

## Our Serial.

## MURIEL'S KEY-NOTE.

BY AGNES GIBBERNE.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## EXCHANGE OF CONFIDENCES.

Chesney Rivers did his best to bridge over the family chasm, but found his engineering skill unequal to the task. Beyond freedom for himself and Sybel to go when they would to Bushby Rectory, and beyond the bringing up of John's name at meal-times, his efforts were a failure.

For about two months he and Sybel stayed at the Manor, before going on a round of visits to friends. One to John and Rose stood first on their list, and Muriel looked forward greatly to having her uncle and Sybel in and out from that house. But Mr. Rivers looked forward to the same with different sensations, and a month at the seaside was arranged to correspond to the precise date of the Bushby Rectory visit.

The two months were happy ones with Muriel. She was completely engrossed by Sybel's companionship, and her newly-deepened interest in Lillias flagged a good deal. Muriel hardly knew it herself, but the two sisters fell apart in their old style, and Lillias resumed her wonted iciness of manner.

Muriel, so long as she could have Sybel, was content. Hers was alike a clinging and an absorbing love. Cramer Ray had small space to himself in her recollection, those days. In truth, her girlish love had died a slow death years before; and only the loneliness of her life, making her ready to grasp at any change, had caused the passing if not altogether spurious revival of it. The marked kindness of her uncle Chesney was a pleasure, but to Sybel she clung with touching devotion. She marvelled more each day at the change in her friend—at the steadfast calm and the quiet joy which nothing seemed to disturb. Muriel gained a thirst for the same in her own life.

Not unfrequently Montgomery Maxwell made a third in the rambles which Muriel and her uncle took together. Chesney was not scientific, and he often stood with a comical smile, watching the tutor's heroic plunges among nettles and briars for some coveted prize—a very worthless prize in the Major's eyes. He learnt a few botanical terms, however, in his walks, and aired them afterwards with much satisfaction for the benefit of the family circle.

He was a pleasant fellow, this Chesney Rivers, true-hearted and outspoken as a child, blunt yet gentle, and always simple. When first married he had made no profession of religion; and Sybel, though brought up with a good head-knowledge of Divine things, cared little for them in her heart. A year later the great change had first come to her; though it was the recent loss of her two children which had so lifted her up and borne her on. This serenity was a thing altogether new. Muriel would scarcely have recognized, save in form and feature, the restless high-spirited fluctuating maiden of earlier days.

Chesney Rivers stood far behind. He was scarcely a decided man—neither decidedly worldly, nor decidedly a follower of Christ. He had strong leanings to the better side—strong longings for higher joys—strong searchings after that which should make him sure of meeting his children in another world. He counted his wife as something saintly and beyond other women, and perhaps he looked to her little hand to draw him upwards. He had not yet learnt to look to Christ alone.

Muriel learned and gained much from this two months' companionship. For the time being she was disposed to forget certain little duties, to lose sight of other people's feelings, and even to neglect visiting her invalid friends. Had Sybel remained long in the house this would have grown to be a snare. As it was, the good effects weighed most heavily, and Muriel made many upward paces. She learnt to strike the joy-note in her tune with greater frequency and clearer touch.

Looking forward, she did not see a bright prospect, after Sybel's departure. Lillias was cold as ever, and Muriel had not discovered the fact of this being, at least in a measure, her own fault. Moreover, Mrs. Bertram seemed quite unable to forget the wearing of the sari, which had so troubled her. She kept Muriel more than ever at a distance.

Others noted this, Montgomery Maxwell not least. He spoke to Chesney one day upon the subject, remarking how keen a trial her mother's lack of affection was to Muriel.

"Do you think so?" asked Chesney. "My wife says the same; but the coldness has been uniform from infancy. One would imagine she must have grown used to it."

"She has not, I assure you. Muriel

is exceedingly fond of Mrs. Bertram."

"Nobody can resist being that, with that she always was," laughed Chesney. "However, I don't see what is to be done."

"You do not! I have hoped something from you. The cause—if cause there is—"

"Then you don't know the reason?"

"No, indeed I do not."

"H-m!" said Chesney thoughtfully. "I have believed it to be one of those inexplicable cases of natural aversion, sometimes seen."

"And the fact has never oozed out even to you. Well, my sister's life-aim has been to keep it secret, but people don't always succeed so well."

"You don't mean—I have had my conjectures, I confess—that Muriel is really the daughter of a first wife? But why conceal it?"

"Nothing of that sort. O no, you are wide of the mark. The fact is, anything which touches my sister's pride is a misery to her; and Muriel unfortunately pulls up certain recollections which do touch her pride. I don't, for my part, feel much hope of the feeling being got over—till all folks concerned are a good many years older. My sister is not very strong-minded or wide in her ideas, and little things seem great to her."

Montgomery assented, anxious for more.

