

PRETTY MISS NEVILLE

BY B. M. CROKER

CHAPTER XXXIII

WHEN WE TWO PARTED IN SILENCE
AND TEARS"Thy fate and mine are sealed
In love against the stream, and all in vain."
Princess

The day after Mrs. Vane's remonstrance was one to which we had long looked forward. The West-Shetlanders were giving a moonlight picnic at some very celebrated old tomb and mosque, about ten miles from Mulkapore. We had all to provide for our own transport as far as the city walls, outside which elephants awaited the enterprising, and carriages those who were not so ambitious. A long row of about twenty of those animals was ranged close to the city gate, each gayly caparisoned in a scarlet cover, with deep green fringe, and on their broad backs the ancient body of a hocked buggy was securely tied with ropes. I believe elephants to be the most sagacious and intelligent of all animals. As they stood in a solemn row, blinking at us out of their ridiculous little eyes, I am convinced that they were discussing us among themselves, and exchanging ponderous jokes as they lounged against each other and thrust down on their heads. The guests were dispatched in pairs, as a buggy was only capable of accommodating two. My fellow-passenger was Dicky Campbell. He showed an extraordinary eagerness to share my buggy, and my efforts to elude his society were vain.

The elephant having knelt, we nimbly ascended the ladder and took our seats, holding on with might and main while our huge steed got up again. We immediately took our place in the procession, and, following our leaders at a rapid, shuffling walk, streamed through the city. It was my first visit there by daylight, and Dicky pointed out to me the Shar Minar, the great mosque, the silver bazaar, and groups of surly-looking Arabs, with their long silver-mounted jizzis, clustered round almost every corner. Blocked as were the narrow streets, our ponderous animals soon effected a passage, and ere long we made our way beyond the walls once more into the open country.

I looked on Dicky Campbell as a family friend, and much in the same light as I regarded Rody; but for a considerable time I had had an uneasy conviction that he did not entertain the same views with regard to me. No, he wished me to be "nearer and dearer yet than all other." In vain I endeavored to keep our acquaintance on the old friendly footing, and set my face resolutely against tender allusions and personalities, and was stone dead to sentimental speeches and all compliments. Dicky was changed; no longer the gay, cheery companion he had once been, but cynical, irritable, and at times morose—especially morose when Maurice was in my company. There was no concealing from myself that he was outrageously jealous, and the rudeness of his answers and incivility of his remarks were frequently a palpable strain on even Maurice's well-known easy temper and proverbial good-nature; and Maurice (who had never been enthusiastic about Dicky) treated him with a formal, frozen politeness, worse, in my opinion, than downright incivility, or the retort uncounted incivility.

For a complete solitude a *deux*, for utter isolation from all other fellow-creatures save one, commend me to the howdah on the back of an elephant. But there is no escape from a disagreeable companion till the journey is accomplished; no stopping, no getting down. I had a horrible misgiving that I had been trapped, and that Dicky meant to seize this glorious opportunity for making the proposal that I had so long and so dexterously avoided. I made conversation, and started topic after topic with feverish anxiety, but my efforts were futile. Dicky was not to be foiled. We had hardly quitted the city ere I found him laying his heart and pay at my feet. I refused him with all the gentleness, and at the same time with all the firmness, I could command. I told him that I would always be his friend—his friend, but nothing more; that I was sincerely sorry to find that he cared for me in a different way, but that some day I hoped he would meet a worthier object, who would reciprocate his affections.

All this I said lamely and hesitatingly, as far as utterance went; but my resolve was unshaken. For more than two miles Dicky refused to listen to the word *No*—spoken never so sweetly. He pleaded his cause with all the eloquence at his disposal, although I assured him that my decision was unalterable. At length I lost all patience, and was so explicit and outspoken that even his dullness was penetrated; and he maintained a sulky and would be dignified silence for the remainder of the journey. I felt exceedingly sorry for myself, and for Dicky. Why could he not be content with being my friend? Why should he expect me to love and marry him, *coute qui coute*? How unreasonable he was to be so angry with me! Our position was, to say the least of it, embarrassing. Whatever you do, never quarrel in a howdah, where you have no means of escape from your antagonist, but are obliged to sit side by side, seemingly on terms of the warmest friendship. I was unfeignedly glad to reach our journey's end, though I am afraid my flushed face, and Mr. Campbell's low-

ering brow, told a tale to more than one penetrating eye.

