

LINKED LIVES.

By Lady Gertrude Douglas.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SWEET VOICE.

My spirit dropped his shining wings. His radiant smile was gone; His voice had ceased, his eyes had dawned. His hand grew cold within my own. Bitter, on bitter tears I wept. Yet still I held his hand; Hoping with vague, unreasoning hope, I would not understand That this pale spirit never more Could be what it had been before.

Adelaide Proctor.

Dipping the fingers of her right hand into the holy water stoup by the door, Marie de St. Laurent presented the tips of them to Mabel; but Mabel, after a moment's hesitation, positively shook her head. For a moment the expressive eyes of the young French girl rested reproachfully and sadly upon her; then she crossed herself reverently, and passing Mabel by, went to kneel on a Prie Dieu at the bottom of the chapel.

Mabel remained standing close to the door; there was nothing in the chapel which at first particularly attracted her attention. It was quite empty; Marie's sisters had evidently gone home, likewise Genevieve, for they were nowhere to be seen. There was no beauty in the architecture or decoration of the building, which was exceedingly plain. The walls were white-washed, and dispensed a pale blue color, with the exception, indeed, of the sanctuary, which was richly gilded and illuminated in the dome; while behind the altar, deep crimson curtains formed a recessed, against which the altar itself, of fine white marble, stood out in bold relief.

On either side of the sanctuary, but more in the body of the church, were two small altars, both under canopies of some soft blue material; on the right side, under the canopy, stood an exquisitely painted statuette of the Blessed Virgin in a white robe and sky-blue mantle, fastened round the neck with a silver collar, over which long waves of golden hair, falling to her feet, formed a natural veil. Her head was crowned with a chaplet of stars, and her hands, lovingly outspread, invited the approach of her children. Mabel's attention was drawn to the sweet expression of the beautiful face, but she turned away with a sigh of disappointment, for embroidered in silver letters, on the blue frontal of the altar cloth, she read these words: "I am the Immaculate Conception."

"What blasphemy!" thought Mabel; and then she directed her attention to the opposite statue, which represented St. Joseph, holding in his arms the Divine Infant, toying with a silver lily. Both altars were furnished with vases full of fragrant flowers, and before each image burned a crimson lamp. The morning sunlight bathed the sanctuary with a glow of warmth and richness impossible to describe. Flushed in perfect stillness was the holy place, where, amidst light and flowers, Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament waited to receive His child.

Mabel still stood by the door, her heart plunged in a chaos of perplexity and vexation. Marie's views respecting the influence which the possible apostasy of one of her priests would exercise over her, had powerfully struck Mabel, as contrasted with her own feelings about Mr. Vaughan; and while following Marie into the chapel, she resolved to take the lesson to herself, by never again allowing Mr. Vaughan's infidelity to his Church to interfere with her own stability.

When Marie offered the holy water, Mabel's first impulse would have led her to accept it, and to have made the sign of the cross, as she had been in the habit of doing; but she recollected at the same moment that Hugh had condemned the practice as superstitious, and out of keeping with the teaching of the English Church. Therefore, though she had learned from Mr. Vaughan to love the sign of the cross, as a custom of the early English Church, she hastily decided that as Mr. Vaughan was her only authority, she would be following the safer path in refraining from its use, in accordance with the spirit of the Church of England.

No sooner, however, had Marie knelt down to pray, leaving her standing by the door, than a heavy sense of isolation began once more to oppress Mabel's heart. Then as her eye rested upon the Blessed Virgin's image, Mabel for a moment wished that devotion to the Mother of Jesus was not forbidden her; but the joy of this desire was followed immediately by the revulsion of feeling caused by those simple words, so unintelligible to a Protestant, so beloved by every Catholic heart, "I am the Immaculate Conception."

Mabel's spirits rose. "Blasphemy!—horrid blasphemy!—just what Hugh warned me of. I wonder how they dare put such words into the mouth of the Blessed Virgin," remonstrated Mabel, with the low sweet voice just beginning to make itself heard within her. It spoke again that strong, sweet voice, whispering only, but louder than before.

