

LUKE DELMEGE

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CHAPTER XV.

AYLESBURGH. "I have been thinking of making some changes in the Cathedral staff," said the Bishop to the Vicar in the library. "I'm not too well satisfied with the seminary and should like to see more life and progress there. Would not Father Sheldon, with his very high ideas about the priesthood, be an admirable guide for young students?"

mighty mazes of the silken net. Then came a series of objections and apologies accompanying the tremendous conflict, whilst every moment seemed to involve the Bishop more hopelessly in the silken intricacy. The brethren moved not. There was a faint sound as of a titter; but no: British equanimity and self-possession were proof against the temptation, and no one altered from his stately position to help the struggling agonist. It was too good to terminate or interrupt. They enjoyed it in British fashion by looking at one another. Just then the master of ceremonies came in. He ran his hands into the pockets of his soutane, looked around calmly, and said aloud: "Well, I'm blessed!" Then, moving forward, he pushed Luke, gently aside with "Allow me!" and, putting his arms under the tangled silk and ermine, he gently lifted it, and, kicking back the long, shining train, and it was done. Then he ordered all forward, and Luke, with burning face and tingling nerves, took his place in the procession. He found it difficult to compose himself during the Vespers, and forgot all about his sermon in the painful retrospect, until Arthur bowed to him, and to him over to receive the episcopal blessing. The Bishop saw his embarrassment, and smiled, as only a Bishop can, some invisible and intangible kindness. Then Luke was in the pulpit. He stammered through his text; then recovered himself, and spoke the first four sentences of his sermon well. His clear, metallic voice tolled slowly through the great overcropped building, searching into every corner, as he leaned on every syllable and accented every final consonant. Then, in an unhappy moment, his memory reverted to his little gauderies in the sacristy, and as the shame came back, he forgot the trend of his discourse and began to flounder through some dreary platitudes. But pride came to his relief, and his heart began to pump blood into his brain, until all the faculties fortified took up their work again, and the paralysis ceased, and the faithful and pliant instrument obeyed the soul; and without blunder or flaw, the beautiful discourse flowed on to the end, and men drew breath and said "It was good!" After Benediction, and before divesting himself even of his biretta, the Bishop came over, shook Luke warmly by the hand and said:—"I have rarely heard anything so beautiful and practical!" which, from a Briton, meant a good deal.

the paper in an envelope, and handed it to Luke. "Good-bye, Delmege," he said. "That was all." "All alike," thought Luke, "Made out of putty and then frozen." It was a week before he opened the envelope. Instead of £7 10s., the quarter's salary, the check was written for £15. A two hour's run brought the sad and disappointed Luke to his new home. He drove rapidly to the presbytery. The rector was not at home. The housekeeper left his luggage in the hall, and did not even show him his room. He went out to see the Church, muttering "brusque and British enough!" The little Church was very dark, and the air was redolent with incense. He said a little prayer, and looked around, trying to imagine his congregation. "Somewhat different from the Cathedral," he thought. "I shall not have to raise my voice here." He went behind the choir screen, and examined the music. He then studied the brass tablets on the benches, with the names of the pew-proprietors. There was no "Lord," nor even "Sir." "The Canon would be disappointed," he whispered. He meant himself, though he did not know it. He started at some names. They were connected with art and literature. "I must mind my P's and Q's here, he whispered. "Let me see." He went up to the peddles of the altar, and looked around, casting his eye in imagination up to the stained Crucifixion that lighted the front gallery. "Will do," he said. He meant "I'll do." He examined the cards in the pews again. "The Misses Pardee," he said. "I wonder who are these. 'Fraulein von Essler; Mademoiselle Deshayes; rather cosmopolitan.' 'Jeremiah O'Connor. Hallo, Jeremiah!' Can this be the Nineteenth Century reviewer? After all, I shall have some one to speak to."

