

LINKED LIVES.

By Lady Gertrude Douglas.

CHAPTER XX.

FAIR FRANCE. "The child needs its mother, And my soul its God." —E. G. de Guerin. "Bon Jour, Mademoiselle. Mademoiselle is up early. It is probably that Mademoiselle desires to assist at Holy Mass."

tances on either side of a broad carriage-road, rise in gigantic splendor, forming, with their leafy boughs, a complete canopy overhead, so thick as almost entirely to shut out from sight the intense deep blue of the August sky. Down the avenue goes Mabel, stepping out in a style and at a rate that is unmistakably British. No French girl would appreciate that amount of bodily exercise—for the sake of pleasure, too, at 6 o'clock in the morning. Outside the ponderous iron gates that close the avenue to the public, Mabel comes to a standstill, and takes a general survey of her surroundings. In front of her, beyond the lane into which the avenue leads, a steep ramp, bordered on both sides by blinding paths, bordered on both sides by shady walnut-trees, and by underwood, chiefly composed of a plant remarkably like Scotch heather, slopes precipitately down to the seashore. The tide is almost at its full height, and the bluest, most sparkling water Mabel ever remembers to have seen in the whole course of her life, is spread out like a sheet of sapphire, upon which are playing the dazzling rays of the morning sunlight, all radiant with prismatic hues. Mabel selects this path, and soon finds herself upon what at Vranaches is known as "La Plage Ste. Anne," probably on account of its proximity to the Chateau bearing that name. Out before her lies the broad sweep of the Atlantic; to the right and left rise the richly-wooded coasts, now with pine-crowned summits, till they seem almost to lose themselves in blue ether, again sloping downward into shady groves of hazel and beach, that kiss the clear waters when at high tide they wash up in some places to the very borders of the woods. At low tide the sands are splendid—a rich yellow in color, and thickly strewn with loveliest shells of innumerable shapes and hues. Following a narrow pathway along a strip of sand, Mabel comes in a few moments upon a bay, which runs inland, still embosomed in woods for three or four hundred yards. The pathway here grows broader, and round the semi-circle formed by the bay, twelve or fourteen feet above the sea, at high water-mark, are built neat wooden sheds, for the purpose of bathing-houses. Of these there are some forty or fifty, more or less commodious, according as they belong either to private families or to the country people, who let them out when required. Steps cut in the rock, or wooded pathways, lead down from these "cabanes" to the water, where the bathing is much more luxurious and enjoyable than at our English water-places. In France few people bathe early in the morning, so that Mabel finds everything very quiet—scarcely anyone is stirring on the shore, or round about it; she has it all to herself, and finding it already early as it is, hot for walking, Mabel seats herself on one of the steps in the rock, as close to the water as possible. "How very lovely!" she thinks—"more lovely than anything in England. What is it, I wonder, that makes it so, for I am sure at Elvanlee the shore is quite as picturesque. I know what it is that makes this so beautiful—it is the coloring, the atmosphere, everything is so wonderfully clear, and the colors are so vivid; but oh! all the same I wish I was back at Elvanlee." A deep sigh, the little English straw hat, with its heavy crape trimming, is tossed almost fretfully aside, while its owner, leaning her head back, stares wistfully into the deep Tyrian blue sky above her. How I hate to be called a Protestant! I suppose they will all cram that down my throat here—a Protestant indeed! When one thinks what their idea of Protestantism is, too—Calvinism, the religion of those "cabanes" to a Presbyterian at once. I won't be called a Protestant! I am not one. How shall I ever make them understand it? Another deep sigh, another impatient gesture—the fair, golden head raises itself slowly, the blue eyes, looking very melancholy, take a long, anxious gaze over the broad expanse of ocean. "Oh! Hugh, dear, dear Hugh, if I was only where you are now! It's so lonely without you, it's so hard to live alone! I thought I was going to be so pleasant to be plain with you, but oh! it's all so changed; I am so lonely, Hugh, so dreadfully, horribly lonely!" Here Mabel takes out a handkerchief, and two or three reluctant tears are brushed away with a good deal of resolution. "Surely Vevea does not believe in that ridiculous nonsense!" (returning to the first train of thought)—"a robe for the Blessed Virgin! I wonder if the foolish, simple creature meant they were going to dress up a doll like the Blessed Virgin?—yes, I suppose she did; and then they will carry it about under a canopy, and kneel down and pray to it—what rubbish! I am sure I do not know why Hugh need ever have imagined I would give a thought to anything so ridiculous! but I wonder how Vevea could have been so taken in, and Mr. Vaughan—ah! that is what is so extraordinary; but perhaps Vevea does not believe in the superstitious nonsense—she can't, that is certain; why did she leave the Anglican Church, then? she could have had all she wanted there." A long, long pause, during which a shadow of deep perplexity settles down upon the grave, thoughtful face. Then two or three more heavy sighs in succession; after which Mabel draws her Common Prayer-Book out of her pocket, together with a very uncommon Ritualistic-looking volume, meant to be an appendix to the former;