Mabel's eyes, wandering from the image which at first arrested her attention, had fixed themselves straight before her upon a scroll, richly illuminated, which formed the base relief of the high altar, upon which was inscribed in the Latin text: "Dulcissimum esse cum filii hominum."

Two adoring angels placed on either side of the sanctuary held up a second scroll which rose in a high arch over the altar, above the canopy where the Blessed Sacrament was exposed, and again Mabel read the words:

"Adoremus in eternum Sanctissimum Sacramentum."

Mabel's knowledge of Latin enabling her to understand the meaning of the sentence, her eyes followed immediately, and remained motionless in one long, imploring gaze upon the Sacred Host itself, around Whom the jewelled aureole of the monstrance flashed in the sunlight. Suddenly, calmly accompanied by a rush of indescribable love, came the yearning wish that, if indeed Jesus were present to her in His sacred humanity, she might at any cost be made to believe it; and a flash of unanswerable conviction followed the whispering of the Divine voice: "He is there, He must be there; and where Jesus is, are rest and peace."

Mabel advanced a few steps, impelled by an attraction she had never before experienced—she longed to cast herself upon her knees, but wavered, resisting as a temptation the feeling she could not account for. It proved, however, too strong for her, and after a brief hesitation she dropped down where she stood, bowing her head low between her clasped hands.

Crowding thickly on her memory came the recollection of bygone days of fervor, seasons known only to herself and God, hallowed moments when a far-away voice had spoken, but in faint accents, to her soul. In the dear old Elyansee church she had often heard it. Sometimes breaking through the half open lips of the angel figures in the quaint stone carvings; again thrilling forth from the tones of the pealing organ; oftener still whispered by the glory-crowned saints, who gazed upon her with their solemn eyes from the deep stained windows.

She had listened to it in the early morning; it had soothed and comforted her dreams by night. Many a time it had gladdened her—full often it had wooed and won the reverent love of her child's passionate heart, which had never failed to respond to its call. It had told her about the love, the deep human love, of a human God, making her yearn with unutterable longing for some visible or sensible manifestation of His presence; and now, with the remembrance of those heaven-breathed whisperings in the past, there had come the low voice once more, but, oh! so much more real, so much more winning, in the sweetness of its tone.

The shadows were rising, the veil was being slowly withdrawn, the dream of Mabel's young life was merging into reality. No longer reaching her as a distant echo through His creatures, but spoken by His own Divine lips, came the inspired lesson to her heart. No longer as in a glass, dimly foreshadowing the uncertain future, filling the soul with insatiable cravings, but instantly illuminating with a flood of light, and hushing into profound peace mind and body alike.

With closed eyes, with suspended breath, with her heart silenced into a nameless rest, Mabel bowed her head, her soul, her intellect, her very life, down in that first solemn act of adoration, knowing that God was there!

"Will you not come up a little higher? You can see the two Sisters who are now in Adoration," whispered Marie's voice.

Mabel started, as one roused from a dream, and Marie wondered greatly at the strange, new expression of awe and reverence which, since she came into the church, had taken possession of her countenance.

"Will you not come?" repeated Marie, seeing that Mabel did not move. Then Mabel, rising mechanically, and following Marie to the top of the chapel, became aware that there was on the right of the high altar, within the sanctuary, an inner chapel, divided from the outer one by an iron grating. Heavy crimson curtains were looped back on either side, so that Mabel could distinctly see the figures of the two nuns in white habits, with flowing mantles of dark crimson, kneeling in motionless adoration.

"O God, they must be happy indeed!" was the thought that flashed across Mabel's mind, but it was passing. She could not yet realize the possibility of such happiness.

"It must surely be an idle life," she remarked to Marie, as they left the chapel. "How do they employ their time, I wonder?"

