

GERTRUDE MANNERING

A TALE OF SACRIFICE BY FRANCES NOBLE CHAPTER XIII.—CONTINUED

She took off her things, and began to help the maid to unpack her trunks, putting away the pretty dresses, for so few of which she would have need again just yet, lingering over the occupation with a kind of blissful pain, not because she was regretting the gay scenes in which she had worn them, but because they seemed to speak to her of the one image in her heart.

She sighed as she handled the costume she had worn that night at the Duchess of N—'s ball, the night she had first met Stanley Graham, the night she had found herself admiring his noble face and figure, when she had likened him to some chivalrous crusader or knight of old romance. She sighed even while her heart beat with its hidden love and trembling hope; and then, turning aside from the occupation for the present, quickly began to dress for the evening dinner with her father, simply but brightly and prettily, as she thought he would like to see her.

Mr. Manning caught her in his arms as she came into the old dining-room, which looked more old-fashioned still when the graceful, sylph-like figure in the pretty dress crossed its threshold. "Does it all look very quiet and solemny, Sunbeam, after Lady Hunter's bright modern rooms?" "Not too quiet and solemny, papa; don't be afraid," she replied, with the old fond smile. "It does seem more old-fashioned than it used to do, of course; but I like it better than those grand new looking places, papa, and I'm so glad to be back in it again."

And Gertrude only spoke the truth; for it was not with the fashion and splendor of the past months that she had left her heart—not for them that she sighed one instant—but for the one presence which for her would have made paradise of a desert. She was so bright and happy outwardly during dinner that Mr. Manning not only forgot his vague fear entirely, but congratulated himself on having parted with his darling for the past month, because she was all the sweeter and more precious to him now on her return, and she was improved too, he thought, if there had been any room at all for improvement in his loving eyes.

"There is something about her which reminds me more than ever of her mother," he said to himself, seeing not yet that it was the softened light in the sweet eyes, the more earnest, less childish reign in her very voice, the unconscious changes imparted by the woman's true, deep love, never to leave her more.

As he had promised, Father Walsley came in during the evening, unconscious of the pain the first sight of him gave to Gertrude, as she met her old friend for the first time in her life with a secret in her heart she could not tell even him—not yet, while her love was not openly asked for. He drew back at the sight of her with a kindly laugh.

"Mr. Manning, is this really Gertrude, our little country girl, or some fashionable young lady she has sent in her place?" Gertrude laughed too as she shook her head. "Now, Father Walsley, you're too bad. If you are going to quarrel with this pretty dress that I put on just to show you and papa a bit of a glimpse of the latest fashions, I shall be sorry I did not alarm you outright by putting on something really gorgeous—the last dinner dress my cousin gave me. Indeed, if you don't believe at once that it is really me, I'll go up and put it on directly, to show that I am the same wicked individual as ever."

"Don't trouble Gertrude, for I am quite convinced now," the priest replied, with his kind smile. Then, more seriously, he added: "If the change is only outward like this—if it can be put aside with the dress—we shall not quarrel with it, shall we, Mr. Manning?" "Did he see the quick, conscious color that rose to Gertrude's face, though she turned aside with a merry laugh to hide it? Perhaps it did not entirely escape his fatherly, experienced eye, though he may have thought but little of it just then and forbore from noticing it.

"I hardly know whether Gertrude or I have talked the most yet, Father Walsley," said Mr. Manning. "About equally, I think, with my questions and her answers, eh, Sunbeam?" "No, I talked the most, papa, I think. And I shall have nearly as much to say to Father Walsley, for I only wrote once to him, didn't I, father?" And she turned towards him. "It was a great shame of me, after the nice letter I had from you, and I'm so very, very sorry; but you see I was so given up to idleness and gaiety that I knew you'd forgive me, wouldn't you?" She had guessed he must have thought her negligent in the matter, and with a vague dread of being questioned about it, even in joke, she had entered on the subject herself to disarm suspicion, as it were. Oh! how unlike the old, guileless, childlike Gertrude, already to have to resort to these wiles, innocent though they were, to

guard her precious secret from her dearest friends.

