

Our Serial.

MURIEL'S KEY-NOTE.

BY AGNES GIBBY.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Muriel found the Manor very quiet after the busy Rectory. The children were out of sight in upstairs back regions. Arthur was silent as usual. Mrs. Bertram rarely opened her lips, save in the presence of Lillias. At all other times she wore a look of gnawing unhappiness. When Lillias could see her, she never failed in cheerfulness.

The "day or two" lengthened into more. Muriel found that, useful as she might be at the Rectory, there was greater need for her here. Lillias was taken worse than first evening, and the doctor somewhat plainly intimated that the end could be not far distant.

Perhaps Lillias knew this fact as well as he, though it was not repeated to her. She seemed singularly calm, not joyous, but peaceful. Reserve was strong still, and she spoke little. Her clinging to Muriel was, however, unmistakable. To Muriel's surprise, Mrs. Bertram was the first to decide that her duty lay here.

Those closing days of life lasted some two weeks, and passed very quietly. The nursing had little about it of a painful character—there being almost no acute pain, and only occasional difficulty of breathing. The prostration was great, yet Lillias suffered less than John had done in that way.

Muriel had opportunities enough for acting upon her uncle's warning. Now that she was on the alert, she found, by the power of the constant temptation to treat her mother coldly, to show no sympathy, to answer curtly, how strong the old habits were. Praying and striving she began to show a gentler manner; and whether through this or some other means, Mrs. Bertram likewise seemed different. Of the devoted tenderness showered upon Lillias, Muriel received none, but Mrs. Bertram certainly leant upon her at this time, and seemed to appreciate her help.

Lillias remarked upon the change one day to Muriel. "I always thought it would be so," she said.

"It is not much yet, Lily—except that she finds me perhaps a degree less repulsive."

"You were not that. But your manner to her now is so unlike what it was."

Then Lillias also had noticed this defect.

"I never intended to be unkind to mamma."

"No, only chilly. You had reason, of course; but I like things better as they are."

"I think I had no reason—either for that, or for being cold to you."

"We didn't understand one another. I used to long for your help, and never expected to have it."

"Help in what?"

"Why, Muriel—in—don't you understand? I knew I might die young, and I wanted to be ready."

"And you wanted me to help you?"

"Yes, oh for a long while. I never could ask you. It isn't my way. Only I did so wish you would speak to me."

"I never knew." But if it had not been for a barrier of, in some measure, Muriel's own raising, she might have known. "How wrong I was," she said in a low voice.

"That is nothing now. You have been a dear sister to me lately—since I have been ill. Everything feels different."

"What things?"

"Everything."

"You were not ready once," said Muriel gently. "Are you now?"

A bright color rose in Lillias pale face. "Yes," she said.

"Quite ready?"

"Yes. I am not afraid," said Lillias with difficulty. "I can't talk much, you know. But Jesus is my Saviour."

"O Lily, I am so thankful."

"Did you not feel sure?"

"Not quite. I had hopes."

"I think He is mine. I do think I am His," said Lillias, tears filling her eyes, and Muriel felt satisfied. She had longed for just such an assurance.

A day or two later, when Lillias had been ill for some hours, and was lying apparently asleep, she suddenly looked up, and said,

"Mamma dear, Muriel must be everything to you now."

"Lily, Lily—hush!—don't," said Mrs. Bertram.

"Just this once," pleaded Lillias. "I will not say much. But, mamma, you will let Muriel be with you, and do things for you. She is so sweet. She has been so good to me. You won't keep her off from you. Yes, I know Muriel is here. I like to have you together—and I want you to be very much together—by and by."

Neither of the two could answer her. "It seems unkind to make you both

cry. But I should like you afterwards to remember my wish. Mamma dear, you would do anything for me. And—I know the reason."

"What reason?" Mrs. Bertram asked in a choked voice.

"About papa—about your not liking Muriel to look quite so Eastern," said Lillias delicately. "I asked uncle Chesney, and he told me—and Muriel knows too. But she can't help it. God save her that dear dark face of hers. I love it so—and you must love it too for my sake. She is handsomer than your white-faced Lily ever was."

Mrs. Bertram shook her head.

"But that doesn't matter. Nothing of that sort matters. It does not matter, mamma darling. That isn't the great question."

"No," said Mrs. Bertram mechanically.

"Things look different when one gets near the end. If I didn't know the love of Jesus, nothing could make me happy. And now I do know it, nothing can make me unhappy. Muriel will come after me, and you must too—you must too, mamma. I wanted just to say a few words."

And Lillias smiled at them, and took a hand of each, and pressed them together with all the little strength she had. Then she dropped asleep, holding still a hand of each.

They stood, one on each side of her bed—united thus, with Lillias for their bond. Was it verily to be so in the future?