"Oh! no, they are not idle, never!" assured Marie, with considerable warmth. "You know, to begin with, they have a large Pensionnat, and that gives plenty to do, and they do much work for the poor churches. Ah! it is a sublime vocation to work for the good God, and, for one's rest, to repose in His presence."

"That is one way of looking at it," said Mabel, thoughtfully; "but," glancing at her watch, "I really must go back to the house—my sister will be waiting for me. I suppose Genevieve has gone home?"

"Yes, it grows late. She will no doubt have gone back with my sisters. Well, then, you will come to day to see us, is it not? My sister Eugenie will go to make a visit to Lady Forrester, and you will come with Genevieve to visit us."

Mabel assented conditionally. She could make no promises independent of Jessie; but if nothing should happen to prevent her, it would give her great pleasure to visit that afternoon the Chateau St. Laurent. And with this understanding, she took leave of her new friend, and retraced her steps to Chateau St. Anne as quickly as possible.

Jessie, who was down stairs, waiting for her, was much amused to hear of Mabel's adventurous introduction to Marie de St. Laurent, of which Mabel, while making tea gave her an account. Of her visit to the chapel, or of the im-

pression there received, Mabel said nothing. Jessie would not have understood her, and Mabel would have been puzzled how to describe her feelings on the subject even to Hugh, if he had been at hand.

Jessie was expecting her friend Eugenie de Villeneuve. "She promised to come early, and will lunch with me. I do not feel up to the gay party at the Chateau—they are so many and so noisy. I shall enjoy having Eugenie all to myself for a quiet day, so go by all means, Mabel—it will cheer you up, dear, and do you good," said Jessie, when Mabel told her of the pressing invitation given by Marie de St. Laurent.

Two hours later Mabel and Genevieve might have been seen, in days long past, wandering leisurely arm-in-arm along the sandy beach, close under the shadow of the woods. They were in no hurry to reach Chateau St. Laurent, and took a round-about way to get there. Mabel was determined to have a full understanding with Genevieve. Her former dread of her friend's influence seemed to have been allayed. There were certain doctrines of the Romish faith to which Mabel felt convinced her friend's superior judgment would never have succumbed. If this were the case, then the barrier between them might not prove impassable.

Belief in the "Real Presence" was, after all, entertained by many Anglicans (so Mabel tried to persuade herself)—she had felt it that morning to be true, as she had never before realized it, and she longed to make Genevieve admit the existence at least of that bond of union between them. On the other hand, there was in her mind a doubt, a misgiving, that, as a member of the English Church, she might not be justified in holding to the extreme views she had hitherto professed. This, however, Mabel was yet far from admitting—she was hardly conscious of such misgivings; they were there, nevertheless, battling with her own earnest wishes, and Mabel's heart was too full of conflicting emotions for her to be able to conceal them entirely from her old friend Genevieve. No sooner were they alone together upon the sands than Mabel burst forth—

"Veve, you must tell me now. I must understand why you forsook the Church of our baptism."

"Oh! Mabel, don't talk about that, darling—wait a little longer."

"No, I won't wait, Veva," said Mabel, standing still, and grasping Genevieve's arm with an impatient hand. "Tell me now—you must, you shall answer me!"

"Why must I? You little tyrant, if I begin to talk to you, you will tell me, as you did yesterday, that I want to make a Romanist of you. I would rather not talk of it, dear Mabel. Why do you ask me?"

"Just because I hate doubt. I hate delusion wherever it exists. You and I cannot both be right. I must know why you acted as you did. I must! I will!"

"Well, then, Mabel, why do you not write and ask Mr. Fortescue?" Mabel positively stamped with impatience.

"Ask Hugh, Veva! Ask him why you became a Romanist! As if you did not know beforehand what would be his answer."

"Mabel, darling, I really do not know."

"Hugh never thought as you and I did, Veva," said Mabel, with a look of perplexed sadness. "He thinks there is only a little difference between us—between you and I, and Romanism. He thinks you became a Romanist just because you were—what you were—well, you know his are the views of the Evangelical party in the Church of England. Don't tell me I must adopt them, please. But, Veva, look back, and remember what you used to feel, what—yes, what I feel now, and then tell me honestly how dared you leave the Church of our baptism?"

