

Clutch of Rome.

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BY "GONZALES."

CHAPTER XXII.—Continued.
WHAT LOVE CAN DO.

When he awoke it was nearly noon. After a hurried breakfast he sought his wife's room. He found her reclining on a couch, and dressed in a gown of some soft, white material. She half arose as her husband came into the room, and the delicate flush on her pale, wasted cheek, and the happy light in her eyes, together with the general air of peaceful repose about her, told him that his promise of the early morning had been sufficient to bring to the bleeding conscience of his wife the balm it needed.

After a time he asked her where he would be likely to find the young priest who was already in her confidence. She directed him to Father St. John's residence, and soon after, with a gentle caress, he left her.

Before leaving the house, Senator Maxwell went to his sister's room, and in a few words acquainted her with what had passed between himself and wife, and the cause of her sudden illness of the night before, and of his intention to have their union solemnized that very afternoon by the church, to insure the happiness of his wife who loved him well enough to go to what she believed her doom with him. An expression of alarm gathered over Martha's face as her brother was speaking. When he had concluded, she said:

"James, do not, I implore you, add to the harvest of bitterness you are gathering home, by sinning further against your Maker, by bringing an envoy of the scarlet woman into the house, to drag you down to destruction, for this perturbation of spirit from which your life is suffering is all a snare of the devil."

"Martha," said her brother, sternly, "do you mean to insinuate that my wife is acting a part?"

"Your wife, James, is under the control of the evil one and his priests. You ought to be the one, if you love her as you say you do, to drag her from them, instead of going at her bidding to destruction with her."

Senator Maxwell was more amused than angry.

"Martha," he said, "will you be kind enough to direct me to the proper course of action in this matter, according to your idea?"

"I can put you in the right path, in a very few words, brother. Finish up the good work you commenced yesterday, when you turned that female papist out of the house, by casting into the water of the bay those prayer-books of the devil your misguided wife calls a rosary, and those graven images she worships, and forbid her, with a husband's authority, to ever again enter a Roman Catholic church; and publish an edict that any Catholic priest caught entering our gates shall be given up to the law as a malicious trespasser; and then bring in an honest, God-fearing Presbyterian minister, and let him, even at this late hour, join you two together in the sight of God. Yea, I have never been easy in my mind, James, that nothing but the civil law binds you and this alien woman, whom it is your duty to save since you have taken her to wife, together. You are an unregenerate descendant of a long line of honest, God-fearing Presbyterian ancestors, James, or you would never have taken this stranger woman to wife without the sanction of the Lord. What He joins together no man may put asunder."

"I find that, after all, you are much of the same opinion as my wife, Martha."

"James," interrupted his sister, sternly, "ye must ain gain yer own wicked gait." I can only hope that God, in His mercy, will not curse you for the work you are contemplating this day."

"Martha," said her brother, calmly, as he moved toward the door, "I would rather risk my immortal soul with my wife and the priests ten times over, than have your hard, pious heart."

And as the door closed after him, Martha buried her face in her hands and wept; and she made up her mind to go back to her own home in the far east, lest the evil one get dominion over her also.

Senator Maxwell, on leaving the house, met Dr. Wood coming up the steps. He told the doctor of the evident improvement in his wife's condition, and that he was going to comply with her wishes. Dr. Wood commended his course, and, in answer to the senator's request, said he would remain until his return. Behind his swift horses, Senator Maxwell soon arrived at Father St. John's residence. Mrs. Gibbs ushered him into the little parlor. He had not long to wait, and the bitter words which were forming on his lips, died away when the young priest came into the room.

Father St. John had been performing some service of the church, and he still wore his long black cassock. His face was very pale, and his large black eyes had that indescribable look in them which denoted a troubled mind at variance with the enforced occupation of the body.

physiognomy, and saw at a glance that the man before him was no canting bigot, and that some deep care was resting upon him.

"You are Father St. John?" he said, stiffly.

