

Our Serial.

MURIEL'S KEY-NOTE.

BY AGNES GIBBERNE.

CHAPTER III.

HEAT.

The evening had come to an end, and the guests were gone. Mrs. Bertram sat turning her diamond bracelet round her white wrist, now and then glancing anxiously towards Lillias, who was leaning back with a fatigued air upon one of the couches. Lillias was easily overdone, and the tired expression did not suit her face, which wanted warmth at the best of times. Muriel stood in a spiritless attitude looking through an album; and a square-browed sleepy-eyed lad of seventeen or eighteen, having planted his chin upon his two hands, seemed lost to the outer world. Nobody knew much of Arthur Bertram's inner life. He was a clever boy, some said, but a very silent one.

Mr. Rivers, returning from the hall, whither with old-fashioned courtesy he had accompanied his guests, broke in upon the *tablan vivant*. He took his stand under the glass chandelier, and Muriel knew by the working of his long bleached whiskers that his state of mind was the reverse of serene.

"That fellow has been in Claverton to-day, Mary." The words were jerked out with a sort of indignant bark. Muriel always recalled at such moments the nursery story, handed down from her infancy days, wherein the tiny Muriel was reported to have complained, "I not like grandpa's puff! I puff! when he am angry." But nobody had ever ventured to tell that tale to Mr. Rivers himself.

"He does not often come," said Mrs. Bertram.

"He had better not. What brought him to-day?"

This was directed to Muriel.

"John, do you mean, grandpapa?"

"There is no need to breathe breath over the fellow's name. Of course."

"I do not know what brought him."

"Speak the truth, if you please."

Muriel flushed. "I never thought of asking," she said, answering composedly, though a certain trembling assailed her. "We were talking of other things."

"You were!—were you?"

"Lillias looks quite poorly," interposed Mrs. Bertram adroitly. "Come, darling—you are so pale and tired out—I must have you away to bed directly. And, Arthur, it is past your time. Muriel, you had better not stay up late."

Mrs. Bertram saw Arthur out of the room, and followed with Lillias. Muriel had rather a forsaken feeling. She would have liked at least the support of her mother's presence. Her attempt to say good-night was checked, as she expected.

"Stop, if you please. We must understand each other first. I allow no insubordination in my household."

"I don't wish to disobey you, grandpapa," said Muriel.

"You have done so. I forbade you absolutely to hold intercourse by word or by letter."

"I have not seen him till to-day, or written to him at all. I could not pass him by, grandpapa," she said again.

"You have nothing more to do with him. John Rivers is grandson to me no longer."

"O grandpapa! And you used to love John so dearly."

The words broke from her without previous intent, and she was half-frightened when they were said.

The muscles round his mouth twitched sharply. Was there still some tenderness left in him towards this only child of his beloved and lost eldest son—this once-idolized darling of his old age? For six or seven and twenty years of his life John Rivers had borne no blemish in his grandfather's eyes. Men had said that, quarrel with whom Mr. Rivers might, here at least was a tie which death alone could sever. But the closer the union, the more complete the rupture when it came. A lump of dough may be lightly divided, and lightly pressed into one again. A mass of iron can be parted in two only by mighty force, but once so parted no mere exercise of strength will make the two halves one again. Nothing short of the furnace heat can bring about that end.

"John Rivers is nothing to me now," sternly replied the old man.

"If you meet him, you are to pass him by as a stranger. You understand me—as a stranger. What people think and say is a matter of utter indifference to me. I care for one thing, and that is that I will be obeyed."

The words came with slow emphasis. But Mr. Rivers did not wait for an answer as Muriel expected, still less did he insist on any promise from her. He walked hastily out of the room, and she could not see the cold damp which sprang to his forehead—could

not know of the gnawing pain below—could not realize how her exclamation had struck home. Verily John Rivers had been the treasure of the old man's heart, and love cannot easily die.

As well that she could not. She would only have hoped, to be disappointed. Wrath and pride were stronger than the pain, and overmastered the love. If they could not kill it, they thrust it out of sight, and reigned rampant themselves. Mr. Rivers was a man of utterly undisciplined character. He had been spoiled in infancy, ill-managed in youth, unaccustomed through life to endure any manner of opposition in his own household. In his wife he had found a meek unreasoning slave; and from his daughter, Mrs. Bertram, he received unqualified submission. Other members of his family were less easily managed. But the headstrong temper and haughty self-will, which had ever been the prominent points in his nature; were a trouble to all about him, and strengthened rather than decreased with age.

"Mary," he said abruptly at breakfast next morning, "I disapprove of the habit that these girls have, of walking alone in country lanes, and being out after dusk."