and compiled by some reverend gentleman whose wants and aspirations were not to be satisfied by Cranmer's devoted efforts in his behalf. The compiler was no doubt one of those who, while he deprecated the honest use of Catholic books of devotion such as the Golden Manual, or the Garden of the Soul, was not inclined to deprive himself of the prayers therein contained, and had consequently wasted a good deal of time and money in rearranging, re-adorning, curtailing and altering (where he chose to do so) those beautiful devotions, often the compositions of canonized saints, always of men whose choicest strings he was not "worthy to unloose." Mabel takes some time to read through the morning service, at which she has been accustomed every day of her life since her childhood to assist. It is no small trial to her to find herself in a place where the only church is a Catholic one, within twenty miles of her, is a wretched temple, open, of course, on Sunday only, and that in a town five miles from Vranaches. It is not a Church of England, so Mabel does not think she shall make any effort, even when Sunday comes, to go to it. Mabel had not been abroad before, so it did not occur to her, before she left England, that she should not be able to go to church. She imagined, poor Mabel! that her beloved Church of England must be everywhere; indeed, she had never reflected on the subject until, to her consternation on the preceding day, she learned the real state of the case from Genevieve. Probably, had Mabel been aware of it before she left England, she would not have consented to go to Vranaches; but it was now too late to raise any objections. Jessie would not understand them, and Mabel felt it would never do to appear ungrateful for Jessie's kind-ness, so Mabel gave up her mind to bear this additional trial (no insignificant one) with as much courage as she could muster. This was the first morning she had tried a plan she meant whenever the weather permitted her to adopt—to use as her oratory some quiet spot out of doors—the open air, at any rate, would be more devotional than bare walls within. "Pardon! I think you lose your hat," says a musical voice in pretty, broken English behind Mabel. Mabel, fancying herself quite alone, looks round in astonishment, and sees a girl about her own age standing on the sandy platform in front of the cabanes. Turning immediately again to see after her hat, which she has tossed carelessly, as she thought, behind her, Mabel perceives it already floating upon the water just out of her reach, the advancing tide having carried it, unnoticed by herself, from the spot where it fell. "Wait! I will bring you a stick—ah! you give yourself too much trouble," says the pretty voice again, as Mabel takes off her shoes and stockings, and wades into the water after her floating head dress. "I have got it, thank you very much," says Mabel, laughing, as she returns to shore, and nods to her new friend. "Ah! but you have so much wet your feet, and you have no towel; if you will give yourself the trouble to come up here, I will give you one." Thus invited, Mabel, gathering together her belongings, prepares to ascend the rock; but the girl above evidently thinks that what with books, parasol, shoes, stockings, not to speak of the dripping hat, Mabel is overloaded, so she trips down the steps to meet her, and relieves Mabel of more than half her burden. "You read; you have forgot the tide," she remarks, as ascending the steps backwards, she displays to Mabel a pleasant French face, all running over with smiles, with soft dark eyes, dove-like in their exceeding gentleness, yet full of light and brilliancy; a neat little plump figure, elegantly, yet very simply dressed, and a countenance remarkable not for beauty of complexion or feature, for Marie de St. Laurent excels in neither, but exquisite in the serenity and almost childlike innocence of its expression. "What a sweet face! thinks Mabel. "I wonder if she is one of the St. Laurents? I do not know; but she certainly is like the description Vevea gave me last night." Then remembering she has not answered the question addressed to her, she exclaims—"Oh! yes, it was stupid of me. I forgot all about my hat. I should have lost it if had not been for you. I am so much obliged." "Ah, it is not worth while. See, this is our cabane. I will fetch to you a towel," says the young French girl, stopping in front of one of the largest and best-looking cabanes, which she opens with a key taken out of her pocket; then, while Mabel, sitting on one of the lodges of rock, dries her feet, and replaces her stockings and shoes, the girl stands shyly watching her, admiring the fair complexion, and the rich auburn hair she had so often heard of as the peculiar beauty of English women. "You are Inglesh—is it not?" she inquires. "And you are also a stranger here. Could it be that you are Mees Mebelle Forrester?" "Yes, How do you know me?" asked Mabel. "I did think so directly I did see you, breaking off into a low, pleasant laugh. "Ah, I have heard so much of you from Genevieve. Well, then, let me say to you, welcome very much to our dear France!" There is something charmingly gracious in this greeting, as the French