Our elephant carried a bell, which he had changed playfully from time to time; he rang it joyfully now, as we prepared to descend from his back.

"Your elephant is the bearer of two bells," cried the gallant Globe-trotter, waddling hastily forward to assist me to alight. How ugly he looked in his brick colored, mushroom tope, checked sack coat, and roomy cricket-shoes. What a contrast to Maurice in his broad leaved Terai hat and well-cut light suit! He looked refreshingly cool, and particularly handsome, as he stepped forward, with a polite "Allow me!" cut out the broiling and breathless Globe-trotter, and handed me carefully down the ladder. A most *cherché* cold dinner awaited us. Every dainty possible to procure was set out in profusion—truffled turkey and boar's head, *pate de foie gras*, Maraschino jelly, and iced pudding, accompanied by wines of the choicest brands. Before we sat down to table I was accosted by Mrs. Vane, with brilliant cheeks and sparkling eyes.

"I want to speak to you for one second, Nora," leading me aside. "Come down this walk for a moment. Listen to me," she added, when we had reached a secluded, shady spot; "I came in the same carriage as Mrs. Stubbs, and I have such a field-day with her!"

"Ah! I thought you looked flushed with victory!" I remarked, with ill-assumed sprightliness.

"Now, Nora," said my friend reprovingly, "I am not in the humor for joking with you. I never can be the same to you again—never!"

"Have you brought me down here especially to tell me this?" I interrupted, impatiently.

"No; but to give you a word of friendly warning you do not deserve. You were the bone of contention between Mrs. Stubbs and me; I fought for you, and took your part—for the last time, let me assure you. She knows all about your other affair, and said, in her most sneering way, 'If it is true that Miss Neville is engaged to Major Percival, she is making an utter fool of her cousin, Captain Beresford. It will be a real charity to open his eyes, and I will enact the part of the Good Samaritan on the first opportunity.'"

I shuddered perceptibly.

"So now, Nora, you have not an instant to lose," continued my companion impressively. "I have long endeavored—Whatever she was going to add was interrupted by one of our hosts, who had entered the walk and was coming hurriedly toward us."

"I have been looking for you every where, Miss Neville. Dinner is ready and I am to have the pleasure of leading you to the festive board. Mrs. Vane you are the favorite default; your partner is going round all the tombs in a state of abject desolation. May I have the honor of conducting you as well as Miss Neville?" offering us each an arm.

I was led to a seat near the head of the table, which was already surrounded by a gay and numerous company. I felt anything but merry, as I reflected on Mrs. Vane's caution, and the avowal that I must make within the next few hours. "Misfortunes never come singly," I thought, as I gazed across at my skeleton at the desk, Dicky—Dicky, whose countenance wore an expression of the deepest, most incurable gloom; who declined to catch my pleading eyes, and who was quaffing far too many beakers of champagne.

Boysie, the ubiquitous, was also within view (having been brought by special desire). As usual he was attending most sedulously to his bodily refreshment. I was exceedingly angry with Boysie, and it afforded me a melancholy pleasure to see him quaffing about, plain hand, in search of the most notoriously unwholesome dainties. Maurice and Ellen were enjoying themselves very much, in another way. They looked the happiest and best matched couple at the table. Could it be possible that Mrs. Vane was wrong? That she had been the victim of her ardent imagination? And I, myself, equally mistaken? All young men flattered, and made speeches to the girls—signifying nothing. Why should not Maurice do the same? This unctuous was not flattering; but I laid it to my soul with a certain indescribable feeling of painful relief.

After dinner the company set about exploring the old ruins, gardens, and tombs. These latter were twelve in number, and each as large as a good sized church. Their exquisite stone carvings had been whitewashed by some Goth, but in the flattering glare of the moonlight they resembled white marble, and seemed to look down with cold, disdainful dignity on the lively throng, whose laughter and voices made their vaulted domes echo and the solemn, stately solitude of their surrounding gardens ring again.

