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MABEL DACRE, OR, THE TRIAL OF FAITH.

CHAPTER I.

To him who in the love of Nature holds communion with her visible forms she speaks in various language.

RARELY does the sun shine upon a lovelier spot than the small, secluded town of Riverdale. Shut in between high hills, that served to screen it also from the bleak north winds, it seemed to embrace within its narrow limits every element of beauty; and though from its retired situation it afforded no business facilities, and therefore contained little wealth and no style, yet to those who sought the beautiful in Nature, or for whom solitude had charms, it was a little paradise.

And so thought Mabel Dacre, as she sat with her hands clasped over a book that lay half open in her lap, and her eyes gazing earnestly and with rapt attention on the distant landscape. It was sunset, and far off in the clear horizon floated the golden clouds containing the day-god's couch. A crimson light, softened by that exquisite misty veil in which Nature is so fond of adorning herself, rested like a glory upon the tops of the hills, and threw into deep shadow the quiet valley at their feet; while upon the river which wound slowly along, reluctant as it would seem to leave a place so lovely, a few bright gleams yet lingered. "How beautiful," murmured Mabel to herself, as her delighted gaze took in at once the scene that we have vainly attempted to describe: "how can any one think the world so dark and dreary?"

"I will tell you, my Mabel," said a low voice at her side, as blushing, yet smiling, Mabel turned and met the fond gaze of Walter Lee, who had advanced unperceived, so absorbed had she previously been. Now, however, she willingly lent an ear to her lover's voice. "I will tell you; it is because so few are in unison with the loveliness, the repose, the purity of Nature, that they find in her no beauty; the vain coils of ambition, the grasping pursuit of wealth, the wearying chase for pleasure, unfit men for loving that which is simple, pure and universal. You, dearest, are a true child of Nature, and you feel almost a child's love for a mother, towards the beauty around you."

"My sweet one," he continued, as with delighted eyes he gazed upon the lovely face uplifted to him in all the unconsciousness and confiding love of childhood, "my beautiful Mabel, will you laugh at my fancies if I say that I find in Nature the original of even all your charms: from the violet you stole the deep-blue of those dear eyes, and from whence learned your hair its graceful waving, save from the tendrils of the vine: so confess now, fair pilgrim, ere I bring forward other charges." And with these words he took the book from her hands; it was a volume of Spenser's Fairy Queen. Mabel laughingly reproached him for stealing so quietly upon her.

"But where have you been, Walter, this long, long day? I was so lonely, I had no one to read to me, so I soon tired of my needle-work, and in very weariness I wandered off to see the sun set."

"Have you, indeed, missed me, Mabel, darling; bless you for those words; to me, too, it was a weary day, in the close, dark city, but duty called me there, and I have brought letters to the rector from London."

"Letters to my father! and from London," exclaimed the surprised girl; "who can he have in the great city to write to him? I have often heard him say he knew no one in London. But hark! I hear the sunset-bell, and my father will be waiting for me for our evening service." And so saying, with one last look at the distant landscape, Mabel put her arm fondly in Walter's, and with step as light and graceful as the mountain deer's, turned towards the little, low-roofed cottage of the Rector of Riverdale.

"Will you not come in, Walter," said Mabel, in soft, persuasive accents.

"Not to-night," he replied; "I have been away all day, and there are numerous duties for me to fulfill ere to-morrow's round commences. Good-night, sweet love," he fondly murmured, as Mabel entered the house.

She advanced hurriedly to the rector's study, where she found him seated in his accustomed armchair by the window, but she was struck at once with the look of anxiety and sorrow so unusual to his placid and venerable face; an open letter lay in his lap, but his eyes were closed, and his lips moved as if in prayer.

"Father, dearest father, what has happened; why do you look so sad," exclaimed Mabel, as she knelt at his side.

