

Our Serial.

MURIEL'S KEY-NOTE.

BY AGNES GIBBERNE.

CHAPTER XX.

ANOTHER LETTER.

It was a chilly afternoon, or the invalid felt it so. A small fire burnt in the drawing-room grate. Lilies lay upon the sofa beside it, colourless as a snowflake. The red gleams of fire-light fell alike upon her and upon Muriel's bent head, as she read aloud from a book. Suddenly Muriel glanced up, and met her sister's gaze.

"I never can look at you without your looking back at me," observed Lilies.

"It is my way. I always have the feeling of being watched. Do you like this book, Lilies?"

"I don't think I heard much."

"Too busy with your own thoughts?" asked Muriel, trying to be cheerful.

"I was wondering what you had been crying about this morning."

"A little storm clears the air sometimes."

"Yes, but something must have happened."

"I am wondering what you were thinking about just now," said Muriel.

A faint colour rose in Lilies' cheeks. "Nothing particular," she said. "I was only thinking—it seems strange that any one should not love you."

Muriel gave her a kiss, and sat silent.

"You are thinking of mamma," she said presently. "It was that—partly this morning."

"Was it? Are you sure?"

"Yes—partly."

"What did she say?"

"Never mind. Something brought up the feeling, and I could not help myself."

"She will care for you more, some day."

"I don't think so," Muriel spoke quietly, remembering her mother's injunctions. The sisters had not exchanged a word on this subject since childhood days. It had been a matter for stormy jealousy on the part of Muriel, not long before.

"She will," repeated Lilies. And then, with an effort, "Promise me never to leave off loving her."

"How could I?" asked Muriel.

"No, I suppose not. She is your mother as much as she is mine. Only—things are different for you."

"Lilies, do you know why?" Muriel asked the question suddenly, bluntly.

"No. What do you mean?"

"I thought you might know?"

"No. Mothers often have favourites, don't they?"

"Not often—I hope," said Muriel slowly. "There is a reason, and Sybel knows it—but I do not."

"If mamma wished me to know it she would have told me," said Lilies.

"Never mind. You will be more to her some day, Muriel. I am sure of it."

Muriel looked at her silently. There was something a little strange in Lilies' manner.

"What do you mean? Why do you think so?" she asked.

Lilies gave no answer at first. In a few seconds she said, in a low voice, "You will—have to comfort her. Poor mamma!"

Muriel did not know what to answer. She dared not take it for granted that she understood Lilies' meaning, yet the words gave her a thrill of hope and pain. Before she had found an answer, Mr. Rivers walked in, holding two letters. One he tossed into Muriel's lap. The other he kept unopened, his features working excitedly the while.

"What does Chesney say?" he demanded, having recognized post-mark and handwriting.

"Sybel is very poorly, and she has asked uncle Chesney to write to me."

"You can read the letter aloud."

The "can" was equivalent to a "must." Muriel knew it to be so, and she knew also that her uncle would not mind. He would have written just as frankly to Mr. Rivers himself. Her hesitation lasted only a moment, but there came an impatient "Make haste, will you!" in that space. Muriel obeyed.

"MY DEAR MURIEL.

"Sybel is so poorly that I have taken up pen in her stead. She has done too much lately, and is quite laid by. The great thing now is to keep her from worry."

"We enjoyed our visit at the Rectory extremely. Sybel no doubt sent you particulars, but she says she has not written lately. The boys are fine little fellows—and Connie is a dear child. Sybel could not always stand seeing her. The child is rather like you know—at least Sybel thought so. I saw the resemblance less, but it helped to upset Sybel, poor girl."

"What on earth does he mean?" demanded Mr. Rivers.

"Sybel thinks Connie like the

twins," said Muriel. "She told me so one day."

"Chesney might as well have said what he meant. Go on."

"I am not satisfied about John. He seems thoroughly below par—no strength for anything. I don't know what has come over him. Nothing makes Rose nervous. John nearly fainted away the evening before we left—no reason for it that any one knew. Rose did not seem anxious, though she said she had never seen him do such a thing before—but Sybel and I do not like it. Could you not get leave to walk over there, and send us word how he is?"

"No," thundered Mr. Rivers.

"We have no chance of hearing otherwise. I have just seen your aunt Constance. A good deal altered, but I should have known her anywhere. She cried at seeing me, poor thing. Her only boy seems a great care to her—rather a troublesome youth. She has lost all her old liveliness."

"Let Sybel have a cheerful letter from you. That will do her more good than anything. Baby is well. We are going to stay with the Irwins next week, if Sybel is fit to be moved."

"Your affectionate uncle, CHESNEY RIVERS."

"Very well! Then he need not expect to be welcomed home at present?" was the stern comment.

Muriel's face whitened. Was it coming to that?

Mr. Rivers held the other letter for an instant before her eyes, and then thrust it into the fire. Muriel sprang to her feet, but he held her back.

"Grandpapa, that is mine. It is mine!"

