

Our Serial.

MURIEL'S KEY-NOTE.

BY AGNES GIBBYNE.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AS OF OLD.

"Yes, my dear boy, yes—but it is only fit that I should go mourning all my days."

Six months had passed, and a pleasant little trio sat in the Manor study. John had come in for a cup of tea, according to his wont of late. He looked fairly strong again after his illness, while Mr. Rivers, in his easy-chair, was a broken-down old man. Muriel, with a bright face, made the tea. Mrs. Bertram and Arthur were engaged elsewhere. Every spare hour in John's busy life was given to his grandfather. Some thought it might not be for long. "That sounds like the little widow of Tea-caddy Cottage," said John cheerfully.

"When I look back—when I think of all my past life—it weighs upon me like lead," said Mr. Rivers. He spoke slowly, and with a slightly thickened intonation. "Nearly eighty years of sin—sin—sin, John."

"Aye, but 'where sin abounded grace did much more abound,' my dear grandfather."

"Saving grace, yes. Nothing but grace can do for me. Yes, I do trust, I do hope. But I am hard and cold, John. The old tree can't be bent like the young one. After dishonouring my God for nearly eighty years, He will let me—perhaps—just creep into heaven."

"I don't exactly understand that 'perhaps,'" said John quietly. "Christ never said, 'Come unto Me, and perhaps I will give thee rest.'"

"I do hope—a little," faltered Mr. Rivers.

"Hope that God may keep His word?" John asked in his gentlest manner.

"My dear John, He will. I am sure He will."

"Then you are sure you are safe."

"So unworthy. If you did but know—"

"I know that in me... dwelleth no good thing," said John. "In my flesh." For I know, too, that Christ dwellth in me, and that the victory is His."

"Some can give service. I cannot. I can only be saved. Those wasted years!" and Mr. Rivers sighed heavily.

"Temper has been my bane. Anger reareth in the bosom of fools—of fools—fools. How true!"

"That was the old past mastery, grandfather. The Evil One reigned then. A stronger than he has come in now."

"Yes, yes, John. I do believe it, and I do hope," repeated the old man. "But as for rejoicing and being glad, it would not be right. It would not be seemly, my dear boy."

"As for rejoicing—that sounds like Muriel's old tune," said John smiling. "I don't hear it now, Muriel. Somehow the joy-note seems taking its right place in the melody."

"I think I learnt to sing while my cage was darkened," said Muriel.

"And grandfather thinks he is never to learn," said John.

"No, no, John—I'll go all my days in bitterness, like King Hezekiah."

"I hope King Hezekiah was too wise to keep his resolution. I see no distinction in the Bible," said John emphatically, "between those who may and those who may not rejoice—of the Lord's own children. 'Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous.' It does not say, 'some of ye righteous.'"

"But, my dear boy—"

"I quoted that verse to Mrs. Rokeby," observed Muriel, "and she said, 'Who can count himself righteous? Not I.'"

"And quoted at you in return, no doubt, 'There is none righteous, no, not one,' with a reference to the 'chief of sinners.' I thought so. A good many people profess to come under that description, who would be very much annoyed if so classified by their friends. There is the true test of humility. Besides, the question is not, 'Who can count himself righteous?'—but, 'Whom does God count righteous?'"

"So I told her."

"Not mine own righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ. 'I will rejoice in the Lord... for He hath clothed me with the robe of righteousness.' We stand all three side by side here. Nothing in ourselves. Everything in Jesus our Lord."

Mr. Rivers bent his head, but gave no direct answer.

These little chats were of common occurrence. There had been a Divine work going on silently and mightily in the soul of the old man. He was greatly changed in many respects. Self-distrust was gaining ground, where pride had reigned; gentleness, where temper had been rampant. At

times flashes of the old nature broke forth. Hardly surprising, this. The shackles of eighty years' growth were hard to shake off; and the old nature, though crucified and dying, was not yet dead.

Muriel's manner of life for the present seemed to be marked out for her. She did not drop visiting certain Claverton invalids, but out-of-door calls had taken a secondary position. She lived for her mother and grandfather.

It was by no means a life without trial. Mrs. Bertram was kinder than of old, and had grown to value her daughter's companionship, nay, even to be exacting of her leisure. Still, Muriel's warm love met a poor response. Muriel had by this time ceased to look for more. She bore cheerfully the pain of knowing that her intense affection was alike unreturned and unappreciated. The more she had been thrown with her mother, the more that mother's want of depth and narrowness of intellect had become manifest to Muriel's vigorous mind. But of this she spoke to no living soul. She accepted her trial, and rejoiced in her Lord. A life of habitual self-denial was beautifying Muriel's character in a marked manner. No other means could have had precisely the same effect.

"Muriel, you are running very far ahead of me," said Rokeby said to her one day.

"How, Rokeby?"

"Holding the things of this world more loosely. I do so cling to everything that I love."