"I must forgive you, my child, I suppose, on condition that you make amends by growing very good and pious again very," quickly. "What do you say, Gertrude?" "Oh, I mean to do so, don't I, papa? You'll see me at Mass again in the morning as if nothing had happened, and I'll begin tomorrow to go and see as many poor people as you like, though just yet you must not give me any very cross old women; and, O Father Walsley! you must promise not to preach very hard sermons again just yet either, or you'll frighten me away again, you know."

The good priest laughed heartily now. "I shall be afraid to preach at all, I think, Gertrude, after so many injunctions."

"Well, perhaps it would be better to wait until we come back from the sea-side, Father Walsley," laughed Mr. Manning. "I think we had better try to get off next week, and then, after a fortnight of bracing air, Gertrude will be quite ready for harness again."

Something made Gertrude sigh, but she laughed it away, and began again to talk brightly, to tell Father Walsley about her life of the past month, of its pleasures and gaieties, of her cousin and Sir Robert, even naming Stanley Graham once or twice when it could not be avoided, quietly and with apparent unconcern, as she did any other of her cousin's friends. He had been so much a part of her life in London, so frequent a companion, that to have avoided speaking of him altogether would have been an impossibility; and, after all, was it not better that her father should at least grow accustomed to his name before the time when he might be called upon to welcome him as the one to whom she, Gertrude, had given her whole heart?

"Is this Mr. Graham a relative of the Hunter's Gertrude?" asked Mr. Manning, as the name was mentioned again. "O no, papa! only a very great friend, almost like a brother to Julia. She knew his mother very well, and since her death Mr. Graham has always been a good deal with the Hunters, at least when he is at home, for he is abroad a great deal."

"He is not a Catholic, Gertrude, of course; there is no need to ask."

"O dear, no, papa! He cares for no religion; indeed, I think he— he despises the very idea of it," replied Gertrude, forcing herself by a desperate effort to speak calmly, and scorning to keep back the truth when it could be told—the truth which they might be obliged to hear some day.

How she longed to add the praises of Stanley which welled up in her heart, of his nobility of character, of his fine intellect and manly beauty, and of his constant kindness to herself! But she repressed the yearning so bravely and with so little outward sign that not even Father Walsley yet suspected that this Mr. Graham was anything to her but an acquaintance, much less that he was the idol of her heart, worshipped with a love almost too absorbing to be given to any creature.

"Another subject for your prayers, poor fellow, eh, Gertrude?" said her father, with a smile, guessing little what secret, ardent prayers hers were for him every day.

Then, as though the strain were too great to keep calm and cheerful on this subject, Gertrude began to ask again about Rupert, and made her father tell her still more about his retreat at the college; and so the evening passed, until Father Walsley rose to go, saying Gertrude would be tired and must not be kept up late this first night of her return home. When he was gone and she had bade the old loving good-night to her father and was safe alone in her own room, Gertrude could bear up no longer, but wept out on her knees the pent-up emotion—wept not only her weary yearning for the one loved presence, but the bitter self-reproach in her heart, the pain of finding that home was the old home no longer to her, never could be again.

"Only three weeks since how I longed for this time! And now! Don't I seem years older, don't I know I can never be the same again? And I must go on letting them think I am unchanged, until I am quite sure that he loves me! Will it seem unkind, even, when I tell papa I have promised to go to Nethercotes so soon? And yet I must go; have I not promised him he shall meet me there when he comes back to England?"

CHAPTER XIV.