Dancing commenced with great spirit on a flagged terrace in front of one of the outer buildings; but I was not in humor for waltzing on uneven pavement, and after the second dance I wandered away into the gardens with Maurice for my companion. It was as bright as day, as we strolled from one tomb to another. Along terraces, up and down white flights of steps, and through pathways lined with flowering shrubs and tall palms, between the branches of which at each turn, we caught glimpses of the perfect outline of some tomb, towering clear cut and silver-white against the dark-blue starry sky. At length we came to a large marble tank, down to whose margin long, shallow flights of steps

descended at each of the four corners. We leaned our elbows on the parapet and gazed into the still water below, which reflected, as in a looking-glass, a neighboring mosque, with its four picturesque little minarets.

"How quiet and peaceful it is! Let us go down and sit on those steps," I said; and leading the way I descended and seated myself almost at the edge of the water.

For some time we preserved an unbroken silence. Maurice was smoking, and I was thinking, and, for me, thinking profoundly. The splash of a frog was the only sound, that broke the surrounding stillness, till an old wandering fakir came and peered over at us, muttering volubly to himself; but the only words that I could catch were "Feringhee! Feringhee!" Soon a band of explorers took noisy possession of a neighboring building. We heard their peals of gay laughter as they climbed up the narrow, winding staircase. Shouts of ecstasy announced to that some specially stout party had become jammed in the ascent. After prolonged shrieks of amusement and expostulation, the whole company seemingly broke loose on the roof of the turret, and chased each other round and round.

"Don't you wish you were with them?" inquired Maurice lazily.

"Not I!" I returned loftily, throwing a stone into the middle of the pool.

"In the old days Nora O'Neill would have been in the first flight among the lot," nodding his head in the direction of our riotous neighbors.

"Does it not seem odd, Nora, that you and I should be wandering together out here, as much at home among these Indian scenes as we were among the lanes and lanes about Galloway?"

"No, it does not strike me in that light; it seems perfectly natural," I returned unguardedly.

"I believe there is a fate in these things," he muttered to himself, as he sent a stone artistically skipping across the pool. "I firmly believe in *kismet*, as they call it out here; don't you?" he asked, raising himself on his elbow, and looking at me interrogatively.

Before I could reply, a high, shrill falsetto suddenly exclaimed, "So there you are!" and at the same moment I descried Mrs. Gower's faded face gazing curiously down on us. "What a snug retreat! quite a Scriptural scene: Jacob and Rachel at the well; they were cousins, too, were they not, Colonel Fox?" turning to her companion.

"Aw—haw! Don't know, I'm shaw—thought they were husband and wife. You have no idea—yaw" (to us) "how awfully jolly you look down there, leaning over and surveying us admiringly; 'I vote we go down there too, Mrs. Gower, eh? So jolly cool.'"

"Certainly not," returned the lady, with very unnecessary emphasis; "we should be greatly de trop," lowering her voice, and giggling affectedly as she turned away.

I pretended not to have heard this little dialogue, but I could not prevent my complexion from assuming a brilliantly crimson tint, and I kept my eyes studiously averted from my cousin.

I had not forgotten my promise to Mrs. Vane, and as I sat on the lower steps, with my chin resting on my hand, I was busily revolving in my own mind how I was to break my news to Maurice.

"A penny for your thoughts," he said abruptly.

"Give me the penny, then," I replied, with an assumed sprightliness, raising my head, and holding out an expectant palm.

"Earn your penny first," he rejoined, pretending to search his pockets. "I never pay in advance."

"Well, then, I was thinking of you?" I exclaimed, now determined to take the plunge, and have it over. "I have something particular to say to you."

"Have you really?" he returned, raising himself from his listless attitude, and tossing his cigar into the water, where it extinguished itself in one indignant fizz.

"And, strange to say, Nora, I was thinking of you; and I have something important to impart to you," he said, taking a seat beside me. "Which of us is to speak first?" he asked, with a smile.

"You are, of course!" I returned eagerly, only too glad to postpone my confession, even at the eleventh hour. "You are the eldest—do you begin."

"Very well," he replied, taking off his hat, and throwing it at our feet. "Now, attention! In the first place, my little cousin, I am going to lecture you; and I hope you will listen to me with more respect than last time, when you cut short my remonstrances by flinging your hat out of the window, and jumping after it."

"It will be your hat, not mine, that will suffer this time," I answered, picking up his Terai, and waving it threateningly toward the water.