"I am stronger than you."

"Bodily? Some would say that must make you cling the more. No—I think it is just a question of the affections being 'set on things above.'"

"It seems sometimes as if the last two or three years had been with me a systematic shaking loose from earthly affections," said Muriel. "I feel a difference—looking back."

"And I—see it."

"Don't lift me up on a pedestal, Rokeby. That is no friendly office, for in falling off one generally comes down hard."

"Perhaps I have had some shakings loose too," said Rokeby. "Only I find I am so apt to tie the strings again on the first opportunity."

"Rokeby, I do not think that so long as one is truly rejoicing in the Lord, there is no fear that the rejoicing in earthly things will take a wrong place."

Sophy pondered.

"Yes," she said. "It may be just that. For we are commanded to rejoice in everything—only 'before the Lord' all the time. And if that is to be, then the rejoicing in Him must come first. That highest kind of joy is to be the key-note, I suppose, to the tune of all joys in one."

"That is a good thought for me," said Muriel.

"Then now help one with a thought. I am often dreadfully troubled on one head. We are to 'rejoice always,' you know."

"Yes—always. How John has drilled that word into me."

"But I see such a difficulty. Think of me lying here, Muriel, day after day, with the same old weary round of life—and yet I am to rejoice. It isn't so hard for a time. I can rejoice for a day or a week, or a year even—or two years. But I may have to lie here fifty years and more. How could I ever 'rejoice always' through fifty years? The very idea is like a great weight upon me."

"I don't wonder," Muriel answered. "God never gave you the fifty years to bear once, Rokeby."

"But they must come—if I live long enough."

"Yes—if. There is no 'must' in your case or mine. I think you have rejoiced pretty steadily this past year."

"Yes—perhaps. Some days it was hard work."

"I dare say it was. You never had two days in one, though. And you never will have."

Sophy looked comforted.

"Then I am always to take each day by itself, and leave the rest alone."

"Yes—till each one comes in turn. Do you know that though I am up and about and busy, I was troubled last summer with that very same thought. It seemed impossible, looking ahead, that I could always find a reason for rejoicing."

"Well—and one evening about then, I went to walk on the path outside the avenue. I don't know why I chose it. All at once there came a bright gleam of light through the first tree, straight upon me. It was just autumn, and the leaves were turning, and the light had a golden sparkle about it—rather uncommon. I stood to enjoy it, and I thought how lovely it was, and what a pity it seemed that I must leave that spot—for the trees ahead looked quite dull and green, with no sparkle or light about them."

"It was so strange! When I went on, and reached the next tree, just such another gleam flashed through it upon me, and so it was at the third and fourth, and all along the whole avenue. Every tree in turn, however dull it looked beforehand, the moment I came up turned into a green veil, with a glory shining through. The light came from the sun, which was near its setting, and it came at just such a slant that I could not catch each gleam, till the tree lay between the sun and me."

"It seemed to strike me all in a moment, how life is just like that to God's children. We look on, and life seems dull, with nothing to enliven it—and yet, as each day comes, there is always the gleam, if only we will look up for it. I thought the one gleam was all—but the brightness lasted right on to the end of the avenue."

"And right on to the end of life," said Rokeby, smiling, as if her face had caught the reflection.

"Yes, indeed. I have sometimes thought of telling you my little fancy. We have our Sun of Righteousness, have we not? I do believe half the clouds that come between Him and us are of our own making. But if we only keep our eyes fixed on Him, the rejoicing never need stop."

"No. And with joy comes victory," said Rokeby. "For 'the joy of the Lord is our strength.'"

(THE END.)

VERY LOW IN RELIGION.

BY ELIZABETH HEYWOOD.

A singing Methodist preacher on one of his rounds of pastoral visiting in a village in Connecticut came upon an aged saint, sitting beside a wide old-fashioned fire-place, and looking very melancholy. He sat down by her side, and cheerily inquired about her health.

"Well, Brother B.," she said, "I'm very low in religion."

"What!" said he, "you, just on the borders of the Jordan, ready to cross over any day, a bankrupt in 'the things of God?' I can't believe it! Let us reckon up. How long have you been serving Him?"

"O, all my life. I was converted young, and came out bright, I tell ye!"

"No doubt of it! But why didn't you stay bright?"

"O, I've got such a bad heart."

"But wasn't it changed when you were converted?"

"You'd better believe 'twas."

"Then you can't have been serving God all your life with a bad heart."

"O, my, no! but lately every thing looks so dark. I haven't any faith, and the Saviour seems so far off."

"But he isn't! He is nigh thee—even in thy heart."

"O, he used to be; but lately I've felt as if I hadn't a spark of religion."

"Now! now! When did the holy fire all burn out, and you an old Methodist, too?" and Brother B. rang out with:

"How happy is the pilgrim's lot; How free from every anxious thought, From worldly hope and fear! Confined to neither court nor cell, His soul disdains on earth to dwell, He only sojourns here!"

and sang three verses in joyful strain, then asked:

"Now, Mother A., don't you feel just so?"

