

SO AS BY FIRE

BY JEAN QUONOR

CHAPTER XII

THE WILD WEED'S BLOOM

The two years had passed. It was winter, and Alston Leigh's growing practice had drawn him to Washington where "the season," social and political, was at its height. Committees, conventions, night sessions, contested the field with dinners, dances, functions of every kind, until the gay city seemed to scintillate with electric life, in which the brilliant young lawyer held place with the careless ease of one "to the manner born."

There were more than a dozen invitations claiming his attention this morning as he lingered over a late breakfast at his club. Dr. John Vance, rapidly gaining name and fame in the University Hospital over which he had been called to preside, and who had pulled Mr. Leigh through a spell of typhoid six months ago, sat opposite him, having dropped in for a cup of the "club" coffee after a trying night.

"If you're going to keep that up," he laughed, with a glance at the mail. "I'll have you on my hands again, Leigh."

"No danger," was the answer. "Most of these must go to the waste basket with regrets." But his eye suddenly brightened as he picked up an envelope from the heap. The careful elegance of the seal, the faint tremor of the old Italian handwriting, were tenderly familiar to him. He broke open the envelope to read the few lines within.

"I am chaperoning a party to the Embassy Ball to-night. Be sure to look for us."

"ANNETTE VAN ARSDALE."

"The dear old *mondaine*," he said, softly. "She will never give it up, if she lives to wind out her century." "Aunt Van?" said the doctor, smiling. He had made the old dame's acquaintance during his nephew's illness. "I'd like to get her anti-toxin for Time, Leigh. In some racket with the other young folks, is she?" "Yes, she will be down to night with a crowd to the Embassy Ball. That means work for me, I know. A dozen girls to provide with partners and ices—and Southern girls at that. A Northern girl will accept three dances with complacency, and spend the rest of the evening in happy wallflowerhood—but for a Southerner to sit out a dance partnerless is tragedy indeed. Vance, you will have to bring over some of your young medics, and help me out."

tell of the battle of life. The wide squares, green yet despite the advanced season, were filled with pretty children and their nursemaids, they gave an added holiday air to the scene. As he took a short cut through one of these charming open Lehigh came across a band of these little tots dancing gleefully to the music of a street organ that was undoubtedly under generous and unusual pay, while leaning back against one of the stately old trees, "bossing" the *al fresco* ballet, was a stalwart young gentleman, who, though dressed in the very latest "cry" of sartorial art, had the unmistakable rustic woodland air of Woodworth's immortal heroine.

"Don't stop, daigo—give us another quarter's good thing. The right kids—keep it up. I can stand it as long as you can; it's a darn sight better than that disreputable half-kicking I paid \$8.00 for last night. Why, Judge!" the speaker turned to honest, astonished eyes on Mr. Leigh, and held out a broad, horny hand. "Good morning good morning! You see I'm taking it gay and easy here—like the rest."

"So it seems," said Mr. Leigh, recognizing with a cordiality not entirely professional, one of his most remunerative clients. "Fortunately for us both, you have every reason to take it easy, Mr. Mills."

"I have, sir. I have, thanks to you," was the emphatic answer. "If I hadn't had the golden good luck to put my business in your hands, and then air confounded shysters would have smashed me and my machine finer than my Graystone Grinder can smash stone. But we did them up, didn't we? We came and fit, and conquered, as the schoolbooks used to read, though I ain't much on schoolbooks, I must say. I once turned a pretty gal dead again me by talking schoolbooks to her instead of plain nat'l common sense. Yes, we've got a good thing of it, you and me, Judge, and the way the money is rolling in fur that Graystone Grinder, I don't feel as if you had been paid enough."

"Oh, quite enough, Mr. Mills. My fee was all I could ask—a bargain is a bargain, you know."

"Land, I haven't kept store at a cross roads ten years without learning that," answered Mr. Mills showing his fine white teeth in a friendly smile. "But this here's different, Judge. This here business you did for me, it's a bargain as anybody would find in a day's hunt, as every one knows. Dafty Mills will say, but I've got the double-headed gold end of this business, I kin see. I'd like to make you out a check for another five thousand, Judge."

"Thank you," said Leigh, laughing. "That is real appreciation I know, Mills; but I've had my fee, and that's enough. Luckily, I don't need to fleece my clients. Money coming in too fast for you, eh?"

"Oh, I ain't complaining of that," answered Dafty, with his genial smile. "I know how to salt it down to keep, Judge. I just want to do the fair thing all around."

