

A PRAYER.

BY SARAH E. TUCKER.

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

I hunger, Lord! my hands reach out to thee,
For food to make me strong thine own to be!

I faint, dear Lord! and in thy hand alone
Is held the staff to guide me to thy throne!

I am athirst, put to my lips the cup
From which to drink is to be lifted up!

Of life divine deep draughts it ever holds,
And seeking hearts within thine own enfolds!

To thirst no more, no more to hunger know!
With righteousness be filled and overflow!

The scarlet and the crimson washed away,
Thy wish alone my every thought to sway!

Thus, Lord, I pray, teach me if my prayer
Holds aught that should not find a shelter there;

So fill me with thy righteousness divine,
That heart and soul and life shall all be thine.

—Ch. Advocate.

Our Serial.

MURIEL'S KEY-NOTE.

BY AGNES GIBBERNE.

CHAPTER IV.

A FRIEND OF THE FAMILY.

Montgomery Maxwell picked his way in careful wise through the mud of the Upper Claverton Road. He chose that route on the same account that Muriel Bertram had chosen it the day before—by reason of its loneliness. But whereas with Muriel the wish for solitude was a mere passing mood, with Montgomery Maxwell it was a part of the man's being. He detested society with all his heart. He feared the face of no wild beast as he feared the face of fellow-man. He counted a Robinson Crusoe life the happiest under the sun, provided only that Crusoe's stores included a library. Yet, as things then stood, Mr. Maxwell would not have been happy in such a life.

He was a scholarly person—study being his leading occupation, tutorship his needful work, and the pursuit of natural history his chief recreation. Dying on his rounded shoulders told its own tale, as did also the short-sighted spectacles, with which he peered into bush and brake as he passed. Careless of the cold, he had taken off his wide-awake, and had transformed it into a basket for ferns. Thereby could be seen more plainly the intellectual outline of his head—not a square solid head of the German type, but sensitive and highly developed, with brown wavy hair, already grey-streaked and showing a tendency to baldness at the crown; with anxious gentle eyes, able to see only one thing at a time; and with well-cut lips, in perpetual unrest. He was slightly over middle height, disposed to stoop, and hollow about the cheeks.

Poking tenderly in among leaves and brambles, coming upon a spider here, unearthing a worm there, Mr. Maxwell was perfectly contented. He had a close personal interest in the lives of these lower beings, and never passed one by without examination. The tiny swelling tree-buds, just breaking into green, brought a smile to his face, and his rather delicate fingers touched them now and then affectionately. "Now, if Arthur were here—" he said.

Just then a shrill scream rang through the air from the road below. Nothing could be seen for the thick growth of trees between, but the scream rang out a second and a third time, and another voice called for help. Mr. Maxwell started into a man of action at once. As is the fashion with people awakened suddenly from a dream, he had not his wits very clearly about him. The fact of somebody in distress or peril was patent, however, and the scholarly gentleman dashed headlong through the wood, which divided the upper from the lower road; for Muriel's favourite view-peep over the wall lay at some distance.

That was a charge in good earnest! Brambles might scratch, but they could not stop a man so bent on flying to the rescue. Bits of his coat-tails remained behind, and the carefully-collected ferns were nowhere. But the empty wide-awake was nothing to him. Being a man of but one idea, he had no thought save for "somebody in danger."

Entirely forgetting that this bit of wood ended abruptly in a steep bank, some four feet high, and overhanging the lower road, he dashed headlong down, and suddenly found himself on the verge. Nothing for it but to leap. He had one glimpse of a little girl clinging to a young lady with cries of terror, while a large dog was worrying her dress. Then leap he did, and came down with a crash at Muriel Bertram's feet, and very nearly upon the dog's back. This was too much for canine courage, and the startled creature fled like a hare; while a half-scream escaped Muriel, at the sight of her brother's tutor nearly measuring his length in the dust.

Maxwell struggled up, panting and bashful, trying to be unconscious of pain in his left knee. "Thank you," he said in response for Muriel's helping hand. "I—I—heard you call, and was afraid something had happened."

"The dog rather frightened us both. I don't know that there was real danger, but he seemed once as if he would fly at me," said Muriel. "See, little girl, you are quite safe now. The dog has gone, and your home lies the other way. Good-bye, and don't cry any more. Mr. Maxwell, you are not hurt, I hope? That was rather a long leap for you."

"It was," said Montgomery Maxwell, in a thoughtful tone. "Yes, certainly it was—at my age. And yet there are men of active habits, past forty-two, who would think nothing of it."

"Are you coming home?" asked Muriel, and he went with her directly, though his face had been turned the other way. Mr. Maxwell was not only Arthur Bertram's tutor. Muriel had for years studied language and science with him; and after being for twelve years perpetually in and out of the house, he had gained the standing of confidential family-friend. It was a standing which he never abused. His caution was akin to that of a man walking blindfold among red-hot ploughshares.

