

PALMS

ANNA HANSON DORSEY, AUTHOR OF "COANA," "FLEMINGS," "TANGLED PATHS," "MAY BROOKE," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XVI.—CONTINUED. On every side her love for the child, who from its birth had been to her as her own flesh and blood, was cast back upon her; a wall of separation, as transparent as air but as impassable as adamant, had risen between them; she felt that in all the strange things that had so lately happened, and the many changes they had brought about, she was no longer necessary to the one only human being that she loved—and her proud, faithful heart was breaking. But she relaxed no tentacles of vigilance, lest the danger she dreaded might come without word or warning. And, because she loved to hold Claudia near her, and see her bright, beautiful face dimpled with smiles, she cut out and helped to make garments for her "beggars"; and because—perhaps this was the primary reason—the child would be exposed to less danger of infection if the miserable wretches were clad in fresh, clean raiment, she redoubled her efforts to substitute such for the soiled tatters that in some cases scarcely covered their nakedness.

"almost persuaded," so far, he had had no time to weigh the matter. And now what use Laurence expected to make of the mob that, with his co-operation, he had summoned to meet him on this 9th day of August, 258, he was at a loss to understand; but supposing that these poor wretches were connected in some way with the question of the secret treasures, he gave the holy deacon his own way, thinking that, even should the means seem foolish, the result would prove satisfactory. Accordingly he whispered an order to the captain of the guards as the prisoner entered the vestibule, and those who had been driven back by blows a few moments before were allowed to pour in, until all the available space in the Prætorium was filled. Valerian had been promptly informed of the harassment of the uproar that had so startled him, and quite regained his self-possession when he saw the Christian deacon standing on the *calata*, calmly awaiting his pleasure. The dignified, composed air of Laurence, his serene fearless countenance, in whose presence he secretly felt his own ignoble inferiority, stung the tyrant, who, however, resolved to control himself until the coveted treasures were in his possession; then—let the Furies dance, and Cerberus whine his fangs!

"Thou knowest why thou art here? Deliver up the key of thy treasury, and designate its location; then, if thou wilt cast a grain of incense in yonder brazier in honor of Jupiter, thy liberty is thine," said Valerian, in tones which were intended to sound conciliatory, but their coarse rumbling had quite the contrary effect. "Had I a thousand lives instead of one, I would not cast a grain of incense in honor of thy gods, which are of stone and metal, without sense or feeling, and was the clear, ringing answer, that penetrated every ear in the vast hall. "I have but one life, and that belongs to Jesus Christ, the only True and Living God, Whom I serve and adore, and for the love of Whom I am ready to suffer death. As to the treasury of the Church, behold it, tyrant! in the poor and miserable congregation here and around this Temple, who have been brought hither by my summons, that thou mightest see and know that the Church of Christ hoards neither gold nor silver nor precious things, but distributes all to the poor." The rage of Valerian at an answer that demolished with one blow his avaricious schemes took from him the power of articulate speech, and for a moment or two he roared like an infuriated bull, while he eyed the infuriated deacon, not knowing what form his vengeance would take, or on how many it might fall—every heart except that of Laurence, which, uplifted above all tempests of human wrath, had a foretaste of those eternal consolations which would soon reward him in their complete fulness. As last from the chaos of the tyrant's fury words shaped themselves. "Seize him, lictors, and scourge him—the liar! the deceiver! the blasphemer of the gods! And disperse your rabble! hunt them down! trample them in the dust!" he belated.

While the "rabble," weeping for the teacher who had led them into the path of salvation, and been their provider and counselor, were dispersed, and, with obedient fidelity, "trampled in the dust"—while the lictors were laying bare to his loins the tender flesh of Laurence, Valerian suddenly remembered that it was due to his own dignity as a stern judge intent only on the punishment of an offender against the State; for had he not been publicly duped, and would not all Rome make a jest and comedy of his discomfiture? He knew the Roman spirit too well not to feel assured that his satirical wit would break out in epigram and lampoon at his expense; that it would be a sweet net for the teeth of every scoundrel in the streets; and he laughed over equally in the low-driking slums of the city, as (on the sly) even in the *portici* of the academies and libraries. Aye! he knew the laugh was against him, and that there was no love for him to keep it back; but who betide the audacious Christian who had humiliated him!