"You've done it," said Leigh, cordially, "and you will continue to do it I am sure. So salt the rest down, my friend. There will be a Mrs. Mills, no doubt, some of these days, and kids of your own to pay the piper for."

errand, I guess. That poor little girl's father is pretty low down, and for her sake, Judge, knowing she'd ask it if she were here, I'd like him to die free. He wasn't a bad lot at all—just fiery and quick, I've heard, and, like Weanora, didn't have no chance. I am trying to work things with our Congressman for a pardon. Our Governor won't meddle. You see they draw guns pretty quick out our way, and he says if he begun to let down the bars, they would draw them quicker. So I've come to head-quarters."

"Good," said Leigh, cordially. "It's not in my line, but if I can help you any, Mills, call on me at my office. And shaking hands as they reached the end of the square the two men parted.

Perhaps it was the pain, the restless yearning, the stifled hope in his own heart that made his client's story haunt Alston Leigh so persistently. Such a poor, pitiful, painful little story as it was, without any touch of grace or charm except the simple love glowing through the humble pathos, a love that neither poverty nor disgrace nor even death could dim. A convict's daughter! Of course, such things did not count in the same way in the far West, still Mr. Alston Leigh's high-born, high-bred instincts recoiled.

Perhaps he found himself coldly reflecting that it was just as well for Mills, good, honest fellow, that this undesirable innocent had been removed from his upward way. And with this conclusion, Mr. Leigh shook off the softening touch of Dafty's humble romance that night, and proceeded to the Embassy Ball.

It was to be one of the most brilliant functions of this brilliant season, he knew, the regal atmosphere, diffused by centuries of stately precedent met the guests at the wide open doors, where lackeys glittering in royal liveries stood on guard, and the great hall and staircase blazed with color and crest on a background of tropic bloom. Through the gorgeous rooms, with their rich draperies and glancing mirrors and coronating lights, surged a tide of life at its most sparkling, dazzling height. There was a glitter of brilliant uniforms and court costumes, the blaze of jeweled stars and orders, the flash of diamonds on snowy throats, the shimmer of splendid gowns, all that tells of human pride and power and beauty in its most triumphant hour.

Accustomed as he was to such scenes, Alston Leigh was conscious of an unusual thrill to night as he was caught on the sweep of this dazzling wave of life and bore forward. Bright smiles and glances, gracious words, friendly greetings, met him on every side. Here on the high tide the brilliant young barrister had already made for himself name and place.

After due greeting to his hostess he felt it behooved him to remember Aunt Van's mandate and "look out" for her and her pretty flock—for Aunt Van never chaperoned anything else. The matches this charming old *mondaine* had made during her forty odd years of matronly maneuvering would have filled a modest marriage register, but she knew her limitations. "Blood or beauty, my dears! I don't undertake any girl without them. Personally, I like clever women, but, as we all know, men don't."

And with philosophic submission to the inevitable, Mr. Leigh passed on into the great ballroom, prepared to do his duty to Aunt Van's proteges at any cost. The dance was on, the wide stretch of polished floor was a kaleidoscopic whirl of light and life and color that pulsed in rhythmic waves to the thrilling music of a stringed band. As Leigh skirted the swaying crowd looking out for the chaperones enthroned in palm bowers on either side, he became conscious of an eddy in this brilliant sea. Its glittering wave-crest seemed swaying, breaking, about a deep embowered window, where some supreme queen of this gay hour was holding court.

"Wonderfully lovely, isn't she? An odd kind of beauty. And that gown in Parisian perfection."

SANDY

Mr. Maxwell looked up from his letter strewn desk when Brooks entered. "A boy to see you, sir," said Brooks. "I gave orders not to be disturbed."

"Yes, sir; but he insists, says he's sure you want to see him."

"What is his name?" "He won't give it."

"Send him in."

Mr. Maxwell eyed the boy who entered with anything but friendly glances; any other boy would have lost confidence and faltered.

"Well?" "You want an errand boy, sir."

"It was a statement not a question. Who told you?" "Bud Fisher, sir. He says you have fired him."

"And you have come for his place?" "Yes, sir."

Mr. Maxwell with one quick glance took in the entire figure before him from the light reddish hair to the shoes, noting particularly the clean face and hands, freshly blackened boots, and threadbare clothes.

"Huh!" That afternoon Mr. Maxwell's automobile stopped in front of the MacPherson home. Father Martin was just descending the steps. Mr. Maxwell looked much relieved, and called the priest aside.

"Here is some money," said Mr. Maxwell when he finished telling Father Martin of what Sandy was doing. "Do for these people what is needed. By all means get Sandy another pair of shoes, but don't let him know that the money came from me, or he'll work himself sick."

The priest smiled, and took the money, saying: "Your story of Sandy sounds just like the lad. God bless you, sir, for this kindness."