"Is it you, my child," said the old man, softly stroking her silken hair—then a sigh so deep escaped him that Mabel was still more terrified. "Be calm, my love, my little lamb," he murmured gently, and with accents choked and broken, "listen calmly, and I will tell you all. You know, Mabel dear, that I am not your own father, but you know not, nor did I, until to-day, that your own father is living; that he is a nobleman of high rank, and having

been under our new sovereign, King James, restored to his estates, he now claims his daughter, and desires me to accompany you at once to London, or at least to York, where he will meet you."

Mabel's cheek grew paler and paler, as she took in the full meaning of these to her painful words; her strength forsook her, and she sunk upon the floor at his feet—

"My father, my own true, loving father, I cannot leave you, and Walter, oh! where can I hide from this cold, stern man, who has left me so long without a word, and now expects me to break, in a moment, the ties that constant intercourse for fifteen years have formed; no! I will not obey this proud dictate. Say I shall not go, dear, dear father," said the weeping girl, throwing herself on his neck.

"Hush! hush! my daughter; remember who controls our destinies; think who it is that orders all the events of life. He has said, 'Children, obey your parents.' Honor thy father and thy mother, and shall I, one of his ministers, counsel you to disobey him. No, my precious child, dear as you are to my heart; though the light of this world will have gone out for me when I no longer see my Mabel's face, or hear her soft, sweet tones, yet I would have you go at once, my child; and go determined, so far as you can under God, to please your father—render to him the obedience that is due from a child to a parent. In one thing, however, you will be tired, your father is a Roman Catholic; in your religious faith be firm and steadfast; let no persuasions induce you to give up the simple faith of our Protestant church; be strong, be prudent, and be gentle in all your intercourse with him, and perhaps the daughter may yet lead her father back to the pure faith of his ancestors, though," murmured he to himself, "a king's favor is a tempting bait."

"But Walter," tremblingly uttered the weeping girl, who had hardly understood the rector's words, so filled was her heart with that dear image. "Walter! must I leave him—must I be so soon to be all his; can I not write and tell my father so, and then perhaps—he might—I am sure if he only knew Walter—she blushed and hesitated, and then stooped, waiting in fearful suspense to hear what would be said by him whose word for fifteen years had been her law.

"Mabel, my darling child, it may not be; you must not even dream of such a step—think you the noble Earl of Arlington would suffer his daughter to wed a poor curate? No, my precious child, you must give up Walter—forget him—think only of your duty to your father, or rather, your duty to your God."

He said no more, for Mabel, upon whose loving heart these words fell like the sentence of death, sunk fainting upon the floor. No words escaped from those pale lips, and not even a sigh relieved the bursting heart.

"Poor stricken lamb!" said the kind old man, as he gently raised the lifeless form, "had I but known thy future destiny this suffering at least thou shouldst have been spared—little did I dream when, fifteen years ago, thou wert brought, a little child beautiful as the angels, to my lonely home, that thou wast one day to tread the halls of royalty." He laid her gently on the couch, and hastily summoning what help he could command, watched fondly and anxiously the return of consciousness.

And now let us review briefly the circumstances that have so strangely formed the lot of our young heroine.

About eighteen years previous to the time at which our story commences, Robert, Earl of Arlington, had married a young and beautiful girl, whom, though of rather humble origin, he loved as passionately as a nature selfish as his could love; she was frail and delicate, and died soon after the birth of her first child, a daughter, to whom the sorrowing husband gave her name—Mabel. His disappointment at not having a son embittered his feelings for the poor, motherless babe, and two years after having in consequence of his being concerned in a rebellion against the reigning monarch, been compelled to leave his country and to endure the confiscation of his estates; he determined to place his child in the keeping of some one whom he could trust, and who would educate her carefully; thinking that should he ever regain his rank, she could easily acquire all the necessary accomplishments. He at once recalled the Rector of Riverdale, of whose learning and virtue he had often heard his young wife speak in terms of eloquent praise, as the very person to whom with the most perfect confidence he could entrust his child. Descended from high and even noble ancestors, and educated at Oxford, the rector was eminently fitted for the development and guidance of his daughter's mind; while for her physical education, the charming and healthy situation of Riverdale afforded every facility. Hastily making his preparations, therefore, and under cover of an assumed name, he sent his child to the old man, with a letter stating only that, being obliged to fly from England, he wished her to be brought up in ignorance of his name or station; and he made at

the same time ample provision for her wants as far as money could supply them.

