever the King repays the debt he owes to my poor Tom."

I thought to myself that our present King had been most unlucky in one thing—debts all over the kingdom. Not a man who had struck a blow for the King, or for his poor father, or even said a good word for him, in the time of his adversity, but expected at least a baronetcy, and a grant of estates to support it. Many have called King Charles ungrateful, and he may have been so. But some indulgence is due to a man with entries few on the credit side and a terrible column of debts.

"Have no fear for the chair," I said, for it creaked under me very fearfully, having legs not so large as my finger; "if the chair breaks, Annie, your fear should be lest the tortoise shell run into me. Why it is striped like a viper's loins! I saw some hundreds in London, and very cheap they are. They are made to be sold to the country people, such as you and me, dear; and carefully kept they will last for almost half a year. Now will you come back from your furniture, and listen to my story?"

Annie was a hearty dear, and she knew that half my talk was joke, to make light of my worrying. Therefore, she took it in good part, as I well knew that she would do; and she led me to a good honest chair; and she sat in my lap and kissed me.

"All this is not like you, John. All this is not one bit like you; and your cheeks are not as they ought to be. I shall have to come home again, if the women worry my brother so. We always held together, John; and we always will, you know."

"You dear," I cried, "there is nobody who understands me as you do. Lorna makes too much of me; and the rest they make too little."

"Not mother; oh, not mother, John!"

"No, mother makes too much, no doubt, but wants it all for herself alone, and reckons it as a part of her. She makes me more wroth than any one; as if not only my life, but all my head and heart must seek from hers, and have no other thought or care."

Being sped of my grumbling thus, and eased into better temper, I told Annie all the strange history about Lorna and her departure, and the small chance that now remained to me of ever seeing my love again. To this Annie would not harken twice; but judging women by her faithful self, was quite vexed with me for speaking so. And then, to my surprise and sorrow, she would deliver no opinion as to what I ought to do until she had consulted darling Tom.

Dear Tom knew much of the world, no doubt, especially the dark side of it. But to me it scarcely seemed becoming that my course of action with regard to the Lady Lorna Dugal should be referred to Tom Faggus, and depend upon his decision. However, I would not grieve Annie again by making light of her husband; and so when he came into dinner, the matter was laid before him.

Now this man never confessed himself surprised, under any circumstances; his knowledge of life being so profound, and his charity universal. And in the present case he vowed that he had suspected it all along, and could have thrown light upon Lorna's history, if we had seen fit to apply to him. Upon further inquiry, I found that this light was a very dim one, flowing only from the fact that he had stopped her mother's coach at the village of Bolhan, on the Bamptom road, the day before I saw them. Finding only women therein, and these in a sad condition, Tom, with his usual chivalry (as he had no scent of the necklace,) allowed them to pass, with nothing more than a pleasant exchange of courtesies, and a testimonial forced upon him in the shape of a bottle of Burgundy wine. This the poor countess handed him; and he twisted the cork out with his teeth, and drank her health with his hat off.

"A lady she was, and a true one; and I am a pretty good judge," said Tom. "Ah, I do like a high lady!"

Our Annie looked rather queer at this, having no pretensions to be one; but she conquered herself, and said, "Yes, Tom; and many of them liked you."

With this Tom went on the brag at once, being but a shallow fellow, and not of settled principles, though steadier than he used to be, until I felt myself almost bound to fetch him back a little: for of all things I do hate brag the most, as any reader of this tale must by this time know. Therefore I said to Squire Faggus, "Come back from your highway days. You have married the daughter of an honest man, and such talk is not fit for her. If you were right in robbing people, I am right in robbing you. I could bind you to your own mantel-piece, as you know thoroughly well, Tom, and drive away your own horses, and all your goods behind them, but for the sense of honesty. And should I not do as fine a thing as any you did on the highway? If everything is of public right, how does this chair belong to you? Clever as you are, Tom Faggus, you are nothing but a fool to mix your felony with your farmership. Drop the one, or drop the other; you cannot maintain them both."

As I finished very sternly a speech which had exhausted me more than ten rounds of wrestling—but I was carried away by the truth, as sometimes happens to all of us—Tom had not a word to say; albeit his mind was so much more nimble and rapid than ever mine was. He leaned against the mantlepiece (a newly-invented affair in his house) as if I had corded him to it, even as I spoke of doing. And he laid one hand on his breast in a way which made Annie creep softly to him, and look at me not like a sister.