The priest inclined his head, inviting his visitor to be seated. The senator declined.

"Father St. John, I have come to take you to my house to read the religious ceremony of your church over the union of myself and wife, not to save the soul of a dead abbess, which, according to the presumptuous judgment of your priests, is suffering purgatorial horrors on our account; and not because my marital relations are not as pure in the judgment of God as if all the priests or ministers in Christendom had united us. Yea, I have more confidence in the wise judgment of my Creator than to believe He delegates His power and endows with prescience a favored few of His creatures; but because you (I do you justice, to think by orders of your superiors), in my absence, stole into my house, and with your dogmas and doctrines so worked upon the too credulous mind of my wife, that you have made it impossible for her to even live happy with me again, till this service is performed. Rest assured, it is to save the life of my wife, which you have endangered, that I consent to this. If you priests had done this thing on a moral basis only, I could have forgiven you, even to the baptism of my children. Your polished archbishop visited me in Washington. He baited his hook well. I confess I nibbled it; but he has used so much bait that I am nauseated, and shall never swallow the hook, for I, and not my wife, was the big fish your priests were trying to catch."

"Senator Maxwell," said St. John, "I, of course, understand all the purport of the archbishop's visit to you in Washington. Will you believe me, when I say that I am glad this scheme of the church has failed? and that I am sincere when I say that I cannot find words to tell you how deeply I regret the circumstances of my being a priest forced me to enter your home in the performance of my duty? For I, also, have the fault, if fault it be, of trusting many things to the judgment and mercy of God."

Senator Maxwell looked at the young priest searchingly a minute, extended his hand, and said:

"I believe you to be sincere; and now let us hasten to my wife."

Looking at the priest, as he sat opposite him in the carriage, Senator Maxwell became convinced that he was suffering from some mental or physical ailment.

"You look as if you had troubles, too," he said.

Father St. John's face flushed.

"A priest's life has its troubles and perplexities like the lives of other men," he said.

The senator respected his reticence, and silence fell between the two men during the remainder of the ride.

CHAPTER XXIII.
NO LONGER A PRIEST.

Martha was on the alert, and when her brother and the priest entered the house she shut herself in her room. After a lapse of time, she heard footsteps and low voices, and she knew that the ceremony was over and that her brother was escorting the priest to the lower hall.

"O, God, forgive them," she murmured, with clasped hands, "they know not what they do."

In response to a light tap on the door, she opened it to admit Anna, the maid.

"Oh, Anna," she exclaimed, as she pulled the girl into the room, "this house is built upon the sand, it will surely fall."

"Oh, I don't know, Ma'am, I think the troubles will soon be over. Mrs. Maxwell looks almost like her old self, already. I hate popery, but I think under the circumstances Mr. Maxwell has done a very sensible thing. Let's trust in the Lord. In any case, we haven't that yellow-eyed governess around; but I came to tell you, Miss, that Dr. Wood is in the drawing-room waiting to see you."

"Dr. Wood," said Miss Martha, "has he just come?"

"Bless you, no, Ma'am; he stood up along with me while the service was going on."

Martha, with a withering look at the girl, opened the door as a hint that she was to go.

"Miss Maxwell!" the girl began, humbly, "I know—"

"Will you please not detain me longer?" said Miss Maxwell.

Anna tossed her head and left the room. Martha's first impulse was to ignore Dr. Wood; her second, to let him feel the weight of her indignation. The doctor had waited to ask her to ride with him on the morrow.

"No, thank you, sir," she said, "tomorrow I shall be busy getting my belongings together and making arrangements to go back to my own home."

"What!" exclaimed the doctor, "isn't this a sudden resolve?"

"I have been aware, sir, that my brother's house was no place for me, and the ceremony of today, which I am informed you took part in, has made it plain to me that the time has come for me to depart."