Years passed, and no tidings came of the unknown father; and gradually the conviction forced itself upon the rector's mind that he must be dead; an opinion which fifteen years of utter silence had tended to confirm, and the kind old man had learned to love the gentle Mabel as his own child; all others considered her as his niece, for as such he was to represent her, and she was accordingly called Mabel Dacre. But after the death of Charles, through the influence of some friends, the long banished man was recalled, and on his return having publicly renounced his allegiance to the Established Church and embraced Romanism, his estates and titles were restored to him, and he was high in favor with the new monarch James II., whose strong partiality for papists was well known. He had obtained occasionally some information respecting his child, and had even made a secret visit to the town, since his return, to satisfy his proud heart as to his daughter's fitness to share in his recovered greatness—but even his haughty spirit was charmed with the exquisite beauty and grace of Mabel, as she, so unconscious that her father even lived, passed before him. He immediately made arrangements to receive her, and then dispatched the letter which had thrown the little household at Riverdale into such sorrow and dismay.

CHAPTER II.

And there were sudden partings, such as press
The life from out young hearts, and choking sighs
Which never might be repeated, who could guess
Ere ever more should meet these mortal eyes?

CHILD OF HEAVEN.

Walter Lee was the youngest son of a baronet, who, during the late struggle, had lost both life and property in defense of his sovereign. The oldest son died after his father, having been severely wounded at the battle of Edgehill. Walter had been intended for the church, and his education carried on with that end in view; the sad fate of his father and only brother had contributed to strengthen his youthful inclination to the ministry; and after collecting what remained of his father's property he completed his studies, and having heard that the curacy at Riverdale, near which town his father had at one time resided, was vacant, he applied immediately to the rector for it, and had the good fortune to be successful.

The worthy man was at once prepossessed in favor of the young scholar, whose acquirements were much above the usual standard, and whose clear, open brow and brilliant eyes seemed to indicate a man of no ordinary character. And in truth his was a nature such as we seldom meet with in this every-day world: full of devotion to his cause, and zealous for his Master's glory, his efforts to do good were untiring. His was a truly noble heart—so strong and loyal, so open and sincere; full of all generous thoughts and high aspirations, and with a soul that shrank in abhorrence from meanness, deceit, or the licentiousness so common to the times, he yet felt and ever showed the kindest pity and compassion for the sinner.

Six years had passed since he came to Riverdale and Mr. Dacre loved him as a son, for such he had long seemed to him, while Walter felt for his venerable pastor the deepest love and reverence.

And Mabel—how shall we describe her, the fair and gentle being, who from the winning simplicity and grace of childhood, had passed almost unconsciously into that loveliest period of womanhood, when as yet the heart has lost none of its early freshness, the sweet dew of life's morning, and its pure affections have only expanded into fuller beauty; its opening mind only exhales a richer perfume; its opening soul only emits a more potent fragrance; beautiful without vanity, intelligent yet simple and child-like; loving, gentle and timid, yet at the same time high-souled, generous and full of enthusiasm—such was Mabel Dacre at seventeen.—Could it be otherwise than that those two, so fitted for each other, such twin-souls as it were, should love? Silently, at first, a pure affection sprang up in their youthful hearts; it grew with their growth and strengthened with their strength; each felt, long before any promise had passed between them, that they were no longer free, and when in low and trembling tones Walter drew from his beloved her pledged troth, they both felt that no time could alter, no circumstances change their fervent, undying love. And it was this love, the growth of years, that Mabel was now so suddenly called upon to resign; she had not at first, in her artless simplicity, even imagined this as the result of her father's letter; it was the thought of parting for a time with him so passionately loved, that had caused the first sorrow.