"You have done me good, John," he said at last, and the hand he gave me was trembling; "there is no other man on God's earth would have dared to speak to me as you have done. From no other would I have taken it. Nevertheless, every word is true, and I shall dwell on it when you are gone. If you never did good in your life before, John, my brother, you have done it now."

He turned away in bitter pain, that none might see his trouble; and Annie, going along with him, looked as if I had killed our mother. For my part, I was so upset for fear of having gone too far, that without a word to either of them, but a message on the title-page of King James, his prayer-book, I saddled Kickums, and was off, and glad of the moor-land air again.

CHAPTER LXI

THEREFORE HE SEEKS COMFORT

It was for poor Annie's sake that I had spoken my mind to her husband so freely, and even harshly. For we all knew she would break her heart if Tom took to evil ways again. And the right mode of preventing this was, not to coax and flatter, and make a hero of him (which he did for himself quite sufficiently,) but to set before him the folly of the thing, and the ruin to his own interests.

They would both be vexed with me, of course, for having left them so hastily, and especially just before dinner-time; but that would soon wear off; and most likely they would come to see mother, and tell her that I was hard to manage, and they could feel for her about it.

Now with a certain yearning, I know not what, for softness, and for one who could understand me—for simple as a child though being, I found few to do that last, at any rate in my love-time—I relied upon Kickums' strength to take me round by Dulverton. It would make the journey some eight miles longer, but what was that to a brisk young horse, even with my weight upon him? And having left Squire Faggus and Annie much sooner than had been intended, I had plenty of time before me, and too much ere a prospect of dinner. Therefore I struck to the right across the hills for Dulverton.

Pretty Ruth was in the main street of the town, with a basket in her hand, going home from the market.

"Why, Cousin Ruth, you are grown," I exclaimed; "I do believe you are, Ruth. And you were almost too tall, already."

At this the little thing was so pleased that she smiled through her blushes beautifully, and must needs come to shake hands with me; though I signed to her not to do it, because of my horse's temper. But scarcely was her hand in mine when Kickums turned like an eel upon her and caught her by the left arm with his teeth, so that she screamed with agony. I saw the white of his vicious eye, and struck him there with all my force, with my left hand over her right arm, and he never used that eye again; none the less he kept his hold on her. Then I smote him again on the jaw, and caught the little maid up by her right hand, and laid her in the saddle in front of me; while the horse, being giddy and staggered with blows, and foiled in his spite, ran backward. Ruth's wits were gone; and she lay before me in such a helpless and senseless way, that I could have killed vile Kickums. I struck the spurs into him past the rowels, and away he went at full gallop; while I had enough to do to hold on, with the little girl lying in front of me. But I called to the men who were flocking around to send up a surgeon as quick as could be to Master Reuben Huckaback's.

The moment I brought my right arm to bear, the vicious horse had no chance with me; and if ever a horse was well paid for spite, Kickums had his change that day. The bridle would almost have held a whale, and I drew on it so that his lower jaw was well-nigh broken from him; while with both spurs I tore his flanks, and he learned a little lesson. There are times when a man is more vicious than any horse may vie with. Therefore by the time we reached Uncle Reuben's house at the top of the hill, the bad horse was only too happy to stop; every string of his body was trembling, and his head hanging down with impotence. I leaped from his back at once, and carried the maiden into her own sweet room.

Now Cousin Ruth was recovering softly from her fright and faintness; and the volley of the wind, from galloping so, had made her little ears quite pink, and shaken her locks all round her. But any one who might wish to see a comely sight and a moving one, need only have looked at Ruth Huckaback when she learned (and imagined yet more than it was) the manner of her little ride with me. Her hair was of a hazel brown, and full of waving readiness; and with no concealment of the trick, she spread it over her eyes and face. Being so delighted with her, and so glad to see her safe, I kissed her through the thick of it, as a cousin has a right to do: yea, and ought to do, with gravity.

"Darling," I said, "he has bitten you dreadfully; show me your poor arm, dear."