Genevieve raised her eyes to the heavens above her, hesitated a moment, then made brief answer: "I have not left her, Mabel."

"Yes, you have, Veva, you have gone over to—"

"Another branch of it, I suppose you mean, Mabel. Well, dear, at any rate it is a branch of it, and I branched which cleaves to the Parent Tree; yours is cut off, I fear."

"Veva, you are evading my question; I am in earnest, I assure you!" said Mabel pleadingly; "you once loved our Church, even as I now love her. Will you answer me straightforwardly, how it was you could have brought yourself to feel that she was not the true Church?"

"Mabel, you must forgive me! but there are reasons why I must avoid answering you at present; I cannot answer you, in fact, without breaking the promise you yesterday required from me. I do not wish to argue on these subjects with you, I would rather somebody else did so than I."

Saying which, Genevieve turned her face resolutely away from Mabel's searching gaze, and sought to turn the conversation into another channel, but Mabel was not to be put off. Unlinking her arm from Genevieve's, she stood rigid before her in her path, and eagerly seizing her friend's hands, persisted.

"But, Veva, no one can answer me but you, for the simple reason that no one else whom I know ever felt as I feel about our Church. Oh! do be my friend still; can't we feel alike, at least, in some things? can't we love what is beautiful in each other's faith? There is much that we can surely hold in common. Veva, this isolation will kill me! I cannot bear to stand alone,

supposing that our dear Lord were at times really present in the Church. "Mabel, Mabel," began Genevieve, as she took Mabel's earnest, uplifted face between her two hands and gazed into her truthful eyes, "you do not know what you ask me; remember if you make me speak, I must say things you will not like to hear."

"I don't care, Veva; only be true to me, that is all I ask."

"Well, then," answered Genevieve steadily, "I left your Church because I found she was no reality; I discovered that the ideal you and I so fondly loved only exists in the One Holy Catholic Church which we were taught to look upon as alien to us, and which we called Roman."

Mabel looked up suddenly. "What is it, dear?" asked Genevieve, interrupting herself; she had stooped to gather a bit of sea-weed, and was pulling it to pieces.

"Veva, do you remember that evening last Spring, a day or two before Hugh's arrival? Do you remember our talk in the wood? I had forgotten it until just now, when you began to pull that sea-weed into bits, exactly as that afternoon you did with a little flower; your action has just reminded me of something you then said."

"What was it, darling? I remember the walk, but I have forgotten what we talked of."

"Yes; but I remember. You said there was a void in your heart that our beautiful ritual was not able to satisfy; you said there was disappointment everywhere! Ah, Veva, it all comes back so plainly to me now; you had lost your faith then—you were losing it fast, at any rate! Oh! why did you not tell me?"

"My Mabel, what good would that have brought about? I did not wish to see you as unhappy as myself."

"Unhappy, Veva? And you never told me!"

"But Mabel—"

"Oh! there was no excuse; had you confided in me then, we would have talked it over together; we would perhaps have found a middle course, or, at any rate, Veva, it would have been better for me to have known it then, whereas now—"

Mabel stopped suddenly, a look of positive terror coming into her eyes. Perhaps Genevieve guessed her meaning, for she asked no question, and went on to finish Mabel's sentence in a different manner from what Mabel had intended.

"Perhaps, now, darling, I am better prepared to comfort you—should my words indeed have the effect of unsettling you. Besides, Mabel, my father had strictly forbidden me then to talk to you of my doubts—remember they were then merely doubts; we hoped—my father and I—that they were but passing temptations, and under that impression it would have been wicked, Mabel, to have disturbed the perfect serenity of your faith."

Mabel was silent for some moments; presently she resumed, with more calmness—

"I will never be unfaithful to our Church, I hope; but I cannot bear doubt. Veva, you must tell me now by what process you discovered that our Church was, as you say, no reality. Why do you think that our faith was ideal?—and how have you made out that that ideal exists in the Roman Church?"