"It is not right," said Mrs. Bertram, whose settled principle of action was never to disagree with her father. "Lillias would not think of such a thing, but Muriel likes to please herself."

"I forbid it for the future."

Muriel was a good deal disturbed. She inherited her grandfather's strength of will, and could not easily see her plans overthrown.

"Indeed, grandpapa, I come home generally as quickly as I can," she said hastily. "But at this time of the year it is not possible always to be back in full daylight."

"You must give up whatever interferes with such a rule."

"I could take the lower road, if you like; that is not so lonely."

"You will take neither by yourself, except in daylight."

"There is Mrs. Fielding's working-party every week."

"Then you may tell Mrs. Fielding that I do not allow you to go till the days are longer. Anything else?"

"The Wednesday prayer-meeting in the school-room."

Mrs. Bertram's look said, "You have done it now." The white framework round Mr. Rivers' face had a writhing movement.

"School-room prayer-meeting! So Claverton is to be favored with that sort of thing! Humph! Were you aware of this, Mary?"

"Muriel generally keeps her out-of-door employments to herself," said Mrs. Bertram with affected indifference. "We have not much in common."

Muriel scarcely knew how to bear that. The small keen blade went deep, and she could have sobbed there and then with almost agony. For how true it was. Mother and daughter, sister and sister, had almost nothing in common. Whose fault was it?

"Look here," said Mr. Rivers, flushing up into a towering passion, and bringing down his fist upon the table with a blow which made his woman-kind start and whiten—"Look here, Muriel! Once and for all, this is to be given up. If you want school-room prayer-meetings, you may go and get them elsewhere. I'll have nothing to do with these new-fangled notions. Just the sort of nambly-pamby way he began with his crazed Methodism. I'll not have it in my house! So there's an end of the matter. If that is to be Mr. Fielding's style, I shall have a word to say to him. Curate, is it?—then the sooner the curate minds what he's about the better. You may be as religious as you like, in the proper way. A little more religious obedience would do you no harm. But I won't have you running after school-room prayer-meetings, and the methodical rubbish of that smooth-faced young curate. So there!"

The closing "puff" and convulsive writhe of the old man's moustaches were decisive. He pushed back his chair roughly, and disappeared into the garden.

Arthur cast a half-sorrowful glance at his sister's face, while Mrs. Bertram only remarked—"You brought it on yourself."

"I could not have said anything else," Muriel answered stiffly.

"I beg your pardon. You were not in the least obliged to particularize."

"I supposed grandpapa knew about the prayer-meeting."

"No one was likely to mention it to him; and it has only been begun a few weeks. I always objected to your going. You have done Mr. Fielding no good. And you will get yourself into serious difficulties, if you take up this wilful mood. There is not much goodness in it to my mind. But people who go to prayer-meetings don't always think it needful to keep their

tempers at home. Lily, dear, I want you in the drawing-room."

Mrs. Bertram's words contained a home-thrust; and the softened tone of her last sentence, compared with what went before, gave one of those contrasts which always set Muriel's heart throbbing with a bitter jealous pain. It was the old pain which she had had to bear from earliest childhood, which never lessened, and to which she never grew used. Her love and admiration for her beautiful mother—despite that mother's moral bluntness—grew with her growth, and strengthened with her increasing strength; but they met with no return.

THE RELIGIOUS PAPER IN THE FAMILY.

For many years the writer has had his attention directed to the influence which the reading of a family has upon its members. He has been a school-teacher, and after that a pastor in charge of different churches. There are the same general facts in different congregations. Ignorance and intelligence are contrasts which appear in pastoral intercourse, and suggest the different work to be done in the different families. I have found by long experience that the reading families require far less attention of the pastor than those that don't read. They are far less complaining and fault-finding, for the good reason that they have something to read about and think about and talk about, other than the village gossip, or whether the minister visits them less than the family over the way. I have come to regard the introduction of a religious paper into a family as the best thing I could do for it, socially and morally as well as spiritually. And nowhere does a little scattering of good seed show such large results, as when some thoughtful member of the church takes the pains to introduce a good religious paper into a family that has not had one before. The present of a religious paper for a year, is the best Christmas or New Year's gift that you can make to a family that is without it. The influence of the kind of reading is soon manifest in the home life, by the increased refinement of old and young. And the reading family is sure to be more interested in the work of the church than the non-reading family. There is no material harder to work upon than an ignorant man, who is often obstinate (or as he is sometimes called, "pig-headed") in proportion to his ignorance.