"You had better not," he said, with assumed indignation, making a vain effort to recapture his headgear. "Tell me, Nora," he went on, "how did you and your travelling companion agree this afternoon? You did not look radiantly happy when you arrived."

"What do mean, Maurice?" I asked, with assumed amazement. "I do not profess to be a particularly keen observer, nor sharper than my neighbors, but even I could see that your relations were a little strained, as they say in political parlance; even I could read 'rejected' and 'dejected,' written in large characters on Campbell's face, as he descended from your mutual elephant. Poor boy, it was too bad! Why did

you make a fool of him, Nora? He was bad enough in his natural state. 'It was not my fault,' I exclaimed, with great emphasis. 'I gave him no encouragement. I could not help it.'"

"Oh, yes, you could!" interrupted my cousin, coolly. "Excuse me, but you womenkind have a subtle way of knowing when a fellow cares for you. You must have seen what was coming, and you could easily have administered one of those brusque retorts for which you were once so justly famous. A rudely delivered home-truth, when the first symptoms of the fatal disease developed themselves in Master Dicky, might have given him a pang at the time, but would have saved him a mortal wound. Now, nothing cuts a fellow so much as being refused, especially if he is fond of the girl, and she had led him on and fooled him into thinking that his feelings were reciprocated."

"You are speaking from sad experience, I conclude?" I put in, with a ghastly effort at gaiety.

"And Dicky is not your only admirer!" pursued Maurice, regardless of my interruption. "There is the sporting major and our mutual friend, the Globe-trotter, only waiting a fitting opportunity to prostrate himself at your feet. Young Forbes, of the Cavalry, too, is badly hit."

"Maurice! how can you talk such absurd nonsense?" I expostulated, avoiding his eyes, and busying myself in rolling and unrolling his unfortunate hat.

"I am talking sober sense," he replied, impressively. "When a young lady possesses four distinctly separate adorsers the situation becomes, to say the least of it, *acute*. Seriously, Nora, I should be sorry to think that my little unsophisticated country cousin had developed into that most hateful creature, an accomplished flirt."

"I don't say you have, mind you; I am only giving you a friendly warning. I do not believe that you are one of those girls who look on every proposal as an honorable trophy, or take a man's heart as an Indian brave would his scalp; but it is neither honorable nor right to lead fellows on to think you mean to marry them, and then turn round and say, 'Ten thousand times no! Spare the too susceptible youth of Mulkapore; and as you are strong, be merciful!'"

"What a sermon," I exclaimed, rising with a gesture of deprecation. "I hope you have nearly finished, for I have something to tell you."

"Not quite," he answered, also standing erect, "I have one word more to say," and here paused.

"Well, then, in conclusion, as Mr. French would say, I replied with would be playfulness."

I eyed Maurice with some surprise; all trace of banter and raillery had vanished from his expression. He looked grave and even agitated, and a conviction, more felt than seen, told me that he was under the influence of some strong emotion, as he, bareheaded, stood before me.

"In conclusion, then," he said, looking at me very earnestly, and speaking in a low but steady voice, "suppose you put a period to all these fellows' sufferings, Nora, by telling them that you are engaged to me."

For a moment I was so taken aback that I was completely stupefied, unable to utter a word. At length I found my voice.

"I thought I had forbidden you to allude to that!" I cried vehemently. "Hear me for a second, Nora," said Maurice impetuously, forcibly taking my hand. "I am not now thinking of your grandfather's bargain, as you called it. I am thinking only of Nora Neville. I am sure you know that she is everything in the world to me. I am speaking as if I had never heard of you, and never known you, till I met you out here; I am speaking entirely for myself. Listen to me," he continued, with a gesture of appeal, seeing an interruption trembling on my lips. "Listen to me for one moment longer. I fully intended honorably to have kept my promise to my uncle, but you know your frustrated good intentions by running away. I have searched for you, far and near, and at last gave up the quest in despair. I am not a susceptible fellow, and I went through life quite heart-whole till I met you at the Residency ball. I am poor, as no one knows better than yourself, Nora, and no, no doubt, could make a much better match as far as money and all that goes, and I am not half good enough for you (humbly); but no one will ever love you as well as I do. You understand that it is not because you are my cousin that I am saying all this; it is because I love you with all my heart and soul, and I went on very earnestly, and still tightly clasping my hand. 'Tell me, Nora darling, do you care for me?'"