Into her pure and simple mind it did not enter that her father would forbid her union with Walter, that he could break ties so solemnly contracted, or sever hearts so closely united; but as her ear took in the last fearful sentences of the rector, light and almost life forsook her, brain reeled, and her heart became like ice.—It was well that consciousness failed, and that

a temporary oblivion deadened the first keen pang; but oh, that sad, dreary awakening to sorrow; that half-shrinking, trembling dread with which we strive to recall the terrible event that has changed life into a gloomy solitude and hushed up within us the very sound of joy. Long did Mabel strive to keep back the return of reason, to dream on in blissful ignorance, but it would come, "You must give up Walter—you must strive to forget him." These words rang for ever in the dark chambers of her now desolate heart; she knew it must be so, she felt that even Walter would bid her go, and as her opening eyes caught a view of her dear old father (for such he ever seemed to her) gazing so sadly upon her, she sprang from the bed and feebly sunk at his feet; then her hiding her face in his lap, she wept such tears as she could never shed again; the bitterness of death was past, her duty was before her, and in that sad hour the old man's prayers were answered; strength from above inspired her drooping heart, and though in those soft eyes the light of joy had faded, and no gleam of brightness played around the mouth that once dimpled with the innocent mirth of an unclouded girlhood, yet Mr. Dacre felt, as he kissed her pure, calm brow, and gazed almost reverently into the clear depths of those spiritual eyes, that a power mightier than the spell of earthly love dwelt in that frail form; and his voice was almost exultant as with trembling hand he implored the blessing of God the Father, the Son and the Spirit upon her youthful head.

That evening, long after the sun had set behind the hills, in the same lonely spot where Mabel was wont to watch his parting glories, two youthful forms sat with clasped hands and pale, tearful faces. The moon rose in all her unclouded beauty, pouring a flood of silvery radiance over the scene; for a moment, the exquisite beauty of Nature sent its wondrous light to Mabel's face; then, with a faint cry of agony, she exclaimed—

"It is the last time, Walter—dear, dear Walter! I shall never again gaze upon this beauty with thee. O, God, who makest the world so lovely, can it be that Thou requirest of me this sacrifice!"

There was no sound for many minutes; but Walter's head was bowed as if in prayer, and his strong frame shook like a reed.

"God knoweth best, my own beloved," at length he murmured. "It may be that for me this trial was sent, to teach me the hard lesson—'Little children, keep yourselves from idols.' I knew it not, but now I feel that your image reigned in the heart I had offered to my God, and that earth had more share in my thoughts than Heaven."

"But, oh! to part from you, my Mabel—to give you up to others, my treasure, my love, my life! Oh I cannot submit—my heart is crushed under this bitter trial! Alas! at times I have no trust, no hope, no faith!"

"Say not so, my own, my noble Walter; give up all else, but cling to your faith; forsake not our only strength; think, in this terrible parting, how tenfold would be our anguish did we not both look forward to that world where there is no more parting, and where God shall wipe all tears from all eyes."

"But, O, my beautiful Mabel, sometimes a strange shuddering fear comes over me, that in that gay and gorgeous world where your future steps will wander, you will be so admired, courted, and caressed, that you will cease to yearn for the simple home of your girlhood, cease to love."

"Nay, Walter, speak not those dreadful words! Say not you doubt the faith, the constancy of years; oh! do not let us add this drop to the bitter cup we are called upon to drink. Ah! if I thought you could doubt me, I should have lost the only happiness that yet remains for me—the thought of your full and perfect trust in my love. Do not let us doubt each other for one moment, Walter dearest; it would be to break the only tie yet left between us, our mutual trust."

"Forgive me, sweet Mabel, my beloved, once my plighted wife—nay, let me not speak that word! Ah! Mabel, Mabel, what have I left to live for!"