in fishing in barren waters." "Your experience?" said Dr. Drysdale, mildly and apologetically. "You've been a good many years in the country?" "Two years and six months," stammered Luke, blushing at his own conceit. "Oh! I nearly agree with you, my young friend," continued the rector; "but there are practical difficulties, which, perhaps, at some future time, you, too, may be invited to solve. For example, did it occur to you that there is a heretical gas company that insists on being paid every quarter; and a heretical corporation that demands rates; and an organist who, though not a heretic, wants bread and butter; and a sacristan who, though an excellent Catholic, must be fed as becomes a Briton; and last, not least, a most estimable young Irish confereur who, perhaps, too—but perhaps, I'm wrong?—Can it be that our realistic brethren across the Channel live, in a balloon-like way, on fresh air?" "You have left them precious little else to live on," said Luke, who was half angry, half amused. Nevertheless, his training had already habituated him to common sense, and he rather admired the rector. Luke preached on Sunday evening after Compline. Luke preached well. He did not anticipate a very distinguished or appreciative audience, and his nerves were calm under the indifference. But when his practised eye detected quite an aristocratic and educated audience, he pulled himself together, and directed his train of thought in the channels that might suit them. "I dare say they have heard of me," the dear little idol whispered, "and expect something. I must not disappoint them." And here let it be said that in these last two years and a half Luke had picked out of reviews and pamphlets more theological information than he had acquired in a four years divinity course. And now he had to study more closely, and address his audience to special subjects, because he found, in a few weeks, that he was addressing not only a congregation of converts, but that, every Sunday evening, his audience was largely composed of Protestants of every shape and hue, from the eager solicitor, or doctor, or banker, down to the dragon from the cavalry barracks, who, during the course, sliced oranges for his best girl. This latter episode, indeed, rather disturbed Luke's equanimity at first, and his Celtic temper brought him perilously near an explosion; but he became accustomed to the unintentional irreverence, and, after a few Sundays ceased to notice it. Then he found that, on Monday or Tuesday, a Baptist, or Socinian, or Unitarian would claim an interview with the object of controverting some statement in the sermon of the previous evening; and Luke became suddenly aware that there was a good deal to be studied and considered before he could break through the crust of self-opinion that gathers round the right of private judgment. But we are anticipating. On the first Sunday evening, when Luke entered the presbytery, expecting to receive the congratulations of his rector, he was surprised to find the little parlor full of parishioners. Three or four families were represented, and father grave and solemn, and mother, smiling and happy, down to grown maidens and youths with great black eyes and pale faces, and even little children, who looked up boldly and inquiringly at the new assistant. There was a little amicable rivalry amongst them, and the question was—who was to secure this clever, handsome young Irishman as guest for the evening. "Now, Mr. Godfrey, you are always monopolizing our priests. There was no such thing as getting Father Collins to come to us." "Oh, dear, dear! and we used to say that Father Collins lived at the Hermitage." "Now, Mr. Godfrey, we really must make a rule that will not be infringed upon. We must have Mr. Delmege—Delmege," said Luke, smiling happily at this battle in his honor. "We have Mr. Delmege every Sunday evening and on alternate Thursdays." "Really, Mrs. Bluet, you are most grasping and intolerant. I appeal to the doctor." The doctor was tossing up the long ringlets of the little maiden of five summers, and here looked up. "I'm sure," he said, shrugging his shoulders, "I shan't interfere. If you could manage to divide him, as Solomon intended with the baby, it would be all the better." Mr. Godfrey, however, bore away the prize triumphantly. Luke had sense enough to whisper to his rector: "Shall I go?" "By all means. But don't stay later than ten. They'll like you all the better." And this was Luke's first introduction to a good pastor, whom ever after he regarded as the greatest and dearest of the "dii majores" who were enshrined in the secret temple of honored friendship, and to the circle of the gentlest and sweetest people that he had yet or ever known. It is quite true, indeed, that he had some academic discussions from time to time with his pastor, generally on political topics, but these, too, were tacitly avoided after a while. And for a time he was embarrassed and puzzled at the idiosyncrasies of English life. He couldn't manage cold roast beef and cheese and ale at 8 o'clock at night; and old John Godfrey was considerably enough always, when placing his hand on the cover of the Stilton, to shout: "Look out, Father Delmege!" So, too, he found it hard to understand how good men of forty or fifty could spend hours over a stupid game of dominoes, with nothing but counters in the pool; and he thought with insufferable. Sometimes, too, he fidgeted in his chair as he sat around a winter's fire, and a calm, Carthusian silence pervaded the whole family circle. "Isn't this enjoyable, Father Del-