"You take a particular interest in Muriel," said Chesney in an odd tone.

"I always did," the tutor answered meekly, with a faint blush.

"She is a splendid girl. I am glad that young Ray never had her—though he is my wife's cousin. But I wish some one of the right stamp would win her."

"I think—I hope—I believe—I could be glad of—of anything—that should be for her happiness," faltered Montgomery.

"Ah!" Chesney said, and he said no more.

"It is desirable for her, as you say," continued Montgomery nervously. "Yes, very desirable. Only I do not think I know any one worthy of her. But the right man may turn up some day. Yes, he may—undoubtedly he may."

Montgomery sighed deeply.

"I wish he would," responded Chesney. "I hope the wrong man will not seek her. She has gone through enough of that already."

Montgomery lifted his eyes suddenly, with steady look and voice.

"Major Rivers, you have seen more than I meant you to see. But do not misunderstand me. I have no thought of winning Muriel."

"None?"

"Absolutely none. I don't deny the fact of what she is to me—trusting to your generosity to keep my secret. But as for giving her a hint—never! I know my position and hers too well. I have guarded myself for years, and I will guard myself still. If I could not, I would go away at once."

Chesney's look was grave, though kind.

"It is a critical position," he said. "One slip of the tongue, and Muriel's peace may be destroyed for years."

"Have I not seen what she has borne already? Even if I had the slightest reason to suppose I could arouse a return of what I feel, do you think I would do it?"

Chesney was silent.

"Think for a moment. You do not yourself know the state of affairs better than I do. Muriel can never be mine. You see I am perfectly well aware of this. I have made up my mind to it. There are no tossings of uncertainty in my case. I have no shadow of hope, and hopelessness brings a calm with it. She is completely cut off from me. I think my love for her is growing to be almost a father's love. She will marry happily some day, and I shall rejoice to see it. Perhaps I shall have left Claverton before then. But you may trust me. I would not willingly add a single shadow to the poor child's life. For myself—if shadow comes, God's will be done. It is not new to me."

He spoke very quietly, and even with something of a smile, though a slight dew broke out upon his forehead. Then he rose and left the room. Chesney made no effort to detain him. He knew how hopeless a case it was.

Not till many hours later did Montgomery recollect the information which he had after all missed receiving. He had to wait a day or two for an opportunity to see the Major again alone. Chesney gave the explanation briefly, adding—

"I have had some doubts whether to tell you, after all. But—perhaps you have a right to know. I trust to you not to mention it again—and I only wish it might make a difference in your feelings."

"As to Muriel? Impossible. But how grievous—how unfair!" said Montgomery, greatly moved. "Muriel—why, Muriel is literally no more touched by the fact than Lillias and

Arthur; yet Mrs. Bertram does not visit it upon them. Strange! She—Muriel's own mother—a mother to look so upon her child—"

"Ah, there you pass my comprehension. But the discovery was a great shock to my sister. Her pride was wounded to the quick."

"But why single out Muriel alone to suffer? The position of Lillias and Arthur is precisely the same."

"Look at their faces. That is answer enough," said the Major.

## JOHN KNOX.

I want to take you back to the sixteenth century, into rugged Scotland, and into the rugged times of that period of its history. I want to introduce to you, hoping you will become better acquainted, a man of whom it was said, "No grander figure can be found in the history of the Reformation in this island than that of Knox."

John Knox was a boy when the Reformation movement began in Germany; indeed it was ten years after that when he was ordained a priest. It was twelve years later that he avowed himself a Protestant, and thus incurred the wrath of the Cardinal. He was of course obliged to withdraw from St. Andrew's, where he held the position of teacher, and seek a place of refuge. This he found with a friend named Hugh Douglass. And the old ruins of the chapel at that place are still called "Knox Kirk." One of his beloved friends was tried and condemned to the stake for heresy. The Cardinal, whose anger he had aroused, was killed about that time, and Knox was suspected of having a hand in it; and having been tried, was condemned to the galleys. For about a year he suffered as a prisoner and from illness.

After he was set free he went to a town on the borders of England, where he succeeded in turning the hearts of many to the views of the Reformers. Always, as he had an opportunity, he defended the cause of the Reformers. He was raised to a position of honor by King Edward, receiving the appointment of king's chaplain. He was offered a bishopric, but declined that honor. At Edward's death he was again in danger. Because the new sovereign was not in sympathy with the views which he was advocating, and not thinking it wise to throw away his life, he went to the continent; he was for a time pastor of a church in Geneva, he became a friend of Calvin and spent two or three peaceful years.

When he returned to England the Scottish clergy burned him in effigy, and he was not well received even in England. Elizabeth was now upon the throne, but this did not seem to make matters much better for Knox.