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The holy deacon Laurence, without a sound spot in his flesh, was removed (still accompanied by Hippolytus) to another apartment, which opened upon the grove of palms that surrounded the Temple of Mars. Here he was visited and consoled by many of his friends. "I have but one life, and that belongs to Jesus Christ, the only True and Living God, Whom I serve and adore, and for the love of Whom I am ready to suffer death. As to the treasury of the Church, behold it, tyrant! in the poor and miserable congregation here and around this Temple, who have been brought hither by my summons, that thou mightest see and know that the Church of Christ hoards neither gold nor silver nor precious things, but distributes all to the poor." The rage of Valerian at an answer that demolished with one blow his avaricious schemes took from him the power of articulate speech, and for a moment or two he roared like an infuriated bull, while he eyed the infuriated deacon, not knowing what form his vengeance would take, or on how many it might fall—every heart except that of Laurence, which, uplifted above all tempests of human wrath, had a foretaste of those eternal consolations which would soon reward him in their complete fulness. As last from the chaos of the tyrant's fury words shaped themselves. "Seize him, lictors, and scourge him—the liar! the deceiver! the blasphemer of the gods! And disperse your rabble! hunt them down! trample them in the dust!" he belated.

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HOW THE ANGEL BECAME BAPPY.

BY REV. P. A. SHEEHAN, D. D.

The angel's name was Astrael. He was not one of the great Archangels that stand close before the throne of God, nor did he belong to any of the seven orders of spirits, but his place was far down in the lower choirs but directly facing the great White Throne of Lamb. He was one of the faithful few that smote and buried from the battlements of heaven the fallen angels when St. Michael raised his battle-cry, "Who is like unto God?" and from that time he had many chosen and delicate duties appointed him, all of which he discharged most faithfully for the love of his great King. For the first thousand years after the fall of the angels, he was charged with the care of a great beautiful star that was quenched when the angels fell, for you must know that every star in heaven is called after its angel, and the stars that belonged to the rebel angels were suddenly extinguished when God drove these unfaithful servants from heaven. Then they were rekindled. So every night our angel had to fly through the fields of space and lit up this beautiful star and hold it aloft in his great right hand, whilst he himself fronted the Almighty. Hence he took his name Astrael, that is, angel of the star.

baptismal font, saw the white robe of innocence placed round the infant and heard it called by the sweet name of "Mary." Then he rested for seven years, gathering all his strength for the struggle which he knew was coming. Now and again he would swoop down to the earth and whisper some things to the mother, and then she would clasp her child closer, and pray that Almighty God would save her child from sin. And then, when Mary could walk, and was beginning to know the names of things, Astrael would teach her the names of Jesus and His Mother and put little pictures in her way, and lead her sometimes into the quiet church, where she would sit for hours, looking up at the pictures in the stained-glass window, at the statues of the Sacred Heart and the Madonna, and above all, at the great crucifix that stood by the pulpit with the white figure upon it, and the red marks in the hands and feet and side. Somehow, she could scarcely tear herself away from the study of this crucifix. She would sit, her hands folded in her lap, her blue eyes wide open and sorrowful, gazing at the sad face and drooping figure, the wreath of thorns on the head, the black nails, the red blood. But, above all, the sad eyes of the Figure haunted her. She thought they were looking straight into her own and once or twice she thought she saw the lips parting, and heard the voice speaking, and she was going up to the crucifix when her mother lifted her from the bench, and took her home and said she was a strange child.

fully breathing in the calm sleep of childhood, her yellow hair tossed over the pillow, like threads of gold, and her face calm and beautiful. The angel looking at her intently, dreaming of the time when she would be a saint in heaven, and would claim her as his child and now and again turning from her to look up into the eyes of the stars and thinking of the bright courts above them. In childhood time passes quickly, because it is a period of enjoyment. The days flew by rapidly, and whenever her birthday came round, Mary wondered how a year could seem so short. At last one morning she awoke, and her mother kissed her and some little friend sent her a pretty book, and on the inner cover was written: "To Mary, on her eleventh birthday." "Eleven! Can it be possible?" thought Mary. "Why, I am quite an old woman," and she ran rapidly to the looking glass; but there was not a single gray hair in her yellow plaits, not a single wrinkle in the pink cheeks; but, all the same, Mary looked very grave, for she felt she might have more time to prepare carefully for the great day of First Communion. But now that she was eleven, there was no further obstacle in the way, and hence was she very grave, very serious, but very happy on this birthday morning.