mege?" John Godfrey would say, taking the long clay from his mouth and exhaling a mighty cloud. "Very," Luke would answer, adding in his own mind, "not quite as bad as a fall, but a great deal worse than a college." But he got used to it, and his nerves were gradually toned down into the silky smoothness that reigned everywhere around him. And he began to see great depths of affection and love far down beneath the icy surface; and every day he was made aware of genuine kindness, gentle, unobtrusive, unobtrusive, until he grew to love these grave, pleasant people, and they loved him in turn. "Bah!" he used to say angrily to himself sometimes, "there's only a sheet of tissue paper between the two races, but politicians and journalists have daubed it all over with the viscid muck of demagogues. When will the great man arise to drive his fist through the obstruction and let the two peoples see each other as they are?" And the great, white-haired Canon at home began to rise steadily in his esteem, and Lisalene, became more shadowy and cloudy than ever. "Luke would not sing 'The Muster' now." "I really must write to Sheldon," he said. I am almost tempted to write the Bishop to thank him. But I'll express it later on." CHAPTER XVI. ENCHANTMENT. The Canon sat in his favorite arm-chair in his rectory at home. The morning sun streamed in, and made a glory of his white hair, as of an Alp in the sunlight. The Canon was happy. And he was happy because he had not yet attained everything he could desire. For, you know, the unhappy man is he who, like poor Herder, has got to old age, and has nothing to look forward to this side of the grave. There were some things yet to be desired, to be reached unto, to be seized, —to be enjoyed? No! The enjoyment is the pursuit; it ceases when the hand closes down on the prize. And yet, with every consolation around him, and that most sublime of consolations, the growing happiness of his people, forever under his eyes, there were some misgivings—the rift in the fabric of the fly in the amber, which are inseparable from all kinds of human felicity. A letter lay open on the table. It was a pathetic letter, and more pathetic still, it contained a poem. This the Canon read over and over, and the tears were in his eyes. Yet the Canon was happy, for he was a good man, and he had the power of relieving misery always within his reach. Indeed, it would be difficult to say which was the happier—the benevolent Canon who presented some poor woman with a brace of Orping tons, with the assurance that she would have a glorious "cluck" in the springtime, or the poor woman who was just about to enjoy the pleasures of proprietorship. And when he had got thirty per cent. knocked off the rents of his tenantry, he walked on air for several days afterwards. So the Canon was happy, for he was writing a check for £10 this morning, and the check was made payable to Louis Wilson. The old fool says some one. Not at all! You'd do the same yourself, my indignant friend, if you had a little account at your banker's, and if you chanced to have these lines addressed to you: He stood afar, as one without a God, Waiting in darkness for the deeper night, When sleep would come—the long and soul-less sleep, That would to him more peaceful than the hope of future immortality. In the silence of that solemn midnight hour, While the calm slept the world, and stars kept watch, And the land was flooded with the moon's light, And the heavens and the earth were steeped in beauty, He laid him down thus wretchedly. And a ray of moonlight glittered on the blade that heaped with deathly swiftness to his heart; And the stars looked down in pity as he sank to rest forever peacefully. The Canon was not a critic; nor had he an ear for music, or a final respect for accents and syllables. He had only an imagination. And he saw the moonlight, and the sleeping flowers, and the crushed grass, and the blade with the dark stain—ugh! and the Canon wept with pity, and debated with himself long and earnestly whether he would not change that check and write fifty. But the check was posted to No. 11 Albermarle Buildings; and the good housekeeper, whose rent had fallen into sad arrears, chuckled as she guessed: "A check from his humble!" But the Canon went around these days in an anxious and happy mood, fearful that every post would bring him an account of a coroner's inquest. But to all outward appearance he was the same grand, majestic Canon, and the people said: "How great and how happy!" During these happy months, Luke Delmege was floated along in a current of calm peaceful work, broken only by the innocent pleasures of refined and beautiful social surroundings. He had time to think at last, though he never ceased to work. And one of his thoughts was this: This fever and fret of work, work, work—What is it all for? What is the object of it? The answer was: Work needs no object but itself, because work is its own reward. There was something in it, but it was not quite satisfactory; for, in that case, an immortal being had no higher object in life than a steam-engine. He proposed the question often to himself; and he proposed it at a happy gathering at a certain house, which had gradually become his salon and academy. Here invariably once a week, sometimes twice a week, Luke had the inestimable privilege of meeting a small, select coterie of esoterics, representative of every branch of literature, science and art, and even divinity. For here came man's soft-mann red, polite, well-read