When Mr. Maxwell was gone, Father Martin said to himself: "And this is the man who the people say does no good, gives no charity."

A few years passed on. Sandy grew into a tall boy. He made himself more and more necessary to Mr. Maxwell until, the employer, seeing the possibilities in the boy, took him into his office. Sandy objected. He didn't like the confinement of the office. But Mr. Maxwell told him that it would be only for a time, and was to enable him to learn the interior workings of the business.

At about this time the large brick chimney, 90 feet high began to lean so far to one side at the top that there was grave danger lest it fall upon the surrounding buildings. Mr. Maxwell called the head carpenter and foreman together. All were of one opinion. The chimney would have to be taken down and rebuilt. Sandy was at this meeting, and listened with marked attention. He summed up in his mind the expense necessary to rebuild the chimney, taking into account at the same time how much the mill-hands would lose through the enforced idleness. The men were all poor, and he knew how keenly the loss of wages would be felt. Before he went to sleep that night he did what he had been accustomed to do for years, prayed to the Blessed Mother of God for help.

Next day he examined the chimney, and formed a plan. That evening he spoke to Mr. Maxwell, saying: "I don't think the chimney needs to be taken down," he said. "If a row of bricks can be taken out on the longest side, and a wedge-shaped portion of bricks on two of the sides, and no bricks on the smallest side, then the chimney will regain its straightness."

"That sounds reasonable," said Mr. Maxwell. "I'll send for Burke."

When Burke, the head carpenter, came, Sandy proposed his plan.

times light, lofty and bright, like the mountainous ones that roll on the summer sky. One day in June Sandy came to Mr. Maxwell in the office.

"What's wrong?" said the latter, looking at the young man's face. "There is something I must tell you, sir, and I dislike to, because I fear you will be offended."

"It is best to get disagreeable things off your mind as soon as possible."

"I'm afraid you will feel hurt, sir. I am going to leave you in September."

Mr. Maxwell was silent some time. "Sandy, this is unexpected. Have you thought well over this step?" "Yes, sir."

There was silence again. When Mr. Maxwell spoke the tremble of his voice showed that he was affected. "I don't believe that you will ever work for another man who will do more for you than I will, or who will pay you better."

"I will never work for any man but you, sir."

"You surely aren't going to quit working?" "No, sir; but I am going to work for God. I am going to be a priest."

"And throw away your chances of business success? You are foolish. What of your mother?"

"I have saved enough money to support her, sir."

"Sandy, I have no sons. This business was to be yours some day."

"I had hoped as much one day, sir, long ago; but now I must be a priest. God calls me. But believe me, Mr. Maxwell, that I am so thankful to you, I like you so much, it is hard for me to leave."

"I can't understand it, Sandy."

"That's because you're not a Catholic, sir. To a Catholic a priest is the greatest man in all the world."

"But there are others who can be priests, others who need not leave behind the chances that you leave."

"I believe I must follow where God calls. For some years I have known that I must be a priest, and I have studied at night. I put off telling you until now, because I knew you would feel this way."

Mr. Maxwell used every plea, every argument that he knew, without avail. He went to Father Martin; Father Martin explained to him what a dignity was to be Sandy's. Mr. Maxwell finally said: "I looked upon him as a son, sir. The Maxwell Silk Mills were to be his some day. He is the finest young man I know, and I can't make you understand my feelings."

"I believe I do understand your feeling," said the priest. "I'm sorry for you, Sandy, truly, is a fine young man, but God wants fine young men in His service."

PRAYER

Much thought has been given to the consideration of the subject of prayer, its usefulness and purpose, during the past few weeks. The proclamation of President Wilson setting aside Sunday October 4, as the day on which all believers in God should repair to their houses of worship to offer prayers that peace might soon end the European war called forth many editorials and sympathies in our daily press. Many were found to sneer at the efficacy of prayer; others ridiculed the spectacle of Christianity here and abroad besieging the Throne of Mercy with petitions so much at variance with the mind the latter difficulty has no force against the usefulness or efficacy of prayer. It only bespeaks the dispositions of men's minds and their prejudices. National prejudices blinded some; God was not to blame; neither should prayer suffer aspersion because of this seeming inconsistency. Man did not understand. Religion has appeared throughout the ages under different forms. Grotesque, irrational those forms may have been, but there never yet has been a religion in which prayer of some kind has not been given an important place and admitted as an essential element. With Pagan and Christian, Jew and Gentile, it was all the same. A fact so universal, so constant, must be accounted for. It cannot be attributed to the choice or caprice of individuals or peoples. We must go back farther and search for the reason of it in the nature of man. It will be found to be a want of our nature; a craving that comes out spontaneously from the soul; an office, that springs directly and at once from conscience, teaching man his duty to pray even when the revealed law is not known.