"My dear lady," said the doctor,

among artists, minglings of swaying draperies and exotic blossoms that formed the bridal decorations of rooms that had before seemed to have exhausted all the artistic resources of wealth in their furnishings.

Mrs. Olney, as usual, flirting languidly with some society men, and her husband, were among the guests. The strains of "Lieder Ohne" were floating through the room. Mrs. Olney, in her Worth gown and diamonds, thought of her own bridal, looked at her husband, who was leaning over the chair of a fair lady and flinging society froth from between his moustached lips, for her benefit, and the curl of her lip turned to a languid smile, as some remark of her companion drew her attention to himself.

"There is that pretty little artist, Flora Hume, among the lady singers, I see," he said, with a wave of Mrs. Olney's fan in their direction.

The ladies commenced to sing the bridal chorus from "Lohengrin." Mrs. Olney's slim fingers closed with destructive force among the bouquet of roses on her lap, as the bridal procession, preceded by his grace the archbishop, the vicar general and Father St. John, came through the rooms; for Mrs. Olney was never easy in the presence of the two who had thrust the keen darts of humiliation into her soul. Darts, which she herself had pointed.

After the ceremony, Father St. John made his way slowly among the brilliant throng, exchanging a few words here and there, to where Flora stood, alone, looking with an artist's eye at the graceful fancies of the decorator; but the priest saw nothing of the beauty around him except the girl herself, in her gown of peach bloom crepe, with a cluster of sweet-pea blossoms on her breast.

Ushered by her, the priest had reached her side, when the youth who had been her escort to the Mardi Gras ball came up to her, requesting her to make the tour of the rooms with him. The girl turned to take the offered arm of the young gentleman, and encountered the gaze of Father St. John fixed intently upon her. Something in his look visibly affected her, for her face paled and her purplish eyes dilated, and she half withdrew her arm from that of the youth.

Father St. John, recalled to himself by her action and her expression, said a few words relative to the festivities of the occasion, bade them good evening and passed on. A little distance away a pair of glowing black eyes, half hid by their heavy lids, noted the little scene, which the priest knew was the climax of his life.

He had felt an almost uncontrollable impulse to snatch the girl from the youth's side, when he saw her link her arm in his, and the look on her face, as she had suddenly encountered his gaze, told Father St. John that every throb of the girl's heart, disguise it as she would, was for him only. Standing in the center of the salon were the bride and groom, with a radiant happiness he had assisted to confirm, shining like a halo around them. A Protestant minister, with his wife on his arm and his two lovely daughters beside them, were offering congratulations.

Why does our church alone deny this right of marriage to her priests, he thought. Are we holier or better than the ministers of other creeds? Surely not, he thought, as he watched the noble-browed minister smiling upon his wife and daughters, as they moved away from the vicinity of the bride and groom; and the resolution which had come and gone in the troubled mind of the priest so many times in the last few months, came to him tonight, in this gorgeous gathering, where Hymen was the fated guest, never to leave him again.

He paused in his progress through the rooms to let a throng of people pass. A silken rustle and a light tap of a fan caused him to turn, to encounter Mrs. Olney's pallid face and gleaming eyes. Something in the face of the priest arrested her half-formed, sarcastic words. Shading her face with her fan, she said:

"I saw the little love scene tonight, with yourself in the title role. Why do you struggle against fate? You are not the stuff priests are made of. Why not free yourself of your shackles? There are plenty who wear them contentedly or lightly; let them, but you—"

"Madam," said the priest, "I have partly anticipated your advice. All the world will soon know what I am telling you now in confidence, that in all probability I have tonight performed my last priestly office."

They were standing comparatively alone behind a screen of feathery palms and banks of flowers.

"Ah," said Mrs. Olney, beneath her breath, "you will marry that girl."

Then, all that was womanly in this beautiful Eve came to the surface, as she looked at the pale, careworn face of the priest she had once tried to ruin.

