The New Utopia.

(From the Irish Monthly.)

CHAPTER IX.—*(Continued.)*

"I should think old Mary's tongue was a peaceable member," I replied.

"Pretty well, though she can come out now and then with a plain truth or two, as she did just now on the matter of genius. I wish she could put some of her common sense into poor Florry."

"Your sister has a touch of the erratic gift herself, I should suspect," I said, "and if so, you must make allowances."

"Oh, yes, and more than a touch; she is always at work on some new bother. Whatever can set a woman on such scents I don't understand' and it's bad altogether you know and unhinges her."

"People have a way now-a-days," I said, "of looking unhinged and unhappy; its the fashion."

"No," said Oswald, "I don't call Florry happy; she's always wanting a career of some sort, and can't settle down to humdrum. Mary is the only person she really minds, and Mary gets Wilfrid Knowles here to meet her, because she hopes he'll do Florry good: but I think it's a mistake; he only rouses her love of contradiction."

We talked about other things for a while, and then adjourned to the drawing-room, where we found Wilfrid and Mary deep in the discussion of parochial affairs, and Florence at the further end of the room, playing a game of fox-and-goose with Edward, while the two little girls looked on, Alexia acting as self-elected umpire. I ventured to approach, and was greeted with the information that "Aunt Florence was losing all her geese!"

"I wish I thought so," said Florence with a sigh. Then, as the last white peg was snapped up by the inexorable fox, she resigned the board to the children, and graciously condescended to allow me to sit beside her. "I have not yet thanked you," she said, "for taking the part of poor genius. I really thought 'Father Wilfrid' (as they call him) would have condemned us for life to the use of stable-lanterns."

"Possibly," I said; if one had to find one's way on a dark night, they might have a trifling advantage over sky-rockets."

"Yes, but one isn't always groping one's way in the dark."

"Well, really, when you come back to civilised society after ten year's absence, it's not much unlike what you find people doing."

"How so?"

"Why, everyone seems on the look-out for first principles which one would have thought they had learnt centuries ago from their grandmothers."

"I think I understand what you mean," said Florence, musingly; "but it must be so when people begin to think for themselves; everyone can't exactly rest satisfied with his grandmother's speculations."

"No, but my complaint is, that these independent thinkers pick everything to pieces and leave it so."

"That is to say," said Florence, "they analyse, and how else can they hope to get at truth?"

"Those who analyse," I said, "should know how to reconstruct, otherwise they are in the position of people who take their watches to pieces, and cannot put them together again. They would have done better to have trusted a watchmaker."

"Your simile has the vice of all similes," she replied; "it seems to say something, and it says nothing. I can trust my watch with another to regulate, but not my independent convictions."

"But, my dear Miss Oswald, how many persons now-a-days possess such a commodity? All the people I know take their convictions second hand from the *Times* newspaper, or the *Saturday Review*, or maybe from the *Western Censor*. I really hardly know one man who thinks for himself, unless it be the Duke of Leven."

"Yes, the duke *is* original, certainly," she replied; "I don't agree with him, of course; but he is thoroughly in earnest, and I respect him immensely."

"And Father Wilfrid, is not he also somewhat of a doctor in Israel?"

She looked disdainfully in the direction where he sat: "In his opinion, no doubt, but not in mine, I like the *real thing*, Mr. Grey, whatever be its kind. Charley's champagne was splendid; but if he were to give us 'gooseberry' with a champagne ticket, I should call him an impostor." With that she walked to the open window, where Wilfrid presently joined her, and soon we heard them engaged afresh in a wordy war.

"That's the way she treats the impostor," said Oswald, who had caught her last words as he approached. "A most wonderful thing is woman."

This philosophic remark closed my study of character for that evening, but when I retired to my room, I could not help going over it all again, as a lawyer studies the points of his brief. "She talks at random," I said to myself, "and half of it is *chaff*. She thinks amazingly well of her own powers, and has read a prodigious quantity of rubbish. She would have no objection to be thought an infidel, because it would be jaunty and defiant. If she ever becomes one, it will be the result of over-preaching; if she is ever saved from becoming one, it will not be by the ministry of Father Wilfrid."

In the correctness of this last conclusion, I was next day confirmed and it happened thus: Exdale was in the parish of Oakham, but possessed a church of its own, served by one of the Oakham curates, and just now the thoughts of Mr. Knowles were busily engaged with plans for its restoration. The architect, Mr. Buttermilk, was to meet him at Exdale, and had brought with him drawings and elevations in great store, the inspection of which furnished the drawing-room party with an agreeable morning's occupation.

Screened by my newspaper, much edifying talk over sedilia and holy water stoups fell upon my ear; and I was wondering a little about the exact utility of the last-named article in a Protestant church, when Florence joined in the conversation and at once hit the blot. "The sedilia are to sit in, I presume," she said, "and will save the expense of chairs; but what will you do with the holy water stoups?"