"Because," said Genevieve, with energy, "we had made to ourselves an ideal of what was good, right, and beautiful, and we strove to clothe that ideal with a name which did not belong to her; we called our ideal the Anglican Branch of the Church Catholic! That ideal of ours is no such thing. It is not Anglican, it is Catholic, Roman Catholic—that is honest truth. Our ideal had no place in the minds of the founders of the Anglican Church, and in the present day it is scouted by nearly every Bishop on the bench. You must surely remember the Bishop's opinion of our ideal worship—that Sunday when he came to give Confirmation!"

"Well, but, Veva, what are these ideal doctrines?" replied Mabel, anxiously.

"Do you believe in the Real Presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, Mabel?"

"I do," answers Mabel, so positively, and with such intense feeling, that Genevieve is surprised. She had not expected so unqualified an admission. Mabel, too, felt she had said too much, so she hastily added—"That is, you know, Veva, I wish to do so, whenever it is possible. We believed it in our Elyansee, did we not, in Mr. Vaughan's time?—but since Hugh has been here it has been different. Hugh will not allow of any actual Presence in the Sacrament; but—"

"But—"

"No, Mabel, surely not. According to our notion of English Orders (by that I mean what I formerly believed and you actually held), Mr. Fortescue is a priest; he has power to consecrate, whether he does or does not acknowledge it."

"He says he has no power to do so; he says that our idea of the Real Presence is utterly contrary to the Church of England's teaching, and he will not allow for one moment that in the Holy Sacrament we receive anything beyond a spiritual communion of our Lord's body; but then—oh! then," added Mabel, with warmth, "he must be wrong there. As you said just now, Veva, he is a priest, and whether he will or not, he must be able to consecrate, and therefore the belief in the Real Presence is not contrary to the faith of the Anglican Church, is it not?"

"I am afraid so, Mabel. But even

supposing that our dear Lord were at times really present in the Church, does it not seem to you very shocking that the priest, by whose command He descends upon our altars, should deny His presence? Moreover, that with the exception of yourself and one or two others, there are few among the congregation who believe that in receiving the Holy Sacrament they are receiving their actual God! If indeed that be God, where is the reverence with which He should be treated?"

Genevieve spoke earnestly, in tones both sorrowful and reproachful, as though her soul revolted from the idea. Mabel burst out passionately—

"Veva, Veva, do you want to bring me, then, to renounce the beautiful faith we grew up in together? Do you wish to drive me into the cold, heartless creed of the Evangelical party in the Church?"

"Yes, dear Mabel; if it be merely a 'beautiful idea,' a matter of sentiment, if you hold to it only because it is so inexpressibly comforting to the imagination, then, I would say to you, give it up; take in exchange the sounder, more practical, more honest teaching of the English Church. It is safer, believe me, darling, more logical, and oh! far more reverent."

"You did not always speak thus, Veva," broke in Mabel, with some bitterness.

"I was going on to say," continued Genevieve, "that if it were not mere sentiment, but a real, deep, intimate faith implanted in your breast, as all faith must be at your baptism, then, Mabel, give it up for no one, rest in it, cling to it, and," here Genevieve's voice trembled with emotion she could not contain, "if need be, sacrifice all for it—even what is most dear."

Mabel's thoughtful face grew a shade brighter, and she said, quietly, after a pause,

"Yes, Veva, with me it is faith, not sentiment, I think. I could not bring myself to disbelieve it, even if I were to try; but then I am not sure that the will to consecrate is not an essential part of the consecration of the Sacrament, consequently when our priests have no intention to consecrate, I cannot feel so sure of the Real Presence, and this puzzles me. I have no one to ask now."

"My father would set you right as to the actual teaching of the ideal Church (I won't call it the English Church, Mabel), upon those points," said Genevieve. "But by the way, Mabel, of course you believe our priests, the Catholic—"

"Roman," interrupted Mabel.