girl, with great simplicity, seizes hold of Mabel's hands, and kisses her on both cheeks. Mabel is surprised, but suffers the salute without opposition, after which she finds voice to say—"I suppose, too, that you are one of the St. Laurents?" "It is right," exclaims the girl gaily. "You have guessed it rightly. I am Marie de St. Laurent, and I do love so much your Inglesh friend, the dear Genevieve. Ah! she so often talks of you. I do feel that I do know you quite well." "Are you going to bathe now?" asks Mabel. "Ah! no; not this early. I will bathe this after-noon, when everybody bathes. You too will bathe, is it not?" "Is it not rather public here for bathing, when all these are full?" objects Mabel, pointing to the cabanes. "I should like to bathe in the morning." "Because?" answers Marie, inquiringly. "Oh! I don't know, only it seems to me it must be disagreeable to have to walk down these steps to the sea in one's bathing dress; and if the tide is out, you must have some way to run." "And in England you do not do that?" "Oh! no; we have bathing-machines, that take us to the water, and we can get into it at once without being seen." "Because you not like to be seen in your costume?" says Marie, looking puzzled. "It is to us quite indifferent. We make up parties de bains, and we do all bathe together, my brothers and my cousins, and my uncles. Oh! it is, I assure you, very amusing." Mabel opened her eyes very wide—she had yet to be introduced to many customs for which she is quite unprepared. "I do not like the idea at all," she protests with British independence. "Because?" reiterates the young French girl, elevating her eyebrows; then she adds, quietly, shrugging her shoulders and laughing her clear, pretty laugh, "but this after-noon you shall see, and then you shall perhaps change your mind. Will you now come with me to my house?—my sisters they shall be so glad to see you." "I am afraid I have not time. I must go home to breakfast," says Mabel. "Ah! your breakfast very early—yes, I remember, as Genevieve; but it is not yet rung out the eight. Will you not come with me a little way? I go to fetch my sisters—they wait for me in the chapel; we shall find there, too, Genevieve." Mabel sees no objection to this, so the two girls leave the sea behind them, Marie leading the way up a steep path through the wood, which winds continually as they advance, gradually opening out and becoming broader, until it reaches the summit, where it concludes abruptly, by a little rustic wooden gate, the entrance into a cemetery attached, so Marie informs Mabel, to the Convent de l'Adoration. "Why do you call it the Adoration," asks Mabel, wondering, as they emerge from the beautifully-kept cemetery, and come in sight of the convent, finely situated on a wooded eminence commanding a splendid sea view. "It is the convent belonging to the nuns of the Perpetual Adoration," answers Marie, reverently, this time speaking in French. "What do they do? Are they like the Poor Clares?" "Oh! no, we have them here, too, in the town, but they are not the nuns of the Adoration. Do you know the Poor Clares?" "I have read a life of St. Claire, and I have a picture of her. I can scarcely believe all of it is true." "Ah! they are wonderful, those Poor Clares," says Marie, earnestly; "if you like we will go to see them one of these days." "Well, but what about the Adoration?—what is it they adore?" asks Mabel, dubiously. Marie casts at her companion a glance of pitying astonishment. "I forget," she replies sorrowfully. "You do not know, of course? They have in their chapel our Good God always to adore." "Always!—our Good God!—what do you mean, Mademoiselle Marie?" asks Mabel, eagerly. "Do you mean something more than we all mean when we say God is everywhere present? I know what you believe about Mass, but this Perpetual Adoration puzzles me. How can God be always there?" "Always, oh! always," repeats Marie, slowly, clasping her hands, and raising her eyes to heaven, with a look of such rapture that Mabel cannot help envying her. "Ah, Mademoiselle Mebelle, do you not know what is the Blessed Sacrament? Do you not know that our Good Jesus is for ever with us on the altar? Well, then, here in this chapel the Blessed Sacrament is for always exposed; and the nuns take it in turns to watch day and night before our Good God, who dwells within them." "Mademoiselle Marie," Mabel stands still, her face flushing, her eyes full of an eager, yearning expression, which goes to the young French girl's very heart—"tell me now—tell me the honest truth—tell me exactly what is your faith about the Blessed Sacrament?" "Why should I not tell you the truth?" answers Marie, simply. "I believe what our Church teaches us in the Catechism—there is no mystery about it, Mademoiselle Mebelle." "But do you all believe exactly the same? Are there no shades of opinion?"

