

mother's face. "You know," she affirmed. "I guessed it from the first. Fenella is brave and good, mother. Laurie's honour is safe with her."

CHAPTER XI.

To every ten women who are good simply because their lives have been sheltered from contact with evil, you will find an eleventh woman who is good from conviction, and the love of doing right.

AGNES PRIDHAM'S saintliness was of the unobtrusive sort.

Every action of kindness or devotion, every sacrifice of selfish desire or feeling was spontaneous, and done with so natural a grace, such an absence of pose or affected humility that those who benefited thereby often forgot to be grateful—taking for granted that Agnes found pleasure in thus yielding to others all the best she had to give.

There was one person who secretly worshipped their gentle saint with the golden eyes, while he scourged his heart for thus betraying the most cherished principles of his life.

The Reverend John Hassall, vicar of the parish which included Spinney Chase in its bounds, spoke of the elder Miss Pridham as "a beautiful character in its development" and he never ceased to deplore her secession from his own beloved Church. This was his view from the standpoint of a rigid low Churchman. He blamed himself (quite unnecessarily) for her change of faith but Agnes' convictions had inclined, since early girlhood, towards Roman Catholicism; its ornate ritual and attractive surroundings had induced her first to attend the Oratory services during a visit to London, and later the powerful eloquence of a great preacher rivetted the slender thread which drew her onwards to an open confession of her change of religion.

John Hassall recognized with stoical resignation that he was separated for ever from the woman whom he had placed in a niche apart from all the world, and it seemed to him that he must have fallen short in his spiritual ministration, thus to have lost the purest soul that had come within the limits of his supervision.

Agnes had ceased to take any prominent part in actual parish work. Still she was ever ready to help her poorer neighbours when in distress, and amongst these were the wife and children of a farm labourer, James Donnithorne, who had been badly injured while working a chaff-cutter. The man lost his right hand and, being incapacitated for doing his ordinary work, could only gain an occasional light job, while his wife—a decent, hard-working woman—took in laundry-work so as to provide food for the children. Of these there were some half-dozen boys and girls, healthy and rosy-cheeked for the most part, and always clean and tidy—a credit to their mother's unceasing toil.

Agnes heard of Mrs. Donnithorne's struggle to keep a home, and her sympathies were at once enlisted. She sent laces and summer blouses to be washed, and paid for them liberally, supplementing these payments with many useful gifts to the children. The youngest little girl, Florrie, the only delicate one in the flock, was a particular favourite with "the young lady from the Chase," as Agnes was always called.

Dr. Fraser, coming late in the afternoon to meet the specialist who had been summoned for Laurie, told Agnes (knowing the interest she took in the child) that little Florrie was ill again—nothing that could be precisely diagnosed, but just listless and drooping, like a flower chilled by cold winds, so that it would never reach its full maturity.

Agnes, pale and heavy-eyed, had left Laurie's room, after a long vigil, and a couple of hospital nurses were now installed there who made it evident that they would tolerate no amateur assistance.

"You want a breath of fresh air," the doctor told Agnes, when the consultation was over and he found her, dejected and wan, in the corridor outside Laurie's door. Then he added,

with inspiration, "and your little protegee Florrie, is making me feel very anxious again. I daresay you could induce her to take some food. Both her mother and I have failed but, if you went to see her, you might perhaps succeed."

"Poor little mite! of course I'll go!" Agnes exclaimed and, a few minutes later, was out of the house, carrying a basket full of dainties and fruit, to tempt the sick child, and with them a picture-book which might perhaps bring back the dimples of laughter to the sweet baby face.

John Hassall saw Agnes coming along the road and it vexed him to know that his pulses quickened and his heart gave a great bound of delight at the prospect of a few words with the girl who had adjoined the doctrine which, to him, spelt Truth. He guessed her mission and stopped to take her little hand in his friendly grasp.

"On kindness bent, as usual, I see!" he told her, with the unspoken adoration shining in his honest eyes. And when Agnes had admitted she was on her way to Mrs. Donnithorne's cottage, he was silent for a few seconds, as if debating something in his mind. Finally, he said, "I'm glad you're going there, Miss Pridham. The poor woman is in sore distress of mind—she'll tell you herself the reason of it. I heard to-day that your brother is very ill and I was just going to the Chase to inquire for him."

"Oh, do go and see father, Mr. Hassall. I'm sure he would be pleased to have a talk with you. He's been dreadfully worried and anxious about poor Laurie, but the specialist—Sir Lionel Fadden—came from London to see him and has given a more hopeful report than we expected. Now there are two hospital nurses in the house, I don't seem to be of much use and thought I was only in the way if I stayed with Laurie."

MR. HASSALL promised to go on to the Chase, adding that he hoped to see Agnes on her return home and so they parted again.

Little Florrie stretched out both arms, with a delighted cry, when Agnes placed the basket before her and allowed the child to lift out its contents herself. Then, seeing Mrs. Donnithorne busy, out in the back garden, hanging up garments to dry, she gave Florrie some fruit to eat and went to speak to the mother.

A shade of trouble was visible on the homely face as Agnes approached. "I'm almost ashamed to meet you, Miss," the woman said apologetically. "I'm afraid the talk that's going about the village must have reached you and, after all your kindness to us, it must appear to you as if we were an ungrateful lot."

Agnes was mystified. "I don't understand, Mrs. Donnithorne. What is it all about?"

"It wasn't Teddie's fault, I assure you, Miss; the boy meant no harm, though, as I told him, he should know when to hold his tongue instead of talking about things that don't concern him. I've been so put about by it all that I feel ready to cry my eyes out, Miss, I assure you I do."

Agnes lifted the corner of a sheet from a spiky gooseberry bush on which it had impaled itself. "Tell me what it is that troubles you, Mrs. Donnithorne."

"It was this way, Miss. Some of the men were talking outside the smithy about poor Liz Bainton. Ben Judd he'd got a newspaper with a portrait of the dead girl—she wasn't known about here, although she was living with an old grandmother only a short distance away. She came from Bristol, I fancy, just to look after the old woman and was rather of the sort that keeps to herself, so nobody has seemed to see much of her."

"I heard something about it," Agnes interposed, as Mrs. Donnithorne paused for breath. "Dr. Fraser mentioned that she was a nice quiet girl—and that her death was a mystery. But in what way came your boy, Teddie, to have anything to do with it?"

(To be continued.)

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