"It is our wish," said Buttermilk, with professional unction, "to reconstruct this beautiful little edifice, as it existed in the fourteenth century, and to do that completely none even of these minor accessories should be omitted."

"But will there be holy water in them?" inquired Florence, in the tone of one innocently desirous of information.

"Probably not," said Knowles, "but they will bear their witness."

"Oh, I see," said Florence, gravely; "holy water stoups and no holy water: let us proceed."

The next drawing was produced; it represented an elaborately carved tomb or sepulchre, to be erected on the north wall of the chancel,

"How beautiful!" said Mary; but isn't it an odd place for a monument?"

"It is not a monument, my dear Mrs. Oswald," said Knowles, "but a *sepulchre*, such as was required for the touching and significant ceremony anciently practised on Easter morning," and he proceeded to read from a glossary of Gothic art the description of an elaborate rite, "now wholely obsolete,'

"I was thinking it must be so," said Florence, who had listened attentively. "I have often gone to the services in Holy Week when I've been abroad: the music is so beautiful; but I never saw anything at all like what you have described."

"No," said Knowles (who, I suppose, overlooked me behind my newspaper), "it is one among many examples of the way in which the modern Roman Church has departed from the ancient practice."

"And which, no doubt, the modern English Church has preserved with jealous veneration," said his tormentor.

"If she has not preserved it, she will very probably revive it," said Knowles. "If we continue at our present pace, the English branch of the Church Catholic will ere long have the most magnificent ritual in western Christendom.

"I don't doubt it," said Florence, "and I tell you what it will then remind me of; a grand display of gold and silver dishes with nothing to eat upon the table."

"Would you like the display any the better," said Knowles, "if the dishes were full of viands?"

"Perhaps not," said Florence, "except in this, that the banquet would then be a reality; whereas, in the present case, it is a cruel sham."

"Do not mistake me, Miss Oswald," said Knowles, with great earnestness. "I respect your love of what is real and honest; I do indeed; were we aiming at the revival of external ceremonies only, it would be, as you say, a cruel sham; but ceremonial is not an empty shell; in time it will bring back the realities."

"Never!" said Florence, with a vehement emphasis, which made Mr. Buttermilk look up through his spectacles in some alarm; "never! your realities are long ago dead and buried."

"Are they?" I said, as I caught her eye over my newspaper.

"Yes," she replied, leaving the group of archæologists, and coming over to my quarter of the apartment. "can you dispute it?"

"I dispute the possibility of a reality ever dying, whatever pains may be taken to bury it."

She remained silent; and, as I looked at her, I too felt a kind of respect for that scorn of shams which was manifestly genuine in her. I thought of the impression I had myself received long years ago, when Grant had told us the story of his life, and how for the first time it had opened my heart to a sense of the realities of faith.

"May I tell you a story, Miss Oswald?" I said.

"I should like it of all things," she replied; and perhaps it will help to restore my temper. Suppose you tell it in the garden, for if you begin here we shall be swallowed up in the mediæval Maelstrom."

So to the garden we made our way, and finding a seat adapted for story-telling, I began at the beginning, and related my friend's history and experiences as well as my memory served me. She listened, at first with curiosity only, but soon with deeper interest; and before I had concluded, the tears which gathered in her eyes had almost softened into beauty her haughty features.

"Yes, that is real, if you like," she said. "That mass in the barn listened to by a crowd of shepherds and bush-men, with the old priest standing up there in the midst, and speaking out to them like a man; and the others, astounded, cut to the heart, conscience-stricken! What a scene! One longs to have witnessed it!"

"But what *made* it real?" I asked.

"The man was in earnest," she replied, "and so was his audience. There was no affectation about mediæval vestments, or obsolete ceremonies; he spoke from his heart and they listened with theirs, and that was all about it."

"Then you don't think it was in any way explained by the fact, that he spoke as one having authority, who had the truth to give?"

"The truth! authority!" she repeated in a tone, as though the words conveyed no definite sense to her understanding. "Perhaps I don't quite catch your meaning; I cannot see how one has any more *authority* to talk than another; but if he says bravely what he thinks strongly, it is truth to him; and I listen with respect, whether the words come from Pius. IX. or from Buddha."

Yes, that is the sort of thing we have to listen to now-a-days from our sisters and daughters. Of course they don't know what they are talking about, and not two of them would be able to tell you who Buddha was, or when he lived. But what does that matter! It is the last new slang which they have picked up from the last periodical, and it sounds free and slashing; so it is quite in harmony with that peculiar style of dress which finds favour in proportion as it is manly.

"That view of truth is rather self-destructive," I observed; "a dozen or two of those same strong truths would soon reduce each other to negations,"