But after a thousand years his duties were changed. And for a thousand years he was charged with the duty of watching a great white lily, that budded and expanded from spring to summer, and was finally gathered and placed before the Blessed Sacrament. So every springtime he came upon earth and drew up the tiny green shoot from the brown mould, and every day made it stronger, until at last the white petals would open out from the green sheath. And then as it grew and broadened, and the white velvet leaves expanded, he had to keep it very pure and unstained, and ever and anon he shook his wings over it, and a beautiful perfume fell on the lily, and was wafted tenderly out and placed in a beautiful bowl on a golden stand, and he touched the leaves with his lips to keep them fresh, and then bent very low before the tabernacle and flew back to his place in heaven.

Now, the seven years went by, and the struggle commenced. One day, that Astrael, full of joy, had entered the little room, he saw sitting close by Mary a dark spirit in whose eyes there was a baleful fire, but who spoke so softly, so sweetly, that the Angel Astrael was deceived until he saw on the forehead of the spirit the red mark that denoted eternal reprobation. He was face to face, the first time for several thousand years, with a fallen spirit. He trembled, but recovered himself and took his usual place by Mary's side.

Mary was one of the quickest in her class. She was not only studious, but she had given her great gifts and she had not only mastered her Catechism, but she knew the meaning of every word, and could sometimes give a little lecture of her own on the mysteries of our holy faith. But it was thought better to wait until she was a little more grown, than to have more time to devote to her studies. But now that she was eleven, there was no further obstacle in the way, and hence was she very grave, very serious, but very happy on this birthday morning.

Now, our angel was not very happy out there amongst the great lonely stars; and though he was much happier amongst his lilies, there was always a pain at his heart—a sad, melancholy feeling that he could not put aside. Because he saw day after day in the courts of heaven a strange thing takes place. Several of his companions would return to their places, after many years' absence and many would return very sad, and he could see their eyes dim with weeping, and notice that they always kept their wings closed, yet their hot tears would drop on the bright shining floor. But some would return their faces full of joy, and now and again they would bring with them another beautiful spirit, not an angel, yet very like an angel, and Astrael was quite jealous to see the dimpled cheeks of the children of the angels, and the angels were called their guardians. And he was hoping and praying every day that the great King would call him and send him to earth, and give him such a precious charge; but thousands of years rolled by and Astrael was unnoted.

It was the eve of the Assumption of our Blessed Lady; and there was great joy in heaven. They were all preparing to celebrate the feast of God's Holy Mother in a worthy manner; but Astrael noticed that there was the greatest eagerness to do honor to the great Queen amongst the children of the angels. Suddenly a bright thought struck him. He would ask the Blessed Virgin to grant him the great desire of his heart. He prayed for the favor. But he had no need of asking. For our Blessed Lady read his thoughts and the morning had scarcely dawned when he heard his name. Astrael! Astrael! He looked up in amazement. All eyes turned to him. Suddenly there came flashing along the great choirs who bent humbly before him, a mighty Archangel, his broad wings extended, his hair flying like a cloud behind him, and he stood over Astrael and said: "Follow me!" And Astrael rose and followed him far up amongst the stars, and he stood on a high tower, and a light shone upon him, like the light of a thousand suns, and he covered his face with his hands, for he was blinded and found himself standing face to face with the Queen of Heaven. Gabriel stood beside him. And his Queen spoke thus, and her voice was soft and gentle: "Astrael, I know the prayer of your heart. To-day it is granted to you. For to-day there is born on earth a child whom I place under your protection. She shall be called Mary. Bring her safe here to the foot of my throne to bless you and me forever!"

There were a few days of rejoicing, of intense piety and happiness and then Mary felt a strange languor creep over her. The hand of the great dark angel called Death, and was laid upon her. She struggled against it, became more gay and playful than ever for a while, but the angel was too strong for her, and gradually she faded away. The roses disappeared from her cheeks, her quick elastic step became slow and heavy, her breathing became very difficult, and she often felt inclined to lie down and rest, though she had done nothing to tire herself. Her mother, for a while, shut her eyes to Mary's illness, but one day, whilst the child was bending over the fire, there came upon her a sharp, dry cough, that shook her and made her tremble all over; and the mother started from her seat and then resumed her work but a great lump gathered in her throat and a big tear slowly filled and fell upon her hand. But when Mary asked: "What is the matter, mamma?" she said nothing, but proceeded with her work.

After a few days he stood beside the

angel and the child. Mary peac-

And now Mary felt a strange longing for solitude. The noise of the

TO BE CONTINUED.