Muriel lost self-control, and struggled to rescue the letter. The corners caught the blaze, and curled up slowly. Mr. Rivers' hands grasped her two wrists, and the muscles upon his own stood out like whip-cord. Aged as was he, passionate as she was, his strength mastered hers completely. He thrust her fiercely down into her chair—losing sight of his manliness.

"What are you thinking about? You forget yourself? You dare to resist!"

The letter was gone, save a few charred remains. Some fell to the hearth. Others, caught by the current of hot air, went up the chimney. Muriel sat trembling and subdued. No sound passed her white lips.

"I have told you before. Once for all, no letters shall come to this house from that man or his wife. You understand. Every letter that comes goes behind the fire."

Strange to say, Lilies had courage to observe, "It might have been some important news."

Mr. Rivers ignored the remark, and strode haughtily out of the room. Muriel looked crushed.

"I would not mind about it," said Lilies quietly.

No answer. Muriel's breath came in laboured catches, and her face had grown livid. Lilies watched her closely.

"Poor dear Muriel!" she said at length.

Muriel started. She had forgotten her sister's presence.

"I would not mind so much," said Lilies. "It is not worth while."

"The sin is worth minding," said Lilies. "But we can't help that."

"No. I was wrong," Muriel answered.

She rested her cheek on her hand, and fell into a muse—the troubled face growing slowly peaceful, even happy.

"What are you thinking?" Lilies asked.

"Only—that it is God's will," said Muriel.

"Does that help you?"

"Yes—it does now. One has to learn to love His will."

Lilies made no answer. Muriel lifted her head suddenly.

"I don't mean that my temper was God's will, Lilies. Only that if He sends the trouble about John and Rose, I have to accept it."

Lilies might or might not have understood. She gave Muriel a kiss silently. Thereafter Muriel read aloud to her, until Mrs. Bertram's return.

SNARLEYOW.

Although he may admit a probability that a majority of those who constitute our Church Courts are "just men," Snarleyow will be careful to accompany the admission by a saving clause, that they are not yet "made perfect." If, once in a while, they do something just about right, they are straightway puffed up with the idea that they can easily repeat the phenomenon. How necessary, then, to guard the fathers and brethren against the sin of pride by pointing out to them their continual liability to error. Of course, even a writer in a church paper may not always be able to put his finger exactly on the spot where a mistake came in; but a very important point in the matter of cultivating the grace of humility is gained by insisting upon the fact that mistakes do come in.

Talking about church papers, Snarleyow is a very valuable contributor in

other ways than the one above hinted at. Once persuade people that everything is calm as a summer sea, and they will—or a section of them will—lose interest. But let them scent a scandal—give them a hint of the slipping of distinguished feet—in fact, introduce them to a "row," or the prospect of one, and "deadness" vanishes—they are all alive at once.

The most chronic fault-finder will acknowledge that in this respect, as a quickener of interest in affairs, Snarleyow is invaluable.

Then he attracts the attention of the outside public, even of those who are most careless about religion, to church matters, as their attention would never be attracted by mere Home and Foreign Mission reports, articles on religious questions, and so forth. What does the world care for such things? But let it be whispered that that smart fellow Snarleyow is on the scent of a piece of crookedness in the working of such and such a committee, or is preparing to unfold a tale about the "engineering" of a certain appointment, and the world will cock up its ears at once. The strong presumption that the crookedness is in Snarleyow's mind, and the engineering confined to the get-up of his story, is quite a minor circumstance, not worth taking into account. The great point is that the church is made attractive—do we not hear on all hands that this is the need of our time?

Snarleyow also keeps up the church's reputation for independence. He makes it evident that everybody in the church is not going to submit, quietly to being "run." Mr. Waterbones, who never allows anybody to run him (nor runs anything, except it be a race with the sheriff), cannot sneer at a church which is blessed with a few vigorous Snarleyows. I tell you, these gentlemen will make it lively for such old foggy notions as the laying of business cut and dried by committees before Church Courts. Just think of it, a whole Assembly dictated to by a small committee! Business brought forward in such a shape, perhaps, that the good brother in the back seats, who has thought the matter all over several nights before he went to sleep, never gets a chance to speak his piece at all.

Then consider the admirable service rendered by Snarleyow as a guardian of our consciences—and of our pockets. Take my own case. I believe the collectors would actually have induced me to approve of, perhaps, even, to subscribe to, certain "Schemes" which I could name, had not Snarleyow informed me that they were actually launched before the possibilities of discussion were anything like exhausted. Figure to yourself my remorse of conscience had I discovered when too late that I had expressed approval of a thing which might turn out some day to have been insufficiently ventilated. Calculate the enormity of actually asking people to give cash toward a Scheme which the Assembly might have kept all to itself, to make speeches about it for two, five, or ten years to come, if one of those meddling committees had not cut and dried it before its time! What a waste of money! The very idea is so depressing that I must pause.

—Canada Presbyterian.

BEATING THE DEVIL.