"Arthur has gone for a game of foot-ball to-day," said Muriel. "Yes—I pressed it upon him! I am afraid of imbuing him too exclusively with my own tastes. A man should not be a mere copy of another," said Mr. Maxwell.

"Did he tell you of my trouble last night?"

"He did—yes, he did mention what took place. Every word that passes there is safe with me, you know," said the tutor deprecatingly.

"I know that. Mr. Maxwell, what do you think?"

Mr. Maxwell had a great dislike to give an opinion on any manner of event "there." He answered by a movement of his eyebrows.

"I can't see that I was wrong. John has been more than brother to me, and Rosie more than sister. How can I cast them off? Will anything ever bring grandpapa and John together again?"

Mr. Maxwell attempted no answer, but Muriel went on passionately, used to his reticence, and secure of his sympathy. "It seems so sad—so terrible—such a family break. Sad enough that he should cast off aunt Constance—his own daughter. But parents don't always love their children alike—not always," repeated the girl mournfully. "We know that, don't we?—though I think I have not spoken of it to you since I was a child. Sometimes I feel as if I could not bear to go on keeping everything in, without a soul to tell my troubles to. Sybel has gone, and Rosie I must not speak with, and John I am to pass as a stranger. There is nobody else except you. I can't talk of my troubles to new friends."

"I think you may feel safe with me," said Mr. Maxwell, in a tone of studied quietness. A new phase of the man came out here. Dreaminess and attention to hedge-rows were laid aside in Muriel's presence. He listened and watched intently for each word and look, yet scarcely seemed as if he did either.

"I know that. You never repeat a word, and I know it, or I could not speak. But about John—oh, it is so sad! As I was saying, it is bad enough about aunt Constance, though they say she never did get on well with grandpapa. But John—why, you know what he and John were to one another. It used to be almost as if he loved no one in the world except John. I don't know how John escaped spoiling, except that there was your influence; and yet you did not teach him. You had not the moulding of him as you have with Arthur. But those two could hardly bear to be apart. Do you remember how, when they came together in holidays and vacation, the perpetual 'Where's John?' and 'Where's grandpapa?' was quite a little joke among us?"

Mr. Maxwell moved his head in sorrowful assent.

"And now, never to meet, never to exchange one word. John feels it sharply, I know; and grandpapa—don't you think he is unhappy? He often looks so. Do you think there is nothing to be done?"

"There is—avoiding further offence," said Mr. Maxwell.

"That may keep the gap from widening, but it will not bring them together. Nothing else?"

Mr. Maxwell did not wish to suggest. He was a little afraid of Muriel's impetuosity. She might quote him, and cause a breach in a new quarter.

"I should like to be peacemaker here. What joy it would be!" she said, with a light in her eyes. "But how to set to work? I feel like some

one penned up in a room full of glass ornaments, afraid to turn for fear of causing a smash. Do you know, I am coming to the conclusion that life can't be happy without freedom?"

"The life shaped out for each one is the best," said Mr. Maxwell.

"You don't mean that we must never even wish for things to be different?"

He thought of a good many answers, and was satisfied with none. Some hackneyed lines came to his relief:

"Happiness dwells in the temper within, And not in the outward estate."

"I don't believe it, Mr. Maxwell. I never did see the force of that couplet. I am of a temper to be happy, I am sure, as much as anybody. No one can be brighter than I am—when in the mood."

"Ay—when," murmured the tutor with some emphasis.

"And when I am not, there is always a cause."

"I suppose everybody would say that. Rosamund is always joyous, whatever her circumstances."

"Rosamund is a born sunbeam, and I am a born barometer. That is the difference, and I can't change my nature. My state of mind always does, and always will depend upon circumstances. Why, the mere state of the weather raises or depresses me. I could never become Rosamund."

"No," said Mr. Maxwell. He did not point out to her what she seemed to overlook—that her comparison between her cousin and herself only tended to prove the truth of his quotation.

"Sybel and I are more alike—we always were. I love and admire Rosie's evenness, but I could not copy it. I am not quite sure how far I wish to do so. Hills must be laid low, as well as valleys filled up, before you can have a level plain, and I could not bear to miss one of my hill-tops. Would you wish to see me change, Mr. Maxwell?"

He half shook his head. "Only for your own sake—a more peaceful spirit, perhaps. Pardon me, Muriel."

"As if you might not say what you liked—you who have been my Roger Ascham," said Muriel, smiling. "Ah, you found out my moodiness many a time, didn't you? and yet you less than anybody. How good and patient you always were! O I wish I were a child again, running over to your house at all hours for my lessons, and Mrs. Maxwell always arranging for us three girls to meet there. Happy days those were, though I didn't always think so at the time. You used to tell me then that I was too much up and down; and now—now—but, Mr. Maxwell, how can I be bright—how can my life be other than sad? You know what my trials are. And you know the worst—the worst of all—which so few know. How can I be happy without a mother's love?"