I know of two farmers in the country who live side by side, who are equally prosperous in worldly things, both out of debt and well-to-do in the world, and both members of the same church, but the two men are of very different value in society. One reads a Sunday sensational newspaper, which he takes because it is cheap, but its influence is to turn him away from everything of a religious character. It is the time novel for an older class of boys. The other farmer has long had *The Evangelist* in his family, and most of the time some other leading religious paper. The value of each of these farmers to the church is as diverse as their reading. The sensational Sunday paper is not an aid to family religion. There is no family altar in that house, and not one of the family—parent or child—is in the Sabbath-school. The other home takes its character from its reading. The family altar is never neglected; the children go with their father and mother to the house of God; they take their places in the Sunday-school; and the pastor, as he sits at the communion table, has before him the beautiful sight of a whole family united as members of the same church.

The way these two men support the Gospel shows the same influence. One gives three times as much as the other, and in benevolent contributions to the various boards of our church, ten times as much! Much of this difference is owing to the different papers that are read in their families.—*The Evangelist*.

SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD!

Money is valuable; but not the most valuable thing in this world. It is not worth as much as life, or health, or a good character, or contentment, or peace of mind. Money will buy a good house and home here, but not a home in a heavenly mansion. Money will not open the eyes of the blind, or unstap the ears of the deaf, or restore life to the dead. In seeking money, therefore, which, in its place, is a great blessing, why not seek first the heavenly inheritance which neither change, panic, nor even death can take from us? "All that a man hath will he give for his life." Mr. Vanderbilt would have promptly assented to this if he could have added a score of years to his probation. Almost any one in his circumstances, with his apparent health, would do the same. Money is worth having, and life is worth living, but treasures in Heaven and eternal

life are worth far more. Millions and hundreds of millions of people are to-day seeking treasures on earth which they cannot keep or take with them, and are trying to "live always" when they know that death is very near. Is it wise thus to do? Is it safe to make all our investments here? Perhaps you have made your will. That is a wise and very proper thing to do. But what is your will—signed, sealed and witnessed—in regard to eternity? What about your happiness there? Have you attended to that matter? In the Probate Court of Heaven your affairs will ere long be adjusted, and there can be no appeal or postponement in that hour. It is better to be bankrupt here, with an inheritance there, than to have millions here and nothing worth having to show on the day of judgment. To-day, to-day, listen to the Saviour's voice saying, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you." The heavenly inheritance is now offered to you, freely—without money and without price. Precious holiday gift—better than silver or gold, houses or land. Will you accept it—to be yours forever?

INFORMATION FROM GOD.

God, in His Word, has informed this world that He "will render to every man according to his deeds." He has explained this general statement under two heads. The first is that "unto them who, by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality," he will render "eternal life." The second head is that "unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness," He will render "tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil." God further informs us that "He hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained," and that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every day receive the things done in His body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." These items of information, upon the authority of God Himself, present very grave matters for human consideration. The Bible never gets up a false scare, in order to awaken our fears and thereby influence our conduct. God is in earnest in all that He says, and means just what He says. When He says that "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap," He means it, and He can and will ultimately make good His own meaning. It is a terrible mistake, practically, to assume that God is indifferent to human conduct, and that opposite moral courses will finally lead to the same result. It is "godliness," and that only, which is "profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." We must gain this "godliness," or we shall never go to Heaven. If we expect to get there without it, we shall in the end find ourselves mistaken. The present life is the time to seek and secure this "godliness." There is no intimation in the Bible that this can be done in the next life.

RANDOM READINGS.

The step from knowing to doing is rarely taken.

We want not time, but diligence, for great performances.

Men's evil manners live in brass; their virtues we write in water.

There are innumerable souls that would resent the charge of the fool's atheism, yet daily deny God in very deed.

The man who will make most progress into new realms is the one who can plant his foot firmest on his present ground.

Slippery places may fling up the heels of great giants, and little temptations may overthrow well-grown Christians.—*Lee*.

The great dependence through life, with most men, is on to-morrow, and to-morrow is still before, while it never will be overtaken.

Do not wait till you be holy ere you cast your confidence on the Saviour; but cast your confidence on him now, and you shall be made holy.—*Dr. Chalmers*.

Cromwell said that it was his aim not only to strike while the iron was hot, but to "make the iron hot by striking!" Some men wait for opportunities, and others make opportunities and circumstances wait upon them.

Brownlow North has well said, "Never believe what you feel, if it contradicts God's Word." So also, we might add, "Never believe that the Holy Ghost tells you to feel or say or do anything that contradicts Scripture and common sense. Never charge the Holy Ghost with inspiring anything foolish."



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