

The New Utopia.

(From the Irish Monthly.)

CHAPTER VII.—(Continued)

We approached the altar, and I perceived what had not struck me at first, the exceeding richness of all its fittings.

"That tabernacle," said the chaplain. "is solid gold: it was made out of the first gold discovered at Glenleven, in Australia, 'the great nugget' as it was called: the duke had it sent to England untouched, and resolved that the first fruits of his gold-fields should furnish the tabernacle of his chapel. The lamps and candlesticks are likewise Australian gold, and so are the sacred vessels."

I knelt before the tabernacle, and the last fragment of my doubts and misgivings vanished into thin air. "Oh, Grant, Grant!" I murmured, "what injustice I have done you! The world talks and judges, and comprehends nothing: you are not of its form and fashion!" And as we turned to leave the chapel, I seemed still to see before me the dying face of St Alexis, and the golden tabernacle.

We walked home through the plantations, and Oswald was silent, and, for him, thoughtful.

"I called your duke a man of business this morning," he said, "but just now I could fancy him to be a poet."

"A poet! Why so?"

"Well, it was a beautiful thought that about his gold; there was something about the whole thing that struck me as poetical."

I doubt if the duke was ever conscious of doing anything particularly graceful; but undoubtedly, *Faith* has always an innate sense of beauty.

"That is a little beyond me," said Oswald; "but I will tell you why it struck me. At Exborough Park, as you may be aware, there is also what goes by the name of a chapel. The Exborough people always set you down to gold plate at dinner, but the chapel looks like a dust-hole. Leven has abolished the gold plate at Oakham, and the gentry hercabouts call it one of his peculiarities; but I suspect they would understand it better if they looked at that altar."

"Yet the Exboroughs are Catholics," I remarked.

"I should rather think so," said Oswald, "and immensely proud of being of the old stock, and all that sort of thing. But Lady Ex. goes in for London seasons to any extent, and the Exborough girls are the fastest in the county."

"A report reached me in Australia," I said, "that one of them was likely to become Duchess of Leven."

"Wouldn't Lady Exborough have liked it!" said Oswald: "but it was a dead failure. On that subject, as on many others, Leven is peculiar; and I believe he confided to Mary that if the seige lasted he should have to leave the county."

I laughed. "Then there *was* a seige? And who relieved it?" I asked.

"Oh, I believe, Lord Exborough stepped in and stopped proceedings; and Lady Florinda herself took alarm when Glenleven was founded, and the rumour spread that the duke was going to be a lay brother."

"What is Glenleven?" I asked. "Everyone talks of it, and no one tells me what or where it is."

"What, don't you know? It is a large tract of country just on the outskirts of Exborough Moor, where Leven has transplanted a community of Benedictines who fled from the tender mercies of Beastmark. He has built them a grand place, I believe; I have not seen it, but by all accounts the church is a second Cluny. They farm the land, and have all manner of schools of art, carving and metal work; then there are the granite works opened hard by, all which things give occupation to Leven's colony of orphan boys and other select characters, out of whom he cherishes the design of creating a New Utopia."

I looked enquiringly.

"I really cannot tell you much more about it," continued Oswald; "but I think his small success at Bradford, or what he considers as such, has convinced him that the reformation of society is somewhat a difficult undertaking unless you take your society in the cradle. And he has conceived the idea of a Christian colony, not beyond the Rocky Mountains, or in the wilds of Australia, but here in the heart of England, to be peopled by men and women of his own bringing up, who shall be protected from penny newspapers, be greatly given to plain chant, and wholly ignorant of the pot-house."

"It sounds splendid; but are you in earnest?"

"Well, I tell you, I have never seen the place. It is a tremendously long drive, and killing for the horses. I gather my ideas of it chiefly from Knowles's talk, who would greatly like to be received as a monk—of course under certain conditions."

"Well, you have excited my curiosity, and some day I shall try and see for myself," I replied; "but it sounds, as you say, uncommonly Utopian."

We reached home, and for the rest of the evening I listened, after a sort, to Oswald's careless rattle: but my attention, I confess, would often wander away to thoughts of the chapel and Utopia.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NEW DUKE.

On the following Monday the duke returned, and next day I received a brief note from him, begging me to come up to the Park, to dine and sleep, and begin the settlement of the Queensland business the next morning. I went up accordingly, was shown to my room, dressed and descended to the drawing-room, where for the best part of an hour I waited alone, but Leven himself appeared not. As I afterwards ascertained, the hour preceding dinner was the one hour in the day he claimed for privacy, and no one then ever ventured to disturb him. At last the door opened, and he stood before me. I grasped his hand looked into that face, the same, and yet so altered,

Aged not by ten but twenty years; no longer with the vigorous ruddy bloom of five-and-twenty, but pale and transparent, and sweet beyond expression. I stammered out something about "waiting on his Grace," but at once he stopped me. "I have enough of that elsewhere," he said; "let you and me be always Grant and Aubrey."