Muriel's face was turned away suddenly, and her breath came in long catches of pain. A pang of sympathy shot through her gentle-hearted companion. To see her in distress was almost more than he could stand. He remembered how bitterly she had once cried over this same grief, when he had first known her as a dark-eyed impulsive child of twelve. He had told her then that it was a thing she should not talk about out of her own family circle; and for twelve years she had rigidly obeyed that injunction—excepting none from the rule but her two intimate girl-friends, Rosamund and Sybel Ray. But this day the wave rose high and broke. She was very lonely. He read the loneliness in her face, when she looked round at him again.

"Why is it, Mr. Maxwell?" she said. "What can be the reason? If I only knew that,—only knew of something definite that I might try to set right, I would set it right at any cost. I think I could do or give up anything on earth for my mother's sake—if it would please her. Why is it that nothing I can do ever pleases her? You know it; you see it. Sometimes I lie awake at night, and ache all over with the longing for one loving word, one true motherly kiss. I never had either. Yet people can love me. Others don't hold me at arm's length, and look upon me as something almost repulsive. Is there anything repulsive about me, which I don't know of? Yes, you may say 'Muriel' in that indignant tone, and others would too, and yet I don't feel sure. For if my mother finds me so, there must be something. Mr. Maxwell, have you no idea of the reason? Why is it? How is it?"

Mr. Maxwell shook his head hopelessly. He had never yet solved the problem. "Perhaps there is more love than appears on the surface," he said.

"And you can say that—after all these years?"

"One can't always judge. Each of us is cold to the other."

"Yes, now—how can it be other-

wise? But have I never tried to win her?"

Another slow shake of the head.

"And her manner to Lilius—it isn't as if she were the same to us both. But I must not speak of that," said Muriel hastily, a constrained look coming over her face. "There is where I feel the tempter's power."

Montgomery Maxwell looked at her sorrowfully. He had what he often called to his mother a "fatherly" longing over Muriel, a pitying desire to smooth her rough path. But he did not know how to comfort her. The thought in his heart was, "God knows best for his children, and He has his reasons, and we must trust his love even in dark days." His thoughts, however, did not easily find expression. "There must be resignation," he said. "One cannot look for happiness without submission."

Muriel sighed, and dropped the subject—relieved to have let out her mind a little, but not comforted. They were near the Manor, and Mr. Maxwell stopped to say good-bye. He was not going in, he said, and he did not tell her that he had not been coming in that direction at all. He turned down a side-path, and went home by rather a detour, quite indifferent to the lengthened walk with a painful knee. He would have done or borne anything for Muriel.

THE HOME CHURCH.

Your home ought to be a church. The home was God's first church, the father and mother were God's first priests, and the first altar was a family altar. The most sacred of all church services is the Lord's Supper, and this replaces the passover feast, which was a family feast. The early Christian Church was cradled in the household, and in private homes the disciples met for prayer and praise. The universal church, including all the faithful, is a household of faith, a great family whose father is in heaven; the Church of the First Born above, our heaven is our home. So the first paradise and the last paradise are both homes, and the home between ought to be like them. Our children ought to learn all their first lessons of father and mother; and lessons of faith, hope, and charity, lessons of reverence and penitence, lessons of prayer and praise, ought to be their first lessons. You would be shocked to go into a Western town and find in it no church, no Sunday-school, no religious services. I heard the other day of such a town, made up of men who had resolved that they would have no preacher and no Gospel there. One man who had tried it for a year bore a bitter testimony of the result.

"I came out here," said he, "to find a place where there was no God. I have found it, and it is a hell." And he set himself to work to organize a Sunday-school. How many families there are which are in just the condition of that Western town. As a family they are without God. No voice of prayer or praise ever goes up from the home circle. No child ever learns to look through the father on earth to the father in heaven; through the earthly home to the home in heaven. It is pitiful to think how many children there are in the world, and even in this land of ours, who grow up in ignorance, not knowing how to read or write. It is more pitiful to think how many children there are who grow up not knowing how to pray or praise. May God help the father and mother who read these lines to establish a church in their house, or, if one is already established there, to make it richer in faith and hope and love; to set up in their household a ladder which rests upon the ground, but whose topmost round pierces the heavens, up which every night and morning the prayers run nimbly to God, and down which, more nimbly, come angels bearing blessings from his hand.—Lyman Abbott.

RANDOM READINGS.

Christ is not valued at all unless he is valued above all.

If men are so wicked with religion what would they be without it?

The whole cross is more easily carried than the half.—Drummond.

The Scriptures teach us the best way of living, the noblest way of suffering, and the most comfortable way of dying.

Mystery is but another name for our ignorance; if we were omniscient, all would be perfectly plain.—Byron Edwards.

No man ever served God by doing things to-morrow. If we honor Christ, and are blessed, it is by the things which we do to-day.

The lark goes up singing toward heaven; but if she stops the motion of her wings then straightway she falls. So is it with him who prays not. Prayer is the movement of the wings of the soul; it bears one heavenward, but without prayer we sink.



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