Does God live in all your churches?—all, without exception?—do all your priests say Mass?" "Without doubt, is it the same for all. We shall not be Catholics if we do not believe all the Church teaches." "Well, then, go on—tell me now what is your Church teaches about the Real Presence. I want to know." "We believe that Jesus, our God, in His human and divine nature, is actually present on our altars, so soon as the words of consecration are spoken in the Mass. At the elevation, the bread and wine become to us the actual body and blood of Christ. These we call the Blessed Sacrament, and we are allowed to preserve this Blessed Sacrament in our churches; that is why we talk of the Real Presence, and the nuns of the Perpetual Adoration have for their sublime vocation to adore always this Blessed Sacrament exposed upon the altar; for in their chapel you can see the Sacred Host, while in our other churches Jesus, though present, is hidden in the Tabernacle, which you will always perceive on the altar. Do you now understand?" Mabel can scarcely say the word, her heart is full of a new and indescribable emotion which she is not altogether able to conceal, for, in contrast to this clear statement respecting the Catholic doctrine of the Real Presence, there arises in her mind the confused, mysterious explanation she has hitherto (whenever she has asked questions on the subject) received from the ministers of her own Church (let us say, more correctly, of her own sect); for the Church of England, to do her justice, is perfectly clear about it in her Thirty-nine Articles. "And you, what do you believe?" inquires Marie, hesitating. "I—I—don't know!—that is, some of us—I think we do believe in something like that—not quite the same," stammers Mabel, her sense of truth overcoming her desire not to appear hopelessly Protestant in the eyes of the Catholic girl. "But tell me, Marie," she pursues, eagerly, "you believe Jesus is in there—really, truly, as He was on earth? Why are you not a Nun of the Adoration?" "Ah! the Good God has not given to me that vocation. I will be, perhaps, a Sister of Charity," responds Marie, very simply. "A vocation!" What is that? "I mean a call from the Good God. He does not will that all the world shall be Religious, you know." "How do you know what He wills?" "The Good God speaks to our hearts, and makes our way clear to us by many different means; sometimes it is circumstances that must guide us; sometimes the desire of our parents, but, more certain than all, the advice of our directors. We are always sure to do the will of the Good God if we obey." "Perhaps, though, your director might be wrong. Priests are mistaken sometimes," says Mabel, with a heavy sigh, remembering that she, too, has leaned for years upon the guidance of one man, who has, according to his own account, misled her. "Ah, perhaps—and perhaps! What will you that I say to all the perhaps that may come to pass, Mademoiselle Mebelle?" answers her companion quickly. "The Good God has not made us to be always doubting and wondering what is right and what is wrong. Ah! life would be a misturture if it would be so. We must have more confidence in the Good God. We know that His Spirit is with His Church, and if we will be but simple and honest in making our hearts known to the priests, who have the charge of our souls, we need not be at all afraid. The Good God will not allow us to be misguided." "Suppose one of your priests, in whom you trust so much, were to change his religion, suppose he were to become—well, say a Protestant?" "Ah! that is not possible," responds Marie. "Mon Dieu! that is not possible." "Well, but just suppose it. What would you do? I particularly want to know." "Mon Dieu! I would be at despair. I would pray much for him. Ah! ciel, how can you suppose a thing so dreadful?" "It would shake your faith, though, would it not? Should you believe everything he had taught you just as before, or would you begin to be a little upset?" "O Grand Dieu, no, no, no, never!" exclaims Marie, clasping her hands in an excited manner. "He did not give to me my faith. My faith it comes to me from our Mother, the most Holy Church. She would not be less dear to me because one of her priests was unfaithful to her."

"Then you would not follow his advice; you would not allow his influence to have any weight with you for the future—what would you do then? you would be obliged to take another director." "Yes, without doubt; but it would not matter. God's Holy Church would still have thousands of good priests left. Monsieur le Curé is my director; if such a thing as you say could be possible, which it is not—but if so—well, he would go away, another would come in his place, and he would be quite as good to direct me. I should have in him all confidence, and I would grieve much for the poor heretic, but I would have no more confidence in him; but because why you ask such horrid question?—ah! it is all impossible." "I was curious to know your ideas, that's all. Is this the chapel? May I come in? I should like to see it—that is, if the service is over. I cannot join in your service, you know." "The Masses are all finished, there will be this morning no more," answers Marie; "yes, come in and let us say un petit bon jour an Bon Dieu—ah! Mademoiselle Mebelle," adds the warm-hearted French girl enthusiastically, and the earnest longing of her heart speaks through her glistening eyes, "if you could know how happy you would be in our Church! I am sure your heart wants the Good God! He is so good! When you have been for a little time in our dear France, you will see how hard it will be for you to live without Him." "What makes you think we are without Him?" says Mabel in a sharply nettled tone. They are standing on the threshold of the little chapel, Marie looking upwards, following with her eyes the rising of a lark towards the glowing sunlight. She does not seem to have heard Mabel's question, but presently murmurs more to herself than to Mabel, *A l'enfant il faut sa mer, et mon cœur il faut son Dieu!* Then she enters the chapel, and Mabel follows her. TO BE CONTINUED.

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