She pulled her sleeve in the simplest manner, rather to look at it herself, than to show me where the wound was. Her sleeve was of dark blue Taunton staple; and her white arm shone, coming out of it, as round and plump and velvety as a stalk of asparagus newly fetched out of ground. But above the curved soft elbow, where no room was for one cross word (according to our proverb)

"A maid with an elbow sharp, or knee,
Hath cross words two out of every three."

three sad gashes, edged with crimson, spoiled the flow of the pearly flesh. My presence of mind was lost altogether; and I raised the poor sore arm to my lips, both to stop the bleeding and to take the venom out, having heard how wise it was, and thinking of my mother. But Ruth, to my great amazement, drew away from me in bitter haste, as if I had been inserting instead of extracting poison. For the bite of a horse is most venemous; especially when he sheds his teeth; and far more to be feared than the bite of a dog, or even of a cat. And in my haste I had forgotten that Ruth might not know a word about this, and might doubt about my meaning, and the warmth of my osculation. But knowing her danger, I durst not heed her childishness or her feelings.

"Don't be a fool, Cousin Ruth," I said, catching her so that she could not move; "the poison is soaking into you. Do you think that I do it for pleasure?"

The spread of shame on her face was such, when she saw her own misunderstanding, that I was ashamed to look at her, and occupied myself with drawing all the risk of glanders forth from the white limb, hanging helpless now, and left entirely to my will. Before I was quite sure of having wholly exhausted suction, and when I had made the holes in her arm look like the gills of a lamprey, in came the doctor, partly drunk, and in haste to get through his business.

"Ha, ha! I see," he cried; "bite of a horse, they tell me. Very poisonous; must be burned away. Sally, the iron in the fire. If you have a fire this weather."

"Crave your pardon, good sir," I said for poor little Ruth was fainting again at his savage orders; "but my cousin's arm shall not be burned; it is a great deal too pretty, and I have sucked all the poison out. Look, sir, how clean and fresh it is."

"Bless my heart! And so it is! No need at all for cauterizing. The epidermis will close over, and the cutis and the pellis. John Ridd, you ought to have studied medicine, with your healing powers. Half my virtue lies in touch. A clean and wholesome body, sir; I have taught you the Latin grammar. I leave you in excellent hands, my dear, and they wait for me at shovel-board. Bread-and-water poultice cold, to be renewed, *trebus horis*. John Ridd, I was at school with you, and you beat me very lamentably when I tried to fight with you. You remember me not? It is likely enough; I am forced to take strong waters, John, from infirmity of the liver. Attend to my directions, and I will call again in the morning."

And in that melancholy plight, caring nothing for business, went one of the cleverest fellows ever known at Tiverton. He could write Latin verses a great deal faster than I could ever write English prose, and nothing seemed too great for him. We thought that he would go to Oxford and astonish every one, and write in the style of Buchanan, but he fell all abroad very lamentably; and now, when I met him again, was come down to push-pin and shovel-board with a wager of spirits pending.

When Master Huckaback came home, he looked at me very sulkily; not only because of my refusal to become a slave to the gold-digging, but also because he regarded me as the cause of a savage broil between Simon Carfax and the men who had cheated him as to his Gwenny. However, when Uncle Ben saw Ruth, and knew what had befallen her, and she with tears in her eyes declared that she owed her life to Cousin Ridd, the old man became very gracious to me; for if he loved any one on earth, it was his little granddaughter.

I could not stay very long, because my horse being quite unfit to travel, from the injuries which his violence and vice had brought upon him, there was nothing for me but to go on foot, as none of Uncle Ben's horses could take me to Plovers Barrows without downright cruelty; and though there would be a harvest-moon, Ruth agreed with me that I must not keep my mother waiting, with no idea where I might be, until a late hour of the night. I told Ruth all about our Annie, and her noble furniture; and the little maid was very lively (although) her wounds were paining her so that half her laughter came "on the wrong side of her mouth," as we rather coarsely express it; especially she laughed about Annie's new-fangled closet for clothes, or standing-press, as she called it. This had frightened me so that I would not come without my stick to look at it; for the front was inlaid with two fiery dragons, and a glass which distorted everything, making even Annie look hideous; and when it was opened, a woman's skeleton all in white, revealed itself in the midst of three standing women. "It is only to keep my best frocks in shape," Annie had explained to me; "hanging them up does ruin them so. But I own that I was afraid of it, John, until I had got all my best clothes there, and then I became very fond of it. But even now it frightens me sometimes in the moonlight."