But a change passed over the frail material bond. The grasp loosened, and the breath faltered. And though they knew not when the moment was, it came to pass that Lillias Bertram in her sleep passed quietly away.

It was fearfully sudden—so everybody said. Only it had not been sudden to Lillias herself. Muriel grieved, but had comfort in her sorrow. Mrs. Bertram's agony was terrible to see. For a week she showed herself inconsolable, would not eat, would not sleep, and wept unceasingly.

But she did not spurn Muriel. Her child's dying wish had taken effect, and Mrs. Bertram in her distress actually turned to her eldest, trusted in her, leant upon her. Heart-love was another matter; kisses were cold still; but Muriel found that she might step into the office of comforter. Any return to the Rectory was out of the question. Mrs. Bertram refused to go there herself, and declared she should die of melancholy if left by Muriel. And Muriel was thankful to be wanted.

The funeral over, Mrs. Bertram returned slowly to her usual state. Long-continued and deep sorrow was not consistent with her somewhat shallow nature. The grief was a tempest while it lasted, but the storm spent itself, the tears wept themselves away, and interest in every day life crept back into Mrs. Bertram's heart.

No one could again be to her what Lillias had been. There was a grave in the mother's heart, and a wound which could not quickly heal. She was often very unhappy, very depressed, very fractious, but she was not crushed. What sorrow she felt showed quickly at the surface, and was not overwhelming.

Moreover, she began to show some interest in the matter of Muriel's appearance and dress—nay, even to discuss what colours were the best for modifying "that dreadful complexion." Muriel was willing to discuss, wear, or do anything for winning of a pleased smile from her mother.

UNAPPRECIATED.

If there is one thing which more than anything nobody likes, it is to be passed by unnoticed—not a word spoken, not a look given. Even a dog likes attention, and a cat will rub her sides against you for recognition and purr.

But for a man or woman to toil from day to day in a humble calling, and receive no special notice, not even a "thank you" from any one, makes the heart sick. If one is faithful in any service he wants assurance that he is appreciated, and a word of genuine appreciation, "lifts the stone from the heart," and does more good than the giver ever can know. From the minister to the miner, from the statesman to the boot-black, all like to be (I will not say praised) noticed, and assured that their services are doing somebody good.

There is a servant, dutiful, prompt, honest, careful in all her round of toil—sweeping, dusting, baking, washing, ironing; no fault to be found (I) and all the family are made comfortable by her diligence; but all "take it for granted" that, because her wages are promptly paid, she is satisfied. And yet how her heart longs for what is better than wages, just one little word of deserved commendation. She is no "eavesdropper," but if she could accidentally even overhear her mistress saying to her lord: "What a 'jewel'

our girl is, she lightens my burdens and assumes my cares, so that life is a real joy;" or even if she would say, "It was very kind in you, Margaret, to do that little job for me!" how proud she would feel.

And the teacher in the day school. She likes her calling, and gives satisfaction to parents and pupils, and does her best to instruct, to win and improve her scholars. But if only the parents would drop in occasionally, and thereby show an interest in her work, even if not a word were spoken, that every act would stimulate her to do even better work, if possible; at least it would say, "They do care for me."

And that clerk in the store. He is honest, trusty, manly with his employer, and genial and gentlemanly and winning toward all the customers, and he performs all the daily routine of work ungrudgingly and uncomplainingly; but he is only a clerk! He would like, O so much, if his master should say: "John, it is very gratifying to see how you draw customers, and the order and neatness of the goods on the shelves." It is what he deserves, but how seldom are such words spoken!

You are at the depot, about to start on a journey. There, in the "cab," waiting for the signal from the conductor to start, sits the engineer. He has a family, and as the train "pulls out" and passes the suburbs, he bows to a waving hand or throws a kiss to the little one at the window, and then, with "eye on the track and hand on the throttle," plunges on with his hundreds of "living freight," "on time" at every station, obeying every order, and caring for nothing else, for the rest of the trip, but to do his duty. How brave, how faithful to every trust, and how much the safety and comfort of all on board rest upon his vigilance. Yet who of all the hundreds of thousands that he lands safely and promptly cares for or thinks of that begimed servant? Who, except dear wife and child?