"Well, Roman, to satisfy you, dear," said Genevieve, with a smile—"our Roman Catholic priests have also the power and right to consecrate."

"Of course I believe that."

"Well, then, Mabel, whenever you go into our churches here, remember there is here no doubt about the matter we have been discussing. You need not fear that in some parishes the priest will not see fit to consecrate, or preserve the Blessed Sacrament. We all believe in the Real Presence; and so far from this belief being a matter of private judgment, we are bound to believe, under pain of excommunication. With us the Church is always open. Night and day the sanctuary lamp burns before the adorable Sacrament. Our Lord is ever there, and whenever you please you may go into His presence. Here is the reality, then, dear Mabel, of what we used to think so beautiful in ideal; for you cannot deny that the belief in the Real Presence is in the English Church only an ideal."

"Not always—oh! not always, Veva," said Mabel, imploringly.

"Nearly always, darling Mabel," asserted Genevieve, positively. "I chose this one subject to-day as you pressed me so for my reasons, to my mind it is the leading one upon which all others depend. I would far rather not argue with you, Mabel—we have found one thing at least to agree on, the Real Presence of our dear Lord in our churches. If doubts come to you, take my advice, darling, do not talk to us about them just yet, but go there, to the Adorable Presence, and think them over at His feet. Pray, ask for light, ask for strength and grace to do His holy will under all circumstances. But do not let us argue these points—indeed, it would be better not."

"But, Veva, what about the Immaculate Conception? You surely do not believe that blasphemy?" exclaimed Mabel, suddenly bethinking herself of a difficulty which Genevieve could not surely so easily dispose of. Very much astonished she was therefore when Genevieve, standing still, clasping her hands tightly over a little silver medal which she always wore, answered with prompt energy,

"Right well do I believe in the Im-

maculate Conception of our holy, pure, sinless Mother Mary. Why, Mabel, it is the glory and the triumph of our faith to believe that."

"Oh! Veva," Mabel withdrew her hand from Genevieve's arm, and turned away with a look of deep disappointment.

"I wonder if you understand what it means?" began Genevieve. "I suspect you have made to yourself quite a wrong idea about it. I could tell you how, but I really meant what I said just now—I will not talk to you about the different articles of our faith. I am quite determined I will not."

"Why not, Veva?"

"Because my idea is—mind, it is only an idea, but still, in your case, I mean to abide by it—you must find out God's will first, about the existence or non-existence of a Visible Church, to whom Divine authority is given. If such a Church exists, find out where; and when you have found her out, come to her as a child to its mother, to learn what you have to believe, not to reason about what she teaches—that is the foundation of all true Catholic spirit of faith. No, darling Mabel, simple, beautiful as it is, I will not talk to you about the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. At present you have nothing to do with it—find out the True Church. There will be time enough afterwards to discuss and im-

maculate her faith."

"I daresay you are right, Veva," said Mabel, sadly. "I must take, then, as your answer to my question, 'Why did you leave our Church?' that you found her to be not a reality, but an ideal. I can't—I won't agree with you. There must be some escape out of the difficulty of choosing between the Low Church of England doctrine, and altogether forsaking the Church of our baptism. I had never thought of it till a few weeks ago. I can't help thinking of it now; but mind, Veva, I am not one bit convinced that your Church can lay claim to being the only true one. I must think about it."

"And pray, darling, ask our Lord to tell you, each time you go into His presence. I hope you will go sometimes."

Then Mabel told Genevieve of her morning's visit to the Chapel of the Perpetual Adoration, which led to a discussion between herself and Marie de St. Laurent, on the subject of vocation. Their conversation lasted until, by a circuitous route, the two friends reached at length the ivy-covered entrance-lodge which opened into a long avenue of elms, leading to the ancient and picturesque Chateau de St. Laurent.

THE NEW YORKER

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THE CATHOLIC RECORD

DECEMBER 9, 1898.

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