Having made poor Ruth a little cheerful, with a full account of all Annie's frock's, material, pattern and fashion (of which I had taken a list for my mother and for Lizzie, lest they should cry out at man's stupidity about anything of real interest), I proceeded to tell her about my own troubles, and the sudden departure of Lorna; concluding, with all the show of indifference which my pride could muster, that now I never should see her again, and must do my best to forget her, as being so far above me. I had not intended to speak of this; but Ruth's face was so kind and earnest that I could not stop myself.

"You must not talk like that, Cousin Ridd," she said, in a low and gentle tone, and turning away her eyes from me; "no lady can be above a man who is pure, and brave, and gentle. And if her heart be worth having, she will never let you give her up for her grandeur and her nobility."

She pronounced those last few words, as I thought, with a little bitterness, unperceived by herself, perhaps, for it was not in her appearance. But I, attaching great importance to a maiden's opinion about a maiden, (because she might judge from experience), would have led her further into that subject. But she declined to follow, having now no more to say in a matter so removed from her. Then I asked her full and straight, and looking at her in such a manner that she could not look away without appearing vanquished by feelings of her own—which thing was very vile of me; but all men are so selfish—

"Dear cousin, tell me, once for all, what is your advice to me?"

"My advice to you," she answered bravely, with her dark eyes full of pride, and instead of flinching, foiling me, "is to do what every man must do, if he would win fair maiden. Since she cannot send you token, neither is free to return to you, follow her; pay your court to her; show that you will not be forgotten; and perhaps she will look down—I mean she will relent to you."

"She has nothing to relent about. I have never vexed nor injured her. My thoughts have never strayed from her. There is no one to compare with her."

"Then keep her in that same mind about you. See, now, I can advise no more. My arm is swelling painfully, in spite of all your goodness and bitter task of surgeonship. I shall have another poultice on, and go to bed, I think, Cousin Ridd, if you will not hold me ungrateful. I am so sorry for your long walk. Surely it might be avoided. Give my love to dear Lizzie; oh, the room is going round so."

And she fainted into the arms of Sally, who was come just in time to fetch her. No doubt she had been suffering agony all the time she talked to me. Leaving word that I would come again to inquire for her, and fetch Kickums home, so soon as the harvest permitted me, I gave directions about the horse, and striding away from the ancient town, was soon upon the moorlands.

Now, through the whole of that long walk—the latter part of which was led by star-light till the moon arose—I dwelt, in my young and foolish way, upon the ordering of our steps by a Power beyond us. But as I could not bring my mind to any clearness upon this matter, and the stars shed no light upon it, but rather confused me with wondering how their Lord could attend to them all, and yet to a puny fool like me it came to pass that my thoughts on the subject were not worth ink, if I knew them.

But it is perhaps worth ink to relate, so far as I can do so, my mother's delight at my return, when she had almost abandoned hope, and concluded that I was gone to London, in disgust at her behavior. And now she was looking up the lane, at the rise of the harvest-moon, in despair, as she said afterward. But if she had despaired in truth, what use to look at all? Yet according to the epigram made by a good Blundellite:

"Despair was never yet so deep
In sinking as in seeming;
Despair is hope just dropp'd asleep,
For better chance of dreaming."

And mother's dream was a happy one when she knew my step at a furlong distant; for the night was of those that carry sounds thrice as far as day can. She recovered herself when she was sure, and even made up her mind to scold me, and felt as if she could do it. But when she was in my arms, into which she threw herself, and I by the light of the moon descried the silver gleam on one side of her head (now spreading since Annie's departure), bless my heart and yours therewith, no room was left for scolding. She hugged me, and she clung to me; and I looked at her, with duty made tenfold, and discharged by love. We said nothing to one another, but all was right between us.

Even Lizzie behaved very well, so far as her nature admitted; not even saying a nasty thing all the time she was getting my supper ready, with a weak imitation of Annie. She knew that the gift of cooking was not vouchsafed by God to her; but sometimes she would do her best, by intellect, to win it. Whereas it is no more to be won by intellect than is divine poetry. An amount of strong quick heart is needful, and the understanding must second it, in the one art as in the other. Now my fare was very choice for the next three days or more, yet not turned out like Annie's. They could do a thing well enough on the fire, but they could not put it on the table so, nor even have plates all piping hot. This was Annie's special gift; born in her, and ready to cool with her; like a plate borne away from the fire-place. I sighed sometimes about Lorna, and they thought it was about the plates. And mother would stand and look at me, as much as to say, "No pleasing him;" and Lizzie would jerk up one shoulder, and cry, "He had better have Lorna to cook for him;" while the whole truth was that I wanted not to be plagued about any cookery, but just to have something good and quiet, and then smoke and think about Lorna.