"Maurice, Maurice!" I faltered, endeavoring to release my hand, "you don't know." Here my voice shook so that I became utterly unintelligible and hysterical, and I trembled from head to foot like an aspen-leaf.

"I will take silence for consent," whispered my companion, and, putting his arm round my waist, he drew me toward him, and kissed me. This kiss acted like an electric shock, and brought me thoroughly to my senses.

"Let me go, Maurice; let me go!" I cried, passionately; "do you hear me?" struggling to free myself.

"Not till you have given me an answer," he replied, resolutely. "Nora, I know you care for me a little—not a hundredth part as much as I care for you, but still a little. Come, won't you tell me the truth?"

"I tell you that I am engaged," I stammered forth; "you have no right to speak to me like this," with spurious indignation. "I am engaged to Major Percival."

"What!" ejaculated Maurice, now not merely releasing me, but pushing me rudely from him. "What did you say? My ears must have deceived me," leaning against the wall with a face as white as death.

"I am engaged," I repeated quite volubly, now that I had recovered my speech. "I met Major Percival on the hills last year. He is coming here very shortly; but until then we do not wish our engagement to be made public. No one is to know."

A long, a complete, a most eloquent silence succeeded my tardy announcement. I glanced timidly at Maurice; I fairly quailed before him. Incredulous amazement and wrathful indignation shone in his eyes. For some minutes the faint lapping of the water at our feet was the only sound. At length he spoke in a hard, restrained, mechanical voice:

"So you have been engaged for months, have you? Meanwhile leading me on to believe that you cared for me, merely *pour parrer temps*. I was pleading for others just now, little knowing that I myself have been the greatest dupe of all! Heavens! what an infatuated fool I have been!" he muttered. "But how was I to know that I was in the toils of a hardened, unscrupulous coquette? You knew that I loved you!" he cried, turning to me fiercely. "Never dare to deny it! You led me on, in a fool's paradise, from day to day; you possessed yourself of every thought of my heart. I looked on you as my dearest and better self, as my good angel."

I could give no idea of the scorn with which Maurice brought out this last peroration, or of the horrible, cynical laugh that accompanied it.

"I gave you all I had to give—an honest man's love. I would have given you my soul had it been possible. I believed—oh, credulous fool!—that you loved me!—yes; can your mind grasp such inordinate vanity?—and I looked forward to a long and happy future spent with you, and lo, with one word, my hopes are demolished! You calmly tell me that you are 'engaged'—engaged!"

With withering contempt—"enjoying the security of a secret engagement, and permitting yourself to receive the addresses of half a dozen deluded suitors. What pleasure has it given you to raise my hopes, only to dash them to the ground? What amusement has it afforded you to have wrecked my life, to have destroyed all my faith in your sex? Answer me!"

Maurice's voice literally shook with passion as he denounced me. I trembled as I gazed at him in conscience-stricken silence. I shall never forget him as he stood before me that evening, never, as long as I live. The cold white moonlight gave his severely cut features an unnatural, all stern expression, that overawed and confounded me, and I was at a loss to recognize my kind and devoted Cousin Maurice in my stern and merciless accuser.

"I never meant it," I whimpered plaintively; "I always intended to tell you of my engagement, I sobbed, now quite broken down and subdued."

"And why did you not tell me—nay I need not ask?" he pursued, with seething sarcasm; "you preferred to play your fish a little longer!"

"I thought you only cared for me as a cousin," I gasped, eagerly clutching every straw of an excuse, "as a friend."

"I don't believe you," returned Maurice, forcibly. "Insultingly rude as it sounds, I do not believe you; and more than that, you do not believe it yourself, in your heart, if you have such an organ. You know very well that I loved you!" After a pause, during which I continued to weep copiously, and with no effect, whatever, on my hard-hearted kinsman, he resumed: "And who is the fortunate possessor of your innocent affections?"

"Major Hastings Percival," the Honorable Hastings Percival," I murmured, in woe-begone tones. "What! Peacock Percival?" in a shocked voice. "Impossible! Why, he is more than double your age! You have not an idea in common."