"I sincerely hope you will be happy, Father St. John, believe me; I am truly glad Providence interfered once on a time, and that you resisted all temptation afterward; and can you forgive me for forgetting my womanhood?" and she held out her perfectly gloved hand.

The priest took the offered hand, saying:

"Mrs. Olney, I proved myself weak

enough when I was . . . ten . . . Forgive my harshness to you. Forgive, and let us forget," and he raised her hand to his lips, bade her adieu and hastened from the house.

Father St. John had scarcely reached his home, when the door bell summoned him to the door. Senator Maxwell's carriage was at the gate and a servant had been dispatched to bring the priest to his residence to perform the rite of baptism. The coachman drove at a rapid pace, for he had orders to lose no time.

St. John was ushered at once to Mrs. Maxwell's rooms. The senator met him at the door, and conducted him to where a woman sat with a little flickering life resting on a pillow in her lap, that had made its advent into the world a few hours before. Dr. Wood, grave and anxious looking, came from an adjoining room, looked at the little creature, and whispered to the priest to be quick.

Senator Maxwell remained by his wife while the priest performed the office. It was soon over and Dr. Wood went back to the mother and told her that the child still lived and was baptized. Mrs. Maxwell had hovered between life and death for many hours, but science had conquered. When they told her that her babe could not live, her husband read the piteous appeal in her eyes, and had sent for Father St. John.

Senator Maxwell left his wife in the doctor's care and went to look at his child. The priest and the nurse were silently watching the little creature give up the gift of life, ere it knew it had possessed it. All at once the tiny spark went out. Senator Maxwell placed his hand on the priest's shoulder and said bitterly:

"Rule or ruin, but, thank God, my wife will live."

St. John turned to gather together the articles he had brought with him, preparatory to taking his departure and Senator Maxwell saw that his large black eyes were moist. He was touched at his evident sympathy. He accompanied the priest out of the room. When they reached the lower floor Father St. John stopped suddenly and said, and his face grew as pale as ashes:

"Senator Maxwell, last night I assisted at a nuptial service. This morning I have shrived the sinless soul of a dying infant. It is the last priestly office I shall perform."

In answer to the Senator's exclamation of surprise, he said:

"I am, virtually, no longer a priest. In a few hours I shall state my case to the archbishop. I have become convinced that I am not fitted for a priest, and I long for a life out in the world. When I am formally released from my obligation, I shall leave the city for a while, for the purpose of looking around me a little. I have some money at interest, left me by my mother, and I love the country, and I think I would like to become a grower of fruit."

A thought seemed to strike Senator Maxwell, for he said: "Step in here, St. John, I have something to propose to you," and he led the way to the ante-room. "You are, perhaps, aware that my wife has considerable property awaiting her claim in Spain," he said, and for various reasons I shall be unable to leave the country for some time. I shall be glad to appoint you my agent to go to Spain and attend to this business for me. I will give you so large a percentage that on your return you can settle comfortably where you will."

Father St. John, gladly, and with many thanks, accepted the senator's offer. Then he said:

"I will give you my confidence in full, sir."

Then he told his new and strangely made friend of the love that had taken possession of his life, and how he knew that love was returned; and that his ideal of a future happy life was to call that pure, young, womanly girl his wife.

"And your kindness, sir," he said with much emotion, "will enable me to do this as soon as my connection with the church as priest is severed."

On reaching his home, after saying good-bye to Senator Maxwell, Father St. John tried to gain a few hours' sleep, but the thoughts of the great change he was about to make in his life, and of his coming interview with the archbishop, made this impossible. So, very early in the morning, he sought the residence of the archbishop.

On arrival, he was informed that his grace was just finishing his morning meal. He had not long to wait for the appearance of the archbishop, who listened to him calmly and without comment to the end. Whatever of surprise or indignation the archbishop may have felt, his cold exterior gave no sign, and to the surprise of Father St. John, who expected a stormy scene, he said, with his expressive eyes—which the gloomy brooding shade had deepened in, since his last interview with Senator Maxwell—fixed intently upon the young man's face:

"I suppose you have weighed this well, St. John? Remember, there have been many instances where priests, impelled by the motive which is actuating you, left the priesthood and have been glad to be reinstated."