"God, and thine own soul, beloved; let me support and strengthen thee in this our greatest trial; for, from thy example, how often have I gathered fortitude and patience. And remember, Walter dearest, that just as full, as perfect, as entire and devoted as your love, so may be your faith in me. I ask you, as my last request, to feel this always, though it may sometimes seem hard, though years of silence may pass, for I know you can never, never forget me!"

"I do—I will trust you always, my beloved. I ask from you no promise, but, before Heaven! I solemnly pronounce myself yours; and should God in his wisdom see fit to forbid our ever again meeting, my heart shall still cherish your image only, and go widowed to its grave."

Night had already filled the firmament with its countless stars, ere the young lovers, for the last time, slowly and sadly wended their way

to the happy home of Mabel's childhood and youth.

"Ah! who can tell the bitterness of that parting; the choking thoughts that could not be uttered, the throbbing hearts whose chords had been so rudely severed; earth had for them no sterner lesson, the light of life is faded—well will it be if in the darkness stars arise, and the night is holy."

CHAPTER III.

Your house within the city
Is richly furnished with plate and gold,
Basins and ewers, to lave your dainty hands,
Your hangings all of Tyrian tapestry."
TALES OF THE SHAW.

A year had passed since the events narrated in our last chapter, and how had the time sped with Mabel. Received with a proud and delighted affection by her newly-found parent, and welcomed with almost a mother's kindness by his titled and wealthy bride, she could not feel otherwise than grateful, and, at times, happy; but as increased intimacy revealed more and more to her of the characters of those whom, under God, she was most bound to obey and honor, Mabel's heart sunk, and her thoughts flew back to the simple piety and humble faith of her early teacher and guardian. The worldliness, the cold selfishness, the grasping ambition, and slavish cringing to superior rank that she saw in all around her, was to the high-souled and enthusiastic girl deserving of the most profound contempt and pity. She saw the father whom she so longed to honor and respect, fawning and bending before a monarch whom he hoped still further to propitiate, and at times he would talk to Mabel about her own advancement, until her whole frame trembled with a nameless fear. He had lately begun to speak more sternly with regard to her neglect of the ceremonies of the Romish Church, not dreaming that this neglect arose from a determined opposition. It did not once occur to him—so little had his own religious belief to do with conviction—that, in the mind of a young and beautiful girl, there could be a settled and resolute preference for any particular church. Mabel had, indeed, never joined in any of the rites of her father's church, but this he had attributed to thoughtlessness and indifference, little dreaming that, in her own solitary chamber, she enjoyed the purest and truest communion with her Maker, and that not the sternest mandate he could utter, would tempt her to abjure her Protestant faith.

But the trial was yet to come. For some months after her arrival at the castle, Mabel had continued to receive constantly letters from Walter and Mr. Dacre; but she was not long to enjoy this gratification.

"Mabel, my daughter," said Lord Arlington one day, as he saw with a frown the blush and smile with which she received an unusually large packet from Riverdale; "it were well if you could remember for yourself what were proper and becoming in the rank you now hold; but since your own sense has not prompted you to cease at once all communication with those among whom nothing but your father's misfortunes could have placed you, I am now compelled to forbid your ever again receiving any of those voluminous epistles, which, to judge from your countenance, must possess a degree of interest perfectly unaccountable. Does the old man send his weekly sermons for your soul's benefit?" he sneeringly said.

Mabel endeavored to reply, but her eyes fell under his cold, searching gaze; she could not speak, as the thought flashed through her mind that she should never again see that well-known hand, or read those precious words of affection from Walter, never more be cheered and supported by the advice and sympathy of him whom she revered more than any earthly being.

"Oh! father, do not, do not compel me to give up my dearest—"

She stooped, for the frown on her father's face grew darker at this involuntary betrayal of her preference for her early friends.

"Do not compel me to seem so ungrateful and proud to those, whose kindness made me what I am; let me at least write a few words to tell them of your wishes?"