"Well, it does me good to hear you sing it so powerful."

"Can't you take it to your own heart?"

"Well, I ain't done nothin' bad as I know on."

"Then your heart can't be bad if nothing bad has proceeded out of it."

"O, I've had dreadful thoughts and feelin's."

"But you did not love to have them. They were not welcome guests?"

"O, bless you, no; but I couldn't get rid of them."

"So you stopped loving God and praying to Him?"

"I didn't say no such thing! I never prayed harder in my life!"

"Bless the Lord for that! Now, could it have been a bad heart that tried to pray away these awful thoughts and feelin's?"

"But how did they get in while I was trusting the Lord and trying to live right?"

"There's an old enemy of righteousness, you know, who likes to persuade us that our hearts are bad, and we must say, as the Saviour did, 'Get thee behind me Satan.'"

"Do you think it was Satan temptin' of me all this time?"

"Well, it wasn't the loving Lord, I know, for he says: 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him, and as one whom his mother comforteth so will I comfort you.'"

"How good that sounds. Ye see I was a proper hand for goin' to meetin' in my day and takin' hold, too, speakin' and prayin', but now I can only sit to home here, and do nothing."

"Has the Lord forgotten all that, do you think?"

"Well, I don't know as he has; but

what is a body good for who can only sit to home and knit?"

"Why, the Lord meant you to have a meeting with Him every day by this old fire-place, for His mercies are new every morning."

"So they be! I really believe I've only been under the weather a little, and thought I was low in religion."

"O, you must never get under the weather in religion again, Mother A., but stay on the mountain-top where there is clear air and sunshine! While you know you keep God's commandments, you need not fear but that His love is boundless, just like sunshine all around you, and you must believe in it—bask in it. Though sorrows come, and troubles assail, the Lord is the same—changeless in His deep love and mercy."

KIND WORDS.

Most men are won by kind words. There may be the brute in the outward appearance, and everything external give evidence of manhood and virtue gone. But often it has been found that beneath all this rough and brutal and exterior linger some remnants of what was naturally a noble soul. A kind look, a sympathetic word, a generous act, have often been received with an appreciation which has given evidence that the sensibilities, though blunted, are not dead.

Kind words cost little, but are often like "apples of gold in pictures of silver." How many noble natures are in ruins—natures which if restored would shine as stars of the first magnitude.

A kind word, a friendly act, a helping hand, would rescue them. Mrs. Willing in her beautiful volume, "From Fifteen to Twenty-five," gives the following incident, which illustrates our thought: "Humanity knows itself to be a king, though dethroned and crownless, and it will be treated with respect. A lady who understood this accidentally pushed a little street Arab off the sidewalk. She stopped and apologized, saying that she hoped she had not hurt him. He stepped back, and gave his rimless hat a jerk. 'My eyes, Jim!' he exclaimed, turning to a boy who had heard the whole, 'If she don't speak to me jest like I were etandin' collars! A feller could 'ford to get pushed off forty times a day to get apole to like that.'"

Many a boy, apparently as rough and hopeless, could be won to virtue and to a life of holy living by kind words and kind acts. The slums of all our cities are full of them, and they will soon be beyond hope. Let them be gathered as jewels for the Saviour's crown, and as stars for the crown of him who rescues them.—N. Y. Witness.

PRECIOUS WORDS.

Let me not be ashamed of my hope. Psalm cxix. 116.

Whoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. Matt. x. 32.

For I the Lord thy God will hold thy hand, saying unto thee, Fear not! I will help thee. Isaiah xli. 13.

The Lord is thy keeper. Psalm cxi. 5.

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling. Jude 24.

Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able. 1 Cor. x. 13.

He himself hath suffered, being tempted. He is able to succor them that are tempted. Heb. ii. 18.

If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. 1 John ii. 1.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John i. 9.

Yet will I not forget thee. Isaiah xlix. 15.

I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. Heb. xiii. 5.—Berean Tract.

RANDOM READINGS.

It is truth, what does it matter who says it!—*Marcus Aurelius.*

Ah, if you knew what peace there is in an accepted sorrow!—*Madame Guyon.*

Every day we omit obscures some truth we should have known.—*John Ruskin.*

Exactness in little duties is a wonderful source of cheerfulness.—*F. W. Faber.*

Is not truth as much a phenomenon of God as motion of matter?—*Theodore Parker.*

I couldn't live in peace, if I put the shadow of wilfulness between myself and God.—*George Eliot.*

Wherever duty summons man, woman has a corresponding duty in the same place.—*Mrs. E. Cady Stanton.*

Our work is not to train a soul by itself alone, nor a body by itself alone, but to train a man; and, in man, soul and body can never be divided.—*Montaigne.*

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