Mr. Manning and Gertrude were at home again after their fortnight at the sea-side, and there was a cloud often now on Mr. Manning's face, a sad, perplexed look at times which it had never worn in the old days before Gertrude went to London. Perhaps he himself could hardly have told what it was that was troubling him, making him feel again that vague anxiety about his darling which had come to him first for one brief space on the evening of her return home. But, acknowledged or not, the anxiety was there in his heart, the sad conviction that a change of some sort, indefinable as yet, perhaps, had come over his

little Gertrude, though at times she was able to shake it off and be again the bright, happy girl she once had always been. He had not noticed it so much during the first few days at home, because if she seemed at all thoughtful or pre-occupied then, he had put it down to fatigue and the reaction after the past month's gaieties, and told himself she would be quite restored after the stay at the seaside. Besides, the preparations for going away and the return to all her old duties and occupations had kept Gertrude outwardly so busy that she was able generally to appear bright and cheerful, keeping back her anxious sighs until she could be alone and under no necessity for restraint.

But when they were fairly established in the quiet little hotel they chose at Beachdown—the small, retired watering-place Mr. Manning in his unconsciousness had thought best for Gertrude, with only the moaning, ever restless sea before them and the quiet walks behind, quite alone together, with not even kind Father Walsley to come between them—then it was that in a very few days Mr. Manning became conscious of the change in his bright little "Sunbeam."

It was not that Gertrude was less affectionate than of old, less attentive to his every wish; on the contrary, there was something more loving and tender about her than ever, a kind of clinging softness in her manner, a quicker anticipation even than before of his every little want or wish, born of the self-reproach in her heart, and the knowledge of how soon he might have to lose her, to be left solitary and alone again—born of the very love and idolatry which had driven him, her dear father, from the first place in her heart. But try as she would, Gertrude could not be always her old bright self; she broke down at times in the effort, making the contrast appear then all the greater. There was an unconscious sadness and care even on her face at times when she did not know her father was watching her; there was a growing reserve about speaking any more closely of her London life, which she herself feared more than once must be apparent.

But it was all a change which was somehow more felt than seen, and Mr. Manning never for an instant let Gertrude see that he noticed it or had any anxiety on her account. He tried to quiet himself with the hope that time and rest would set all to rights again, and strove to make himself happy meanwhile with having his darling safe back at least once more. Their life outwardly was just such as Gertrude would have revealed in once in the past peaceful, happy days. They took long, delicious strolls together on the quiet shore, they sat for hours under the shadow of the rocks, watching the tide ebb and flow, or gazing admiringly at the beautiful sunsets those balmy September evenings. Then sometimes when it grew chilly they would sit indoors in the twilight, looking at the shadows gathering over the sea, and Gertrude often fell into one of her fits of musing and abstractions, knowing not how her father as he watched her yearned to ask her to come to his arms and whisper in his ear whatever of care or trouble had come to her, if such it was that ailed her. But he was always silent, waiting patiently until Gertrude roused herself with a start and kissed him with a lingering tenderness, often going then to the piano and forcing herself to sing as brightly as ever for him some favorite little song.

She had chosen one of these evenings, as they sat together in the twilight, to tell her father of her promise to visit Nethercotes at Christmas. She had put it off from day to day, dreading in the consciousness of her secret even having to tell him that she should want to leave him again so soon, though it would be for so short a time, and though she knew he would be pleased at the prospect of further enjoyment for her.

"Papa," she began quietly, but glad somehow, too, of the friendly twilight, "Julia wants me so much to visit them at Nethercotes after Christmas—indeed, they insisted on it, both she and Sir Robert. So I promised I would, papa, just for a fortnight, if—if you could spare me, of course."

TO BE CONTINUED

TAKING A CHANCE

None but members of St. Augustine's were to be asked to contribute towards the fund for the necessary enlargement of the church. But that all might be reached and given the opportunity of helping, lists of names covering the precincts of the parish were distributed to a committee of men who were asked to call personally upon those assigned them. As is usual in such cases, the men found much revision necessary; some members had moved into other parishes, and some living within the parish attended other churches; frequently new names were added, and occasionally names had been listed of those not of the faith. The "drive," however, was meeting with gratifying success, as everyone knew of the crowded condition of the church. David Kenyon's list was a lengthy one, yet the day before the report on the work was to be made, the

record was complete—with the exception of one name, Peter Howard. Twice he had rung the Howard door-bell, but no one had answered, and as he did not want to give in his list with even one name unaccounted for, he made a third attempt.