"Mabel—I have already been sufficiently annoyed and displeased by your evident dislike to your new life, and your childish preference for your country home; rouse me no further by opposition, strive to overcome your early prejudices, and to remember you are an Earl's daughter, and that you may be the wife—"

At this moment, Mabel uttered a faint cry of surprise and terror; then recollecting herself, she complained of feeling unwell, and begged her father's permission to retire to her own apartment.

"Go, my daughter; but do not let a trifling indisposition prevent your being in readiness to accompany us this evening to the palace, for the king expressly requested me to bring you, and your mother has provided your toilette for the occasion; let me see my Mabel the gayest and happiest as she will be the loveliest in the proud assemblage?"

"With a sad and heavy heart Mabel gained her own chamber, and there—seated on the floor, with her head buried in the velvet cushions of the luxurious divan, and her precious letters clasped to her bosom—she wept bitterly. Long did she sit thus, with her soft, black hair hanging like a veil around her, and her head bowed in that utter abandonment to grief, that only an impassioned nature can feel.

CHAPTER IV.

"Oh! her smile—it seems half holy,
As if drawn from thoughts more far
Than our common feelings are;
And if any painter drew her,
He would paint her unaware,
With a halo around her hair."
ELIZABETH BARRATT.

Never was the Lady Mabel's beauty more transcendent than on that evening; and as she entered the splendid apartments where King James held his levee, a low murmur of admiration arose on every side.

"What exquisite creature is she, who moves like a queen by right of her own loveliness!" exclaimed a young French nobleman of the highest rank, who was visiting at the court.—"Tell me, Ormond?" he said, turning to an older person who stood beside him, "do your cold English eyes behold unmoved such a vision of beauty; for my own part, I confess that, never upon my sight rose so peerless a creature." And, in truth, Mabel's beauty was of no ordinary kind; tall, and rather slender, yet with all the roundness of contour, and the gracefulness of childhood, every movement had had a charm. Her complexion was exquisitely fair, and so transparently delicate that it glowed with every passing emotion; her eyes large and full, were of that dark violet hue, that varies every moment—sometimes so soft and liquid that you would have thought her a creature all gentleness, then flashing with the light of thought, brilliant and sparkling, as though a tear had never dimmed their lustre. At times, the mirth—so natural to her once—would play over her lovely features, glancing in dimples round her rosy mouth, and bringing to view the pearly teeth, so small and regular.

On this evening she was robed in a thin exquisite dress of the richest lace, over a satin of such lustre as to resemble woven silver, whilst on her raven hair rested a tiara of brilliants, such as a nobleman's revenue could not purchase, the gift of the Queen to Lady Arlington on her marriage. Her snowy neck and arms were circled with the same sparkling gems, and one shone like a star on the girdle that confined her slender waist.

English monarch, that had induced him to visit the Court of St. James.

To Lord Arlington, the king had often spoken of his dear friend D'Alencón; and, ever striving to add new links to the ties that bound the nation to France, he expressed his wish that a union between Mabel and the young duke might be formed, adding, at the same time, that the latter would wed none but a member of his own communion. To this proposal, Lord Arlington with much delight had acceded, and declared that his daughter could be no other than a zealous Catholic. It was with this plan at heart, he had so earnestly desired Mabel to be present on the evening before-mentioned, and all transparent to the satisfaction of the ambitious parent. The king himself introduced D'Alencón to the lovely Mabel, and after whispering in her ear some words of flattery, that called a blush to her fair cheek, he left them to converse undisturbed. The young duke's nature was more earnest, sincere, and enthusiastic than any our heroine had yet encountered, and she accordingly listened with unusual interest to his words, and replied with more of her accustomed spirit and vivacity than she had ever before displayed.

(TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.)

Five dollar notes of the Bank of Susquehanna County, at Montrose, Pa., are in circulation. This is not now in existence and its notes are worthless.