Prayer is petitioning God as it is commonly understood. But it means moreover adoration and thanksgiving. It is natural for man to admire the sublime, the beautiful and the true. The genius of an Aristotle or an Augustine, an Alexander or a Napoleon, a Raphael or a Michelangelo, a Dante or a Shakespeare, impels admiration and respect. One may dislike the man, but one must admire his genius. So in the presence of the sublime and beautiful in nature and in art, we not only feel, but give spontaneous expression to our feeling of admiration and joy. And our intellect reasoning back from effect to cause comprehends there is a God. It cannot comprehend him as a God. It cannot comprehend him as a first cause there must be. If there is such a being He must be infinitely perfect, infinitely powerful, infinitely wise, infinitely good, infinitely beautiful. It knows that itself and everything that is has come from God. Under this consciousness the intellect cannot remain unmoved. Having mounted up to God it bows down in adoration, does homage to the Creative Power from which everything springs—the source of all that is true, sublime and beautiful. This is the prayer of adoration.

Now, the heart of man cannot remain unmoved. The intellect sees the goodness of God; it is manifested in the creation and preservation of everything that exists. And there is an innate persuasion in man that ingratitude should not find a place in the human heart. As the knowledge of God and His attributes calls forth from the intellect of man the prayer of adoration, so gratitude for the blessing of creation and preservation and the gifts dispensed in life by Divine Providence call forth from the heart the prayer of thanksgiving. The intellect knows that mercy is an attribute of God and we are naturally moved to ask pardon for our faults. We know that goodness is an attribute and we are moved to ask Him to manifest His providence in granting us spiritual or temporal favors, or in averting from us spiritual or temporal evils that we fear. This is prayer of petition.

Those who repudiate prayer as a thing absurd or at least useless have in mind generally prayer of petition. Of course atheists and pantheists assert prayer of any kind is illogical and meaningless. The atheist, because he admits no God; the pantheist, because he asserts he is himself an essential part of a necessary whole which therefore it would be folly to adore or praise, and useless to petition for good or against evil. It is not our purpose to answer the objections of those who do not admit a personal God, but to justify Christians who practice prayer of petition. The objections raised against this form of prayer reflect the objectors' notions of Divine Providence and the unchangeableness of the Divine nature. Prayer is incompatible with the unchangeableness of God, is the first objection. Doubtless in any interference on the part of God with the course and order of the world, embodies the second objection.

"Do what you will," says the first class of objectors, "you cannot take away from God His attributes of unchangeableness and eternity. Prayer brings no other good than to bring us nearer to God by meditation and love. God is all-seeing. He knows our desires and our needs and if it be good for us He will satisfy our wishes and provide for our needs. The theory of prayer implies either that we may have wants God does not know, or knowing them He does not know, or providing for them without the impurity of prayer."

There are two phases to this objection. One regards God as an unchangeable being. "He cannot be influenced to change His will. That would be weakness." To this we may answer in the words of St. Thomas Aquinas: "It is one thing to change the will, it is another thing to will a change in anything; for anyone, his will remaining unchanged, may will one thing now and its contrary afterwards." The now and the afterwards, it will be observed, refer to the object, not to the will directing the change. That prayer implies limited goodness on the part of God is equally refuted by the words of St. Thomas: "God gives us many things without our asking them. But it is for our good that He requires our asking some things, for we thus acquire a confidence in Him, and at the same time acknowledge Him as the Author of everything we have." We know from experience that we are apt to forget gifts and benefactors unless we feel that we may need them again. If our every want, spiritual and temporal, were supplied by God as a matter of course, and without asking we would soon forget to remember them as favors, and would come to look upon them as our due. We would forget our dependence on God; the requirement of prayer is our best reminder of it. Absolution from the duty of prayer would lead eventually to the neglect of adoration of God.

The second objection to prayer denies its propriety, because it implies divine interposition or interference with the fixed laws of the universe. This objection is merely specious. The objection assumes that prayer had no place in the original design of the world in the conception of God. It implies that prayer takes God by surprise, as it were, and implores Him to disturb the pre-arranged harmony of things. It implies that divine interposition does not enter into the government of the world, whereas it continually does. And God has decreed from eternity that this interposition would sometimes be in answer to prayers. He thus made prayer enter into and be one of the laws that govern the world. Hear St. Thomas again: "We pray not to change what Divine Providence has disposed, but to ask that what He has disposed would come to pass."

It may be further objected that since some things happening are contingent on prayer, what would be the result if the prayer failed to be put? Would they have happened or would