

the two, as well as the more profitable both socially and pecuniarily; but Theresa was the better subject for vivisection—to be conducted with caution and his hands well protected.

All this flashed in one formless thought through his mind as he stood before the altar in the attitude of a High Priest, symbolizing the cross and blessing the people, while Theresa knew the supreme bliss of spiritual ecstasy—that ecstasy which though spiritual is also sensuous; and Hermione, with darkened eyes, thought what a charming thing it was to be religious, and how happy she was in her new life! For the moment Richard, her late trouble with him and her marriage, altogether had ceased to exist, and she was now simply one of Mr. Lascelles' congregation—and the favourite member.

Perhaps Virginia was really the happiest of all. She was not quite so pale as usual, and her gentle face had even more of that tender peace which had come into it since she had known Sister Agnes, as she fixed her eyes on the white cross above the altar and prayed to Mother Mary and Our Lord to make her worthy of her privileges. And ah! what a treasure of pure love was in it as she looked over to Sister Agnes in her nunlike dress standing in voluntary humility by the pillar in the free seats, and said an Ave as her act of thanksgiving for the gift of her spiritual mother. Then she looked at Ringrove, who was looking at her, and her eyes shone if her lips were still—glad, grateful, as she was that she had been able to bring him here, according to the command laid on her by the Sister.

That look was poor Ringrove's reward for the violence which he had done to his truest self in coming here to-day simply to please her; and, being in love, it made him think:—

"Perhaps after all such women as these are right. Perhaps they do see more clearly than we coarser and less pure men, and we might do worse than listen to them!"

It was a concession to have got so far as this; what if Virginia should care to lead him to the end?

Aunt Catherine near Sister Agnes, also ostentatiously in the free seats, was mysterious and beatified but fluttered and half coy to-day. The ladies had all come in their brightest dresses to do honour to a festival which was in its intention joyful and a thanksgiving; and Aunt Catherine was in white, with a strangely bridal character about her veil and bonnet that looked odd enough on a rosy-cheeked, apple-faced, round little dumpling of a woman past fifty as she was. But she had dreamed last night of certain heavenly espousals by which her imagination had been more awakened than usual—and it was never very drowsy; and thinking a ghostly bridegroom better than none at all, and a marriage made in a dream a witness of sealing here which shall be proclaimed and solemnized hereafter, she had come in what she meant should express bridal array; and the meaning of which she would explain to Sister Agnes and Superior when mass was over.

For the rest, pretty Beatrice and her younger sisters were here, shame to say, in part as at a show; not having reached that state of ecclesiastical grace when the Church is the same as God, and a week-day service, with decorations like a fair, as sacred as the Sunday prayers without. She glanced often at Ringrove Hardisty; her brown eyes full of mild surprise to see him standing there, tall and superior-looking, in his pew. For she was an unconverted kind of creature; and, though thoroughly good and gentle and wholesome, had not in her the makings of a zealot

—besides having no great admiration for the man who was now the great god Zeus of Crossholme. Ringrove had been always her ideal of what a strong good man should be; and especially had she taken delight in his quiet resistance to the new vicar. And now he was here in church on a week-day, and assisting at a service that was just a Roman Catholic mass and nothing else! How odd it was, and how strange these contradictions were! And how strange too were these differences of feeling! Here was Bee Nesbitt sorrowing secretly over her friend's weakness, while Virginia's soul was elate with holy joy to think that this pleasant, good-tempered, honest-hearted sinner, known since her childhood and liked always if never loved, was so far on the road to salvation that he might one day be looked for among the saved—turned into a new path by the means of a handful of incense and a few barrow-loads of flowers! It was a very little matter on which to build up hope or fashion fear; but life is made up of small touches—and Ringrove was in love; and when men are in love there is no miracle that may not be expected, no transformation that may not be wrought.

Even Mr. Lascelles allowed himself to draw bigger conclusions than the premiss warranted. As he said to Cuthbert Molyneux in the sacristy—there was no vestry now-a-days—Virginia Fullerton's influence was evidently blessed. She had brought Mr. Hardisty to the service to-day, as she had brought him yesterday to assist in the preparations; and, tainted as he notoriously was by the diabolical principles professed by Mr. Fullerton, it was an immense deal to have accomplished. What a gain it would be to the Church should he be won over by the means of this dear young saint, this sweet child of grace and natural piety united!



To which Cuthbert had assented warmly, so far as Virginia was concerned—but in the matter of Ringrove's possible salvation, somewhat tamely. He wondered at the time why he was not able to feel more Christian and fraternal exultation at the possible gathering-in of a notorious outsider like Ringrove. It was not like him not to hail the probable salvation of a now lost brother with effusive sympathy; yet, he would rather that Superior himself, or say his own Aunt Catherine, had been that vessel of grace by whose influence the master of Monks-hall had been won. He was not in love with Virginia; not in the least, as wholesome-minded men count love; but he was glad to be the only male sheep in the flock which held her as its most precious lamb; and he dreaded the introduction of another masculine saint, especially one so self-assertive and strong as Ringrove Hardisty. He was a good young man; a very good young man indeed; but he had rather mistaken his vocation in being a man at all, and if he had some of the virtues of women, he had many of their faults and not a few of their foibles.

But now the procession and the processional hymn were ended; the Wicked Man and the opening exhortation had been intoned in a high-pitched key by one of the strange priests; and then the ladies dropped on their knees in the abrupt automatic manner practised by this school, which makes manner of as much account as matter, and holds it for testimony when human beings are enabled to make themselves look like marionettes jerked by a string. Virginia knelt close behind her mother in their big pew, which was soon to be cut down into an open seat in conformity with the rest. Theresa, her burning hands clasped nervously together, repeated the causes of the Confession, while the inevitable reaction

from that moment of ecstasy having set in, the hot tears of what she thought was penitence and Mr. Lascelles knew to be hysteria, streamed down her face; and the service went on in great volumes of voice and music such as they had never heard at Crossholme before, and did not know what to make of now when they did hear.

Still it was fine and heartsome. Even those most hostile could not deny the grand effect of it all, while those most committed were enraptured; and of the *tertium quid*, halting between two opinions, some were won over by the brave show and thought that there must be something in it all, and some were terrified at the papistry which now seemed to have thrown off its disguise, and would never stop until it had got its foot on their necks, and made them slaves without a voice in the disposition of their own souls.

And then, in its right place in the service, Mr. Lascelles, in his surplice tied round the waist with a cord, and with a small cap or berretta on his head, went into the pulpit, and after his usual formula, "In the name of—" crossing himself rapidly as he spoke, abruptly began his textless sermon of thanksgiving.

No pains of hell, nor penalties for sin, informed the vicar's discourse to-day. It was all jubilant, hopeful, inspiring. It spoke much of the gratitude which we owe to the Divine Father who gives us all these good things, and who leads us so gently through the thorny ways and guides us safely over the burning ploughshares; who cares for us as His children and does not allow a hair of our heads to fall without His will. It spoke much too of the peace which comes to souls that are reconciled to the Church, and by the power of the Church made free of divine grace and eternal forgiveness; and it extolled the