And away out on the frontier is a home missionary. He has come from the east, refusing good offers, in a spirit of self-denial, to look after the "scattered sheep" on the prairies, and gather them into the fold. He has taken an intelligent and devoted Sabbath-school teacher, whom the "superintendent knew not how to spare" as his companion for life. They go where the people are. The town is small, country new, people poor, saloons in full blast, settlers rapidly "taking claims," but all around in chaos. He must reduce confusion to order, organize a church and Sabbath-school, and his wife must be his assistant in superintending it. He must visit, study as he can; must be sexton, pastor, superintendent, all in one; prepare to erect a church edifice, do the soliciting, collecting, let the job, and oversee its construction; visit the sick, attend the "funeral of a man killed in a drunken row," call on every new settler, give his family a welcome and invite them to church, and a "thousand and one" things that a settled pastor in the east never knows of. But he is only a "home missionary," and his wife "only the wife of a pioneer minister." "That's all." He is too busy to know or care whether anybody else is concerned in his work. But she is "dead and buried, and forgotten" by the world at large. Her toils, tears, prayers, self-denials are known only to God, and her history of sacrifice and service will never be written, much less read, in this world. She has neither salary nor "commission," and yet she toils with her husband, and does her work just as faithfully, and finally wears out her life and dies.

"Unwept, unhonored and unsung." How it would have cheered her in many a lonely hour, when her husband was gone to "fill his appointment," and she sat alone in her "cabin" or "dug-out" or in later years, watching over a sick child, could she have had a few "crumbs of comfort" from one of her well-to-do acquaintances of former years.

To each and all of these, and others outside the classes here named, let me say, You may not be appreciated now, except by very few. But do not be discouraged. Your Lord and Master was not appreciated when on earth, and "should the servant be greater than his lord? If no other eyes sees, and no other tongue encourages, and no other heart sympathizes, he does. All your toils and trials and tears and prayers are known to him, and by-and-by he will say: "Come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."—New York Evangelist.

Good thoughts are no better than good dreams, unless they are executed.

A torn jacket is soon mended; but hard words bruise the heart of a child.

LOVE IS OF GOD.

If we could only know what the love of God is toward us it would greatly strengthen us in this grace. One way of coming to this knowledge is to love those things which are lovely in his sight. We are thus drawn by laws of our mental and moral constitution into his very presence. We thus live in Him. His life is evermore our own. In this sense love may be said to be "of God."

How may we know those things which are, and those which are not, lovely in his sight?

Reverently seek for this knowledge in His word.

Prayerfully consider what tends to divert our minds from such study.

Continually keep our hearts in the spirit of self-dedication.

Patiently wait for this knowledge, willing to endure any tests God may appoint.

Earnestly seek Christian fellowships, while we try to discover those things which He loves.

Faithfully pursue the path of obedience, omitting no duty, however trivial it may seem.

Do all this in the Holy Spirit's guidance, assured that whoever asks for that guidance will receive it.

Having clearly discerned those things in which God takes delight, and having seen their excellency ourselves, nothing is more natural for a regenerated heart than to choose them with an habitual life. And this will very soon lead us into the enjoyment of blissful love. And the more we love Him, the clearer will be our view of His love to us, while the converse will be equally true. Hence, our Lord said: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me he shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself unto him."

WHO HIS OWN SELF BARE OUR SINS.

Some time ago a war raged in India between the English and a native monarch named Tippoo Sahib. On one occasion several English officers were taken prisoners, among them one named Baird. One day a native officer brought in fetters to be put on each of the prisoners, the wounded not excepted. Baird had been severely wounded, and was suffering from pain and weakness. A gray-haired officer said to the native official:

"You do not think of putting chains upon that wounded young man?"

"There are just as many pairs of fetters as there are captives," was the answer, "and every pair must be worn."

"Then," said the officer, "put two pairs on me. I will wear his as well as my own."

The end of the story is that Baird lived to regain his freedom, lived to take that very city, but the generous friend died in prison. He wore two pairs of fetters. But what if he had worn the fetters for all in the prison? What if, instead of being a captive himself, he had been free and great, and had quitted a glorious palace to live in their loathsome dungeon, to wear their chains, to bear their stripes, to suffer and die in their stead, that they might go free? Such a thing has been done. For all who receive the grace of God's Son the chains are struck off and the prison is thrown wide open.—Edward Judson, D. D.

"WHERE ARE YOU GOING."

There was an apprentice in London once, who made an appointment with another boy to spend a particular Sunday evening in folly. He was hurrying along to meet his companions, and at a turning of the street he met his master's wife.

"William," she said, "where are you going?"

William told her. Then the good woman said to the lad: "That would be a wrong way to spend the day of rest. Come to God's house with me."

The lad consented and went; and that night Jesus, who has the hearts of all men in his keeping, caused the minister to choose for his text: "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" The lad heard the voice of his Saviour in the words, and God gave him grace to open his heart and let the Saviour in. He became a Christian, and then a student of the Bible, and in the end of the great South Sea Missionary and martyr, Williams.

RANDOM READINGS.

The aching head may cease to throb when laid upon the softest pillow for human pain—"God knows!"

Keep your conduct abreast of your conscience, and very soon your conscience will be illuminated by the radiance of God.

I have been benefited by praying for others; for by making an errand to God for them I have gotten something for myself.—Rutherford.

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