"Oh yes, we have," I hastily interposed. "He is very fond of botany and music!"

"Botany and music!" echoed Maurice, "a pretty foundation on which to build a home. But I see it all," he added reflectively. "I have never given you credit for one of your gifts—a large share of worldly wisdom. I find that you quite understand the spirit of your age, my pretty cousin. Love is an old, worn-out delusion, and only fit to be entertained by the inmates of a lunatic asylum. You will be rich—that is the main thing now—and with a coronet dangling before your eyes, you will see no faults in Major Percival. What have I to offer but a few barren acres; and what is a miserable captain of artillery in comparison with a future lord?"

"Why should you assume that I am marrying Major Percival for his money and position?" I asked, plucking up a little spirit, and drying my eyes.

"Do you ask me to believe that you are marrying him for love?" returned Maurice, with slow, distinct utterance, and looking into my eyes as though he would read my very soul. "Ah! your face is enough; do not trouble yourself to tell a falsehood." So Mrs. Roper's golden precepts did not go in at one ear and out at the other. I think I can re-

member one of them verbatim. You were to have nothing to say to the military; they were poor, but pleasant, and she recommended the civil element to your particular notice. How admirably you have carried out her instructions!"

"Maurice—" "No, I will speak for once," he proceeded, in the same tone of withering sarcasm. "I wear her majesty's uniform, and heaven knows I am poor enough, and occasionally you have found my society pleasant; the cap fits me exactly. And as to a rich civilian, have you not favored Major Percival with your attention, your affections (with a laugh), and the promise of your hand? You have achieved the position Mrs. Roper recommended; accept my best congratulations. If you go on as you have commenced—and you are a young lady of great promise—you will outlive Laura yet; it is a mere question of opportunity."

"Maurice, how dare you compare me to her!" I cried, aglow with indignation. "You called her a murderer."

"Let me assure you of one thing," he resumed, completely ignoring my expostulation, and stooping to pick up his hat. "In me you see the last of your victims. Your propensity for keeping dangerous secrets must be checked. This very evening the fact of your engagement shall be known far and wide. I shall take good care to erect such a moral finger-post that no other unlucky fool shall share my fate," speaking in a tone of fierce resolve. "Come along," he continued roughly, "I am going to take you back to your aunt. I have done with you!" moving aside to permit me to pass up the steps.

"Maurice, you are very hard on me; if you only knew—if you would listen to me—"

"I know quite enough. You are a deceitful, heartless, unscrupulous flirt, without the ghost of a notion of the meaning of the words 'honor' and 'truth.' I don't wish to know anything more about you," he rejoined, in a manner that effectually disposed of argument.

My demoralization was complete. I could make no stand against Maurice's bitter sarcasms or biting truths. I accompanied him back to the rest of the party in solemn silence, vainly endeavoring to repress the tears that would keep rolling from my eyes in spite of all my efforts to restrain them. As we came into the light emitted by dozens of colored paper lanterns we found that a dance had just been concluded, and all the recent performers were sitting in tiers on the steps; consequently our return was remarkably public and conspicuous.

We walked up the whole length of the terrace in search of auntie, the cynosure at all eyes.

"Oh, here are Captain Beresford and Nora!" cried Boysie Towers, bounding toward us like a new ball. "They have had no dancing; and oh, I say!" he shrieked, capering before me, "Nora has been crying!"

"You little fiend!" I heard Maurice mutter between his teeth. "If you say another word, I shall kill you!"

I gladly sought refuge with Mrs. Vane, who charitably made room for me on the steps beside her, and still more humanely lent me her fan.

"I see you have told him," she whispered, with ready comprehension. "I was choking, and the only answer I was able to vouchsafe was a nod. Ever grateful shall I be to Mrs. Vane for her good offices that disastrous evening. She kept the Globe-trotter at bay, in spite of his obstinate determination to come and sit between us, and make himself agreeable." She parried all Mrs. Gower's sarcastic inquiries, and shielded me when I was completely hors de combat, and utterly unable to take any part in the surrounding chatter. Indignation, shame, and mortification were struggling in my breast; my eyes were nearly blinded with tears; but I was not so completely blind that I failed to see Maurice and auntie in earnest conversation. Shortly afterward he took his leave. I watched his fast receding dog-cart rapidly disappearing along the white, moonlit road, with feelings I found it hard to analyze.