Mrs. Howard was at home and listened with sympathetic interest to the method of subscription. "If you can call again I think my husband will be willing to give something towards the fund," she said, reflectively, "but we are not Catholics."

Apologizing for the mistake, Mr. Kenyon explained that it was not the intention of the pastor to solicit outside of the parish membership, and that the error was due, possibly, to the zeal of the one who compiled that list.

"In addition to the pew rent list and other church list he must have used the street directory and have chosen names that to him, at least, suggested probable membership. He took a chance and included Mr. Howard."

"I do not mind the mistake," she smiled, pleasantly, "but I am sorry that our name having been included should make your list incomplete, although I can understand your pastor's wish to make it wholly a parish affair. A friend of mine has told me how much too small the present building is. I am sorry that Mr. Howard is not here."

Mr. Kenyon thanked her again for her interest in the work and withdrew. In a way, his report would be complete, and he was well satisfied with results.

There was a lesser degree of complacency in the Howard home when an account of the visit was related. "Why should they have my name on their lists? Where did they get it?" Howard inquired.

"It's St. Augustine's," was the somewhat indirect reply. "You remember how amused Mrs. Taylor was last week at Mrs. Palmer's opinion of the congregation there. Mrs. Palmer lives opposite the church and says that she is not deceived by the crowds who go in and out on Sunday at the four Masses. She insists that they are not four different groups; that they are the same individuals who attend all four services, although Mrs. Taylor does not see how this accounts for the throng leaving the church while others are coming towards it. They certainly need a larger building, and—"

"Yes, yes. But what I want to know is why anyone should think that I belong there," he repeated irritably.

"Well, what difference does it make, dear?" she inquired, soothingly. "We all make mistakes, and surely in getting a list of all those that perplex poor Mrs. Palmer, one cannot expect absolute accuracy. It was probably as the man suggested, that one of those working on the lists had a street directory. He found we lived within a few blocks of the church; he did not know where we belonged, but not wanting to miss anyone who should be included, he just took a chance."

"Took a chance," he repeated. "Well, as a rule, I have no objection to that course. Sometimes it shows enterprise. But why take a chance that I belong there?" he continued. "I'm not a Catholic. Never was."

"Of course not," quietly reassured his wife. "I know that." "I am willing to give towards the subscription," he added, after a brief silence. "I think such work should be encouraged. I'll have to find out who the collector on this street is, and—"

"He told me that his name is Kenyon. He lives up this street, several blocks farther up. I have seen him passing here on Sundays. I'll call your attention the next time."

"I wish you would. Since they had my name I would feel better satisfied to give something, although I cannot see just why they—"

"And I cannot see just why you attach any importance to so natural a mistake," laughed his wife. "Because it—well, I told you once, you remember, that my mother, before her marriage, was a Catholic."

"Yes but you said she gave it up shortly afterwards."

"She did. Father insisted upon that. I know only what he told me about it, as mother died when I was only two years old. My father was away on a business trip when my mother was taken suddenly ill. She was dead when he reached home, but he told me she died a Catholic. And that is why this classifying me as a Catholic struck me as singular, that's all. My father said he had refused to permit my mother to have me baptized; so the one who took a chance on me didn't pick a winner as far as religion goes."

"But you are not angry about it, are you?" inquired his wife, solicitously. "Trifling things do not usually disturb you like this. I am almost sorry I told you. Perhaps after you talk with Mr. Kenyon tomorrow your mind will be relieved."

On Sunday morning, when Mr. Kenyon was still a block away, Mrs. Howard called her husband to the window to see him. "I am going out now to speak to him," he decided. "Might as well get it off my mind—and give him something for the fund." Introducing himself, Peter Howard assured Mr. Kenyon that he

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