Nevertheless, the time went on, with one change and another! and we gathered all our harvest in, and Parson Bowden thanked God for it, both in church and out of it; for his tithes would be very goodly. The unmatched cold of the previous winter, and general fear of scarcity, and our own talk about our ruin, had sent prices up to a grand high pitch, and we did out best to keep them there. For nine Englishmen out of every ten believe that a bitter winter must breed a sour summer, and explain away topmost prices. While according to my experience, more often it would be otherwise, except for the public thinking so. However, I have said too much; and if any farmer reads my book, he will vow that I wrote it for nothing else except to rob his family.

TO BE CONTINUED

A MARVEL OF GRACE

A TRUE STORY

By Richard W. Alexander

It was the mission time, and after my sermon I had come from the church to the rectory. As I passed the parlor I saw an elderly lady standing there alone, as if she wished to speak to some one. I addressed her and gave her a chair.

She was a woman whose kindly face bore an expression of serene content and mother-love; with the lines of past sorrow sweetened by religion. She was no longer young but her bearing commanded profound respect and deference.

After a few commonplace remarks about the sermon, I waited for her to speak.

"When I hear of God's wonderful goodness to the world, Father," she said, "I cannot help reviewing the events of my own early life. They were so remarkable, so filled with divine mercy, so unusual in their trend, that they were evidences of the purest goodness and love of God, and worthy of being recorded for the edification of the skeptical and the worldly; I want to tell you something about them. Have you time to listen?"

The address and language of this sweet old lady charmed me. I took a chair and bade her tell me her story; I was interested already.

She then mentioned she was a convert; her husband had only died recently. God had blessed them with thirteen children, all of whom had done well, and were faithful in their duty to God and to her.

"In all these years, Father," she said, "my husband and I were lovers to the end. He never seemed to think I was growing old, and his courtesy and devotion were the light of my existence. When he died that light went out, and I, too, would have died were it for my faith—that faith, given to me through so much tribulation.

"I want to tell you, Father, I was the daughter of a Methodist Bishop, reared in strictness, and saturated with the Bible. I was well educated and given the best that the old-fashioned days could offer — in solid training and academy instruction. Roman Catholics, however, and their creed, were the 'scarlet woman' of horror, in my mind—I knew none of them, and if I accidentally touched one, I felt contaminated. Bigotry in those days was more bitter than it is now.

"My life was happy and peaceful, and as I grew near twenty, I met my future husband. He was a young lawyer, one of our neighbors. He was bright, clean, ambitious, and my heart went out to him in answer to his love. In time we were married by my father, and no young couple ever began life with more enthusiasm and devotion than we did. I was willing to go anywhere, as long as he was at my side, and so I agreed—almost without a pang in the greatness of my love for him—to leave my home town, my family and my friends, and go to the West with him and his father's family to seek wealth and fame. His father, too, was a lawyer, and they were deeply affectionate and devoted to each other and to the new daughter-in-law.

"We were going to live on a ranch; and they had made negotiations, investing every penny they had in a perfectly beautiful and immensely fertile piece of land adjoining a flourishing town—land that came up to the very doors of an old-time adobe church — a Catholic Church, of course.

"And here the blunder was made that brought sorrow and misery and bitterness on our lives and threw us into poverty. How those two bright lawyers, my husband and his father, took such steps acquiring all the information necessary to their negotiations, is a mystery to every one to this day; but as it happened, I must believe it to have been one of the inscrutable dispensations of Providence.

"We took possession of the land, caring nothing for privations. We built ourselves a house and barn and prepared the ground. How happy I was in those days! I went singing about my work; my strong young hands counted the daily inconveniences of life as nothing when I looked forward to the evening return of my beloved husband—to his hearty greeting and embrace. And then my approaching motherhood sent a rosy glow over the whole world. We were so happy that we cared nothing for the rumors and reports that now and then reached us about the title to our land.