"Yes, your grace," said St. John, "I have pondered over this matter long, and have weighed it well, and I do not

think it possible, with Flora Hume by my side, to regret my present life."

The archbishop smiled.

"They all had Flora Hume," he said, "but enough, St. John. I have long since seen you are not calculated for the life of a priest. Everything shall be done to release you as quickly as possible from your obligations. Have you decided upon a future career?"

Then St. John, with some embarrassment, told him of his compact with Senator Maxwell. The archbishop colored and bit his lip.

"Well, St. John," he said, after a pause, "you are the only one to reap much benefit from the labors the church has been performing the last few months. True, he added, quickly, and by way of parenthesis, "we have compelled Senator Maxwell to do his duty, and his wife is back in the church, where she belongs," and in the same breath he said:

"Well, St. John, you deserve your reward. I am glad you do not wish to leave the church entirely. I will see the vicar general at once, and as soon as possible everything shall be as you wish," and rising and extending his hand to the young man, "I shall be pleased to unite you to this young girl myself."

St. John clasped the hand of the archbishop and thanked him. He went direct from the episcopal residence to Flora Hume's cottage. She had finished her morning duties, and was dressed to go out for her painting lesson, when Father St. John arrived at the house.

She was somewhat surprised to see him, for he knew it to be her lesson day. St. John noticed that her eyes were heavy and that the flush which dyed her cheeks crimson, when, in answer to his ring, she had opened the door to find him standing before her, ebbed away as suddenly as it had come, leaving her marble pale. Her eyes, too, avoided his face.

"Flora," he said, when they had stepped from the hall to the parlor, "I won't detain you long; I am come to tell you that I am going to leave California for a long time."

"Going to leave California?" she said, faintly. Then, bravely, but ending with a little hysterical sob, "Good-bye, your reverence."

"Flora," he said, watching her with that selfish exultation shining in his eyes, which men feel when drawing from the woman they love, her inmost feeling regarding themselves, when they know their love is returned, "I saw in that tell tale face of yours, last night, that you still love me beyond all else on earth."

The girl drew herself up proudly and looked at him with flashing eyes.

"Father St. John," she said, "you might have spared me that cruel thrust—"

"Ah, but, darling," he interrupted, "it fills me with unspeakable rapture to know that you love me, for I am free, Flora, free to love you with my whole soul, and to make you my wife, for I am no longer a priest. Come to me, Flora," and he held out his arms. "Flora, Flora," he repeated to the dazed girl, "can't you understand? I am no longer a priest."

Then, seeing great love and truth and honor shining in the eyes so intently fixed on her own, she fluttered like a tired dove toward him.

In less than a month they were married in the Church of the Blessed Sacrament, by the archbishop, assisted by the new pastor, in the presence of Margaret and a few friends.

Poor Mrs. Gibbs, who shed bitter tears when she found her fool had stepped down from his high estate to become a mortal among mortals, was installed as housekeeper for Margaret till the return of the young couple from Europe.

Archbishop O'Connor wrote to Cardinal Pizani that all hope of Senator Maxwell's becoming president of the United States must be abandoned.

"However," he wrote, "we still have a bright future before us. The time must come when a new vicar of Christ will arise from the ashes of the old. You know the significance of that."

The cardinal had not become reconciled to the miscarriage of the great

(Continued on Page 4.)

STATE OF OHIO, CITY OF TOLEDO, Lucas County.
I, FRANK J. CHENEY, make oath that he is the sole partner of the firm of F. J. CHENEY & CO., doing business in the city of Toledo, County and State aforesaid, and that said firm will pay the sum of ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS for each and every case of CATARRH that cannot be cured by the use of HALL'S CATARRH CURE.
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