We went in to dinner. Remembering all I had heard of his eccentric habits, I was curious what there might be to notice, and I noticed nothing. There was no gold plate, certainly; but neither was there any affectation of extravagant simplicity.

He talked of old times in Australia, and of Scotland, whence he had just returned, and of Homchester, where he had been inspecting some new engines for his mines. Oswald was right; he certainly had a liking for business.

After dinner we stepped out on the terrace. How delicious this is, after a week of Homchester; how it reminds me of that happy evening at the Grange, Jack, when you all made me so at home. I couldn't say the feeling it gave me to see your mother with her cap and her crotchet, and her sweet motherly ways. It reminded me of my own dear mother. Do you know, I often go and have a talk to the old lady, that I may just look at that cap of hers; it's the most lovable thing in Oakham."

(No wonder, I thought, that she considers him faultless.)

"You have been adding to the place since I was here," I said. "Really, Grant, I never expected to see new graperies."

"That was your sister's affair; trust a woman for getting what she has a mind for."

"And, then, the chapel?"

"Ah, yes, I couldn't always be going over to Bradford, as on that eventful Sunday. You've seen it, of course?"

"Yes, and St. Alexis."

He smiled. "That was poor Werner's painting; such a fellow, Jack; a true painter; a man with a soul at the end of his paint-brush; it was wonderful."

"So you burnt poor Adonis?"

"Who's been talking about all that nonsense? Mary, I'll be bound. Yes, I burnt him, and I'd burn him again if I had the coffee."

"What a Goth you are, Grant!"

"About as bad as St. Gregory, for he would certainly have done the same. Look here, Jack; you send a fellow to prison for a month, with hard labour, for selling prints in a shop window that shock the eye of the respectable public: and then the respectable public votes thousands of the public money to bang the walls of the national collections with abominations much more dangerous."

"Well, but what about Werner? is he an ancient or a modern?"

"Werner? Oh, I forgot you didn't know him; well, I think I never loved a fellow better: but, you see, my friends have all got a trick of leaving me."

"Is he dead, then," I asked, gently.

"Dead to this world, Jack: he has left it; passed, as the Laureate would say, 'into the silent life.' He carried his heart and his pencil to Glenleven."

He was silent. "People say——" I began, then paused, for I thought it might seem an impertinence.

"I know what you mean," he said, quickly. "Yes, I dreamt about it once, but they would not hear of it. They told me truly that I had received my call, and that my sacrifice must be to remain in the world, and not to leave it."

"Why, of course," I said. "Could you doubt it? It is not every one who has such means at his command."

He sighed deeply. "Means enough, but so little comes of it."

Come now, Grant, what do you mean by that? Just look at Bradford."

"Bradford!" he said: "yes, indeed, look at it—such an utter failure. No, of course, I don't regret it, nor the time, nor the plague of it, nor the money; and I don't mean there's been nothing done: but, oh, the depths of iniquity hidden away in places like that, and all England seething with them." He bent his head for a minute or two, and an expression of great pain was on his brow when he once more raised it. But it passed in a moment, and again the sweet, calm look returned. "All right, Jack: one must do one's best, and a sad mess the best is: but one must do it, and then leave it with God."

"And how about Glenleven? Is it true, Grant, that you are trying to create a Garden of Eden there, with all due precautions for shutting out the serpent?"

"If you mean the ale-house, yes," he answered. "I suspect that is our English edition of the monster."

"What! beer actually prohibited? My dear Grant, that will never pay: the Anglo-Saxon animal cannot live without it."

"I believe he can't; but I don't go that length."

"What then?"

"Well, I try it this way: I engage the fellows to drink what they want at home at their own houses."

"But how can they get it to drink?" I asked. "Isn't there something about 'licensed to be drunk on the premises?'"

He looked a little timid, as though aware that he was confessing to a hobby. "I do it this way, Jack: they all have their *rations*. Every man at work on the place has his proper allowance, and it is sent him from the little tavern. But the tavern is in my own hands, and the fellow who keeps it has no licence to sell beer or spirits on the premises."

"Don't they evade your code of laws?"

"Well, on the whole, no: but time alone can test it."

We walked up and down for a while in silence. "I know, my dear Aubrey," at last he said, "that there's much to be said against it, as unreal, unpractical. Most men think me an ass, and I daresay they are in the right of it. But to secure even a year, a month, a week of innocence is worth living for—at least that is how I see it."

I felt touched at the humble, apologetic tone of the man who was speaking of what the world styled his crotchet. "My dear Grant," I said, "who can doubt it? All I was thinking was, how far any private efforts can ever take the place of law and public opinion."

"Your old stronghold!" he said, smiling. "You were always the man for law and order. Just see here. Did you ever hear of Count Rumford?"