"Suddenly a heavy cloud fell upon us like a thunderbolt"—She paused in her narration, and we were both silent. I was becoming deeply interested, and did not say a word, wondering what was next. She soon continued her story.

"Father," she said, and her eyes glowed and her cheeks flushed rosy, "I can speak it calmly now, but in those days I was like a lioness in fury and indignation. One day the United States marshal served a notice on us that we were on the land of the Catholic Church. The treaty of Guadaloupe-Hidalgo, by which the Mexican War was ended, guaranteed all church property. Because we had built on church land (a fact of which we were unaware) our house, our barn, our ranch were church property. The priest of that Roman Catholic Church claimed all. We were beggared if the Roman Catholic Bishop and his priest won the case. We were formally sued for trespass and ordered off the land.

"You may be sure our two lawyers—my husband and his father — contested every inch.

The suit was long and bitter. The days were full of trouble, misery and forebodings. Ruin was staring us in the face, for every cent my husband and father-in-law had was expended in the buildings and implements for farming, and in the preparations they had made for a prosperous settlement. How I hated the name of Roman Catholic! The name of a priest, or bishop, was enough to fill my whole soul with anger.

"Under these circumstances my first child was born. I felt that a new responsibility had come to my husband and myself, and now that poverty was hanging over us the sweet joy that should have come with my baby was chilled with apprehension.

"My love for my husband, my sympathy with his troubles, was the great absorption of my soul, and he felt and appreciated my devotion.

"Father, can you imagine how we felt under such circumstances? Could you blame me that I hated everything Catholic?"

"Indeed, my dear friend," I replied, "I could hardly imagine a position more trying. It is truly a wonder that you ever became a Catholic."

"Father, you are right," she rejoined, "and this is what makes my conversion, and that of my dear husband so miraculous. Let me tell you how it all came to pass, and you will praise the Lord with me and understand my desire to make known to the world the wonders God wrought in my behalf. I used to go over to the village on little errands, and often when I was lonely I took my infant in my arms for a little walk in the gay sunshine, although my heart was aching. I always had to pass the little adobe church; I did so with my face averted. Once I glanced at it with a sort of curiosity—for there was no one to see me—then I stared inquisitively at it, then went around it to discover something to mock. But, instead I found a grace and humble beauty about its proportions I hated to acknowledge. The door was always unlocked, as I found one day when I cautiously tried it, and I passed in. I could see nothing; it was so dark, and I hastily fled. But I thought about it constantly—at home, at my work; when I awoke at night, something drew me with a force I could not understand to the thought of that hated little Catholic Church. In vain I tried to grow angry, assuring myself it was treason to my husband and his family to harbor a thought, even a curious thought—about a place of worship—especially this place which was bringing misery and trouble upon our young life. It was all useless. When my husband and the men would go to work, I would leave the baby asleep with its nurse, and walk quickly down the lane until I came to the church. I would look at it, walk around it, meeting no one; then one day I boldly opened the door and walked in.

"A cool silence filled the place. I saw nothing but a bright red star half way to the ceiling at the upper end of the church. There was not a sound. I went on trembling. Near a portion that was railed off I saw one or two Indian women squatted on their heels, their hands clasped, their eyes fixed on a little door on a long white table hung with white linen. They never heeded me—never even turned their heads.

"I sat down on a bench and looked long at that door. And then, Father, a strange sweet peace came over my troubled spirit, an overpowering sense of the nearness to God like the touch of a strong and soothing hand. Father, I believed. I knew the Lord was there. In one instant the prejudices of years fell off like scales. All my life's traditions on the superstitions and idolatry of the Catholic Church fell away like ashes. A miracle had been wrought in me. Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament had drawn my tired heart to His divine breast, and—I was a Catholic—a believer in the Blessed Eucharist.

"It seemed to me that I could linger there forever, drinking in the comfort my thirsty soul was longing for. Troubles, heartaches, poverty, the pending law-suit, my husband's anger, my own bitterness—all—everything was swept away by the torrent of sweetness the Divine Presence poured into my soul. The red lamp shed its crimson glow on the motionless women, on the white altar, on my bowed head. I fell on my knees and my heart cried out, 'My Lord and my God!'"

She stopped; the tears had gathered in her eyes, and my own heart had risen like a lump in my throat. Oh! the