Maurice was quite as good as his word. He kept his promise and erected his finger-post. The following day my engagement to Major Percival was the latest news in Mulkapore.

TO BE CONTINUED

"SOCIAL CATHOLICISM"

During nineteen centuries the church has had in view what certain persons think has been the exclusive preoccupation of Socialism which was born yesterday. The church has tendered a helping hand to the poor; it has rehabilitated woman, has abolished slavery, has saved the West from ruin, has collided Roman law, upheld the serfs against the feudal barons, instituted Orders which were bound by oath to protect the orphan, the poor and the widow, fought usury by founding pawn offices, censured even kings themselves, established fraternities whence sprang the corporations and guilds, the church has afforded shelter to all unfortunate and has condemned all excess. Nowadays, when the material and moral wants of the proletariat have so much increased on account of had times and bad men, the church has established in every city, not excepting this city of

ours, flourishing popular institutions which are highly beneficial, which insensibly attract the people who leave the path of error and see and gain accept truth under the cloak of love.—The Southern Cross.

(Written for the Missionary)

TRUE STORY OF A
WAYWARD GIRL

By Rev. Richard W. Alexander

During an unusually active season of Mission-giving I found myself in a certain district in Pennsylvania where the church was crowded with devout souls listening eagerly to the Word of God. As I stood on the platform preaching forgiveness for sinners who returned to God with a sincere and contrite heart, my eyes fell on the figure of a girl who stood near an adjacent pillar. The light fell full on her, and I never saw more beautifully chiselled features. Her eyes were large and dark, and were brimming with tears which rolled down her pale cheeks. I raised my heart to God and talked right to this soul, and with all my strength laid open the treasures of grace ready to be poured out on the repentant sinner. I felt that she was one of these; and as I finished my sermon I saw her sink on her knees, and bury her face in her hands.

I prayed for her fervently at the foot of the altar; and when I returned to the rectory some time after, I was not surprised to receive a call to the reception room, where I found the same young girl. She was strikingly handsome, well dressed, and in conversation was even more attractive. She began at once, "Father, I am not fit to talk to you, and I don't know why I am here. I don't know why I went into the Church, either, for it is years since I crossed its threshold—but I was passing, and saw many people enter, and I was curious to know what was going on. I went in, I heard your sermon, and I came here to see you. Do you know what I am?"

"I know you are a soul Christ died to save," I replied.

"I am a bad girl, Father," she replied, and a blush rose to her face.

"The hand of God has mercifully brought you here my child," I said, "and you must thank Him with all your heart. Is your home here?"

"No, indeed, Father," she said hastily. "No one at home knows where I am. I ran off with a procress eighteen months ago, and I have lived a fearful life of sin ever since. I was once a Catholic; my father and mother and brothers are Catholics. I am the only girl, spoiled and petted—too much, perhaps. I have a beautiful home in X—, and I know my family are broken-hearted because they cannot find me. They call me Lucy Ashton here, but my real name is Ethel B—."

"And you live in X—?" I said, determining I would communicate with her friends.

"My father is well known in X—," she replied; "but I have disgraced him, and I will never go home again. Perhaps this visit to you is only an impulse born of the sermon I heard, the sight of a Catholic Church, and the piety of the people."

"No my child," I said. "It was the tender love of God who yearns for your return to grace. It was the voice of the Good Shepherd calling His lost sheep. You must not leave here until you are restored to grace."

"Father," she exclaimed, "how could God forgive one who has deliberately flung aside all virtue; who knew what she was doing, and wanted to do wrong? I love admiration, I love the life I am leading, even though I know my health is suffering already. Other girls have told me that I won't live half a dozen years longer at the pace I am going."

"How old are you, child?"

"I am not quite nineteen, Father."

"And you are willing to continue this life—for a few years—and be condemned forever to the eternal mind, the eternal flames of hell? You! an educated Catholic, a daughter of Catholic parents—a girl who has received unusual graces of mind and body!"

The girl was silent. I saw that she was thinking. There was a little oratory in the rectory where a beautiful white statue of our Lady looked down from a pedestal in sweet gentleness. A little