Now I cannot tell you in the little space given me about the stormy times that followed his return to Scotland. He believed the time had come when the Reformation in Scotland must be established, and he fought bravely with tongue and pen for its success. The young and beautiful queen of Scotland tried her powers of pleasing upon the heroic man who had dared to speak plainly of the sins even of the court. "But the faces of angry men could not move him, neither could the beauty of the young queen charm him, nor her tears melt him." He continued to preach according to his convictions, and kept it up with no lessening of power until a short time before his death. But about 1570 his strength declined; but though growing weaker physically, he seemed to lose none of his intellectual and spiritual vigor. He spoke in public for the last time November 9th, 1572, and died on the 24th of the same month, holding up his hand to testify of his adherence to the faith for which he had lived and preached and toiled, and in which he was now dying. I think the more you study the character of this man, the more you will admire it. If he seemed rough, remember he lived in rough times. If he was intolerant, it was an age of intolerance, and his intolerance was exercised only where he felt that the truth was assailed.

Carlyle says: "Nothing hypocritical, foolish or untrue can find harbor in this man; a pure and manly silent tenderness of affection is in him; touches of genial humor are not wanting under his severe austerity. A most clear-cut, hardy, distinct and effective man; fearing God without any other fear. There is in Knox, throughout, the spirit of an old Hebrew prophet—spirit almost altogether unique among modern men."—*The Pansy*.

The best way to do good to ourselves, is to do it to others; the right way to gather, is to scatter.

Where we are ignorant, God is wise; where we stand blindly in the dark, he is in the light.—*Philips Brooks*.

The best portion of a good man's life, is his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love.—*Wordsworth*.

## PRAYER-MEETING RESOLUTIONS.

1. I propose to be there regular and punctually. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together."

2. I will endeavor to draw others to the meeting. "Come thou with us and we will do thee good."

3. Before entering the place of prayer I will ask the Saviour's presence. "We would see Jesus."

4. I will refrain from fault-finding, and will not indulge a criticism spirit. "Be ye kindly affectioned one to another."

5. So far as is consistent, I will assist actively in the exercises by testifying to the love of Christ by exhortation, by a passage of Scripture, a hymn, a stanza, or otherwise. "Let the wonder of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."

6. My prayers and remarks shall not be long. "For God is in heaven, and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few."

7. I will not speak merely to fill up a vacancy, but rather offer during pauses in the meeting. "That thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly."

8. I will cultivate enlargement of faith and desires. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace."

9. I will endeavor to use all means suited to secure the blessing for which I have prayed. "Faith without works is dead."—*Ex.*

## THE BURIED TALENT.

Some years ago a man appeared at the counter of a bank in Connecticut, presenting one thousand dollars in bank-notes, for which he received the specie. He had received those notes more than twenty years before, and had kept them safe through all that time; but they were as useless for those twenty years as so much brown paper. If they had been deposited in a savings bank, on interest, they would probably have amounted to more than three times as much as their owner received for them when he presented them.

We think such a man must have been very foolish. He had preserved his money, it is true, but he had lost the use of it. And this was just what the wicked and slothful servant did. Too idle to trade and do business in the absence of his master, instead of seeking out some bank where he might place it to be taken care of, that it might increase, he went and dugged in the earth and hid his lord's money. When the reckoning-day came, he returned, undiminished, the trust that was committed to him. But he was called a "wicked and slothful servant," and that which he had failed to improve was taken away from him for ever.

So it may be with many others. God gives us faculties and opportunities for improvement; but our talents are to be used and multiplied; we are to make the most of ourselves, and of our abilities and our opportunities for advancing the work of God in this world. Ere long we must give an account of our stewardship, and must meet the Judge, who will give to every man according to his works.

Where is your talent? In use? In the bank? or in the napkin? Is it growing larger, or is it lying useless? Arouse, oh slothful one! The Master comes to reckon with His servants; happy are they who then shall hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

## LET IT REST.

Let it rest. Ah! how many hearts on the brink of anxiety and disquietude by this simple sentence have been made calm and happy?

Some proceeding has wounded us by its want of tact; let it rest; no one will think of it again.

A harsh or unjust sentence irritates us; let it rest; whoever may have given vent to it will be pleased to see it is forgotten.

A painful scandal is about to estrange us from an old friend; let it rest, and thus preserve our charity and peace of mind.

A suspicious look is on the point of cooling our affection; let it rest, and our look of trust will restore confidence.

Fancy! we who are so careful to remove the briars from our pathway, for fear they should wound, yet take pleasure in collecting and piercing our hearts with the thorns that meet us in our daily intercourse with one another. How childish and unreasonable we are!—*Gold Dust*.

We can only live noble lives by acting nobly on every occasion.

We can do more good by being good, than in any other way.—*Rowland Hill*.

A holy life has a voice. It speaks when the tongue is silent, and is either a constant attraction or a continual reproach.—*Hinton*.

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