An industrious enterprising farmer after several years successful farming and eager pursuit of worldly ends was induced to attend religious services in his district school house where special meetings were in progress, conducted by a village pastor. He became interested and a true Christian, and enjoyed his newly found Saviour.

The pastor in passing called on him and family, and after prayers and a social chat remarked: Well friend S. I must be going, I promised wife that I would be back in time with meat for dinner."

Said Mr. S. "And where were you going to get it?" "Oh, Mr. G. down here, one of our members, wished me to call and get some, and I must drive down, and as it is a mile further and return I must be going."

"If it is for meat you are going, perhaps you need not mind going there to-day; can't you stop a while longer with us, and then be in time, as I can furnish the meat?"

"Oh, Mr. S., I do not wish to trouble you for meat." "Well, but it is my privilege to serve you," said Mr. S. "I have never done anything for the cause of religion, yet the good Lord has spared and prospered me, and I might as well begin now as any time."

At the conclusion of the call, Mr. S. went to his smoke house where a fine lot of meat hung, looking out a nice ham, he reached for it. As he did so the devil whispered, 25 lbs. of ham 8 cents a lb., \$2.00, take a smaller one."

At this suggestion Mr. S. proceeded to secure the large one intended, and then reached for the next best one, and presented them to the surprised pastor, who remarked, "Why, Mr. S.,

don't rob yourself." "No," said Mr. S., "I am not, but have robbed God these years. But let me tell you what a fight I had with the devil. As I selected this finest one he suggested that I take a smaller one. The pastor won't know or care, only see, 25 lbs., 8 cents, 2.00, don't be green I tell you."

I just took it down quick and then reached for this fine one (for I have plenty) and I just told the devil that if he did not quit I'd give you every ham I had. So you see I am bound to begin right; take them right along and when you need more come and get them."

SALVATION OF CHILDREN.

I hate to hear people say, "They have received a pack of children into the church." "A pack of children!" Yes, and if Jesus carries them in his bosom, surely you are not imitating Christ, nor exhibiting much of his Spirit, when you look down upon them or despise them. To me one soul is as good as another. I rejoice as much in the addition of the poorest mechanic to this church as if he was a peer of the realm; I am as grateful to God when I hear of repentance in the young as in the aged; for souls, after all, are not affected in value by rank or age. They are all priceless, and not to be weighed in the scale with worlds. I pray you, therefore, rejoice if the Spirit of God dwells in the lowly or in the great, in the young or in the old. He is the self-same Spirit; he makes each renewed person equally his temple, and each saved one is equally a jewel of Christ, dear to the heart of the Eternal Father, beloved by him who redeemed all his people alike with his most gracious blood.

—Spurgeon.

CLEAVING TO CHRIST.

"I have seen a heavy piece of iron hanging on to another, not welded, not linked, not glued to the spot, and yet it adhered with such tenacity as to bear not only its weight, but mine too, if I chose to seize it and hang upon it. A wire charged with an electric current is in contact with the mass, and hence its adhesion. Cut that wire through, or move it by a hair's breadth, and the piece of iron drops dead to the ground, like any other unsupported weight."

"A stream of life from the Lord, brought into contact with a human spirit, keeps the spirit cleaving to the Lord so firmly that no power on earth or hell can wrench the two asunder. From Christ the mysterious life-stream flows, through the being of a disciple it spreads, and to the Lord returns again. In that circle the feeblest Christian is held safely, but if the circle be broken the dependent spirit instantly drops off."—Dr. Arnold.

RANDOM READINGS.

Nobody is so wise but has a little folly to spare.

Christ seeketh your help in your place; give him your hand.—Rutherford.

Were every body to sweep before his own house, every street would be clean.

If thou desirest to be borne with, thou must also bear with others.—Thomas à Kempis.

There are some folks in this world who spend their whole lives hunting after righteousness and can't find any time to practice it.

As the goodness of our God hath been more than sufficient for all our need, so is His grace more than equal to our shortcomings.

We cannot worship "The Unknown God;" at least, such worship lacks eyes and light, and is fitter for owls and bats than for man.—Spurgeon.

Heaven is the day of which grace is the dawn; the rich, ripe fruit of which grace is the lovely flower; the inner shrine of that most glorious temple to which grace forms the approach and outer courts.

Secure for your worldly home a house built on the earth, and not a "castle in the air," and for your heavenly home "a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

The work of a Christian as it is described in the Bible looks fitter for an angel than for a fallen man; but this fallen, weak man has more than the sufficiency of an angel for the discharge of it—his sufficiency is of God.—Jay.

Get into the habit of looking for the silver lining of the cloud, and, when you have found it, continue to look at it, rather than at the leaden gray in the middle. It will help you over many hard places.—Dr. A. A. Willits.

We do not understand the next page of God's lesson-book, we see only the one before us; nor shall we be allowed—it is indeed impossible we should do it—to turn the leaf until we have learned the lesson of that before us.

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