Anglican clergymen, who stepped over from their snug, if dingy, houses in the cathedral close, and brought with the man atmosphere of learning and refinement and gentle courtesy, which had a perceptible effect on the character and manner of this young Irishman. And here, mostly on Wednesday evenings, were gathered celebrities, who slipped down from London by an afternoon train and went back at midnight; and Luke began to learn that there were in the world a few who might be masters and teachers forever to a First of First. And Luke grew humble, and began to sit at the feet of some Gamsiell, and his quarter's salary was spent long before he had received it in buying books, the very names of which he had never heard before. And with his plastic Irish nature, he had begun to fit in and adapt himself to these environments, and even his dress bespoke a novice in a monastery, to subdue the riotous and impassioned elements of his nature, and to become as silky and soft and smooth as those with whom he associated. But he proposed the question to Amiel Lefevril, one of the three maiden sisters who presided over the salon, and who had heard a good deal from Catholic friends about this new light, which had suddenly dawned from Ireland on the gray monotony of a dull English cathedral town. And it came around in this way. The lady had got a letter from the great Master of Balliol, who had just finished his work on the Republic of Plato, and one sentence ran thus:—"You have endless work to do in your own sphere; and you must finish that, and not fancy that life is receding from you. I always mean to cherish the illusion, which is not an illusion, that the few years of life are the most valuable and important, and every year I shall try in some way or other to do more than in the year before." "You see," continued Amiel, "these are the words of an old man, a great old man; and how applicable to you, before whom the years are spreading in a long, sunlit vista." "But—but," said Luke, with the old sic-argumentary style, but now, oh! so modified, "life must have an object. There must be an ideal—an object to attain." "Distinguo!" said the lady, and Canon Mellich jumped from his chair at the old familiar word. "If you are selfish and self-centred you need no other object than the tonic of daily work to strengthen and purify every mental and moral faculty. But there is a higher plane to which you will reach, and where you become divinely altruistic. That is, when you acknowledge and understand that the crown of life is self-surrender, and when the interest of the individual is absorbed in the interests of the race." It sounded sweetly, and wrapped Luke's senses around as with an atmosphere of music and perfume; but his judgment was not convinced. "I thought I heard some one enlarge a few nights ago—yes, indeed, it was Canon Mellich—on the world-weariness of all our great writers and workers—the dread despair of Arnold of Rugby and Matthew Arnold—on the justification of suicide by George Eliot, and the wish that it could be justified by Carlyle." "Quite so," answered Amiel. "The necessary result of too great enthusiasm—the reaction from the Schopenhauer towards ashes and weeping. But brother, you were unhappy in your illustrations. Those bright lights selves only, leaving smoke and darkness behind them. You and we must seek better things." "I cannot quite grasp it," said Luke vainly stretching towards the insoluble. "I see some great idea underlying your thesis, but I cannot seize it." "Then I must take you by the hand, and lead you into the inner circle of the mystics. You know, of course, that all great thinkers now understand the nature of life's symbolism—that the whole world of experience is but the appearance or vestment of the divine idea or life, and that he alone has true life who is willing to resign his own personality in the service of humanity, and who tries unceasingly to work out this ideal that gives the only nobility and grandeur to human action—that is:— Seek God in Man! not Man in God, which latter has been the great human heresy from the beginning." It sounded nice, and it gave Luke a good deal of food for reflection. This self-surrender, this absorption in race, the ego lost in the All, and immortal in the eternity of Being—this is the very thing he sought for; and was it not the thing the martyrs sought for—the high-water mark of Catholicism? He ventured to hint vaguely at the matter to his rector, who rubbed his chin and seemed to smile, and said:—"I think, Father Delmege, you had better keep to John Godfrey and his pipe, and leave these Anglo-French blue-stockings alone." Luke pronounced the old man reactionary. "However," said Dr. Drysdale, "you want work for humanity. All right. I'll hand you over the county jail. You will meet some pretty specimens of humanity there." "This all this horrible mechanism," said Luke; "these English cannot get over it. Man is only a tiny crank in the huge machine—that's all they can conceive. How different this teaching—Man, a Symbol of the Divine!" Yes the beautiful, smooth mechanism was affecting Luke unconsciously. He no longer heard the whir and jar of machinery, or saw the mighty monster flinging out its refuse of slime and filth in the alleys and courts of southwest London; but the same smooth regularity, the same quiet, invincible energy, was manifest even here in the sleepy cathedral town. Here was the beautiful, pushed out from the horrid jaws of the great mill, beautiful, perfect, with all fair colours of cultured man and stately women, and woven through with gold and crimson threads

of art and science at Luke felt the glam around with an atm light, and he felt it self to his envied helped a good deal. "Quick, quick, quick; you're two morning. These people know." Luke felt his past could not help him. Old Ireland, where leisurely for a morning, and sit on talk of old times! the priest being had done he, for he said as he passed into they say "God bless Or: "Look here, Delmege; now look! There you have not at it must be all Or: "Could you Delmege, to mod little? This is not some of those ladies Mrs. S— start whilst you were a? It was like an elec "God be with O Luke, "where the all right, and when preaching powers sound you can emi But he did none it became a clear of sled bells on a? They had long, on theology during after dinner. In Luke would break a kind of mild grave, polite old contradiction on a tion. Luke did not dicted. Had he a college? An perceived that it comit an antagonist or tell him he is the gravity of the quiet, gentle pers an effect on Luke ally he came to v are a good thing some thing in that it were well amiable and t opinions. For th on Luke's mind though he never loved halls of his very deed, a pro when Luke, later accidentally th actually the auti markable philoso Dublin were quot in reviews, he was —who could eve This idea of t in grasping. I logical faculty the side of a question ent because othe same manner, that at his first tively rude. H contempt for E was fencing wro at mighty swor Ireland. One b and Sylvester, hopeless entang etc., and that other priests ca but Luke should "That's not and no theolog that." Canon Drysd and said: "I had some Palmiro on the young friend d his reply?" And Luke, a his own refutat But the beau and mildness telling insensit One evening even to ask qu ly man had b just visited B that Bunsen heathen. "Did you, you ever come Germany?" "Weg—Weg! Let me Weib, thing to old S gravely. "No!" said "He was on was heterodox have met his for Luke. He the ways of p in "I think," Anglican par tremely kind, a Sabelian." "What's th "Oh! I th heretics," re "A pretty Anglican. word, except Bishop as a papers." Later on started a litly enlarging race, and con possibilities "Consider said Olivett have grown into what w around and arranged a absolutely n of humanity something e anthropomor Deity is eve "There i said a bellig the nation's for a trifle; in morning cabinets can ist to blow of amusement."