

A CHILD OF THE MANSE.

(By Gertrude Cockerell.)

IV.

(Continued.)

In a home of such low ideals and standard, Pearl felt that she could hardly breathe. Though the claims and duties of her new sphere would not have absorbed her whole time and strength, the lack of order, and, above all, good-will, made them to her laborious and wearisome, and left little time for anything else. Letters from her boys' class remained long unanswered, and the mothers' meeting despaired of hearing from her. And Pearl had not the satisfaction of feeling that she was being used of God. Her soul was starved for lack of the things that had figured so prominently in her life, and which to her were life. Her experience during the darkest days is well expressed in "This soul hath been alone on a dark, dark sea;
So lonely 'twas, that God Himself
Scarce seemed there to be."

More than once Pearl had expressed a wish to take up some definite Christian work, but Phyllis so stoutly opposed her, on the ground of her duties in the home, or of her ill-health, the only time she recognised the fact that Pearl was ailing, or she so discouraged her by severe criticism of any attempt she made of self-expression, that she abandoned the idea. And that there was something in the charge Pearl felt was only too true. Under the blighting influence of the home, Pearl was becoming a nervous wreck. On the rare occasions when she attempted to sing her voice sounded to her own ears harsh and strange. An acknowledged good speaker, she could now hardly balance her thoughts, and give them lucid expression, to the great irritation of her cousin.

Phyllis now hardly addressed Pearl, and proud Sarah was, as taken into the counsels of her mistress, to flaunt her knowledge before Pearl as one who knew things. Letters that would have interested her as a member of the family were kept back from her.

Pearl was the mirror through which Phyllis caught ugly glimpses of herself, and wanting an excuse for her ill-will, she lost no opportunity of trying to arouse her cousin's resent-

ment. She watched her words and actions in order to trip her.

If Pearl could always have been silent under provocation, like her Master, Who was "brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth," it would have stopped the mouths of her enemies and the jeering remark, "And you such a Christian!" over her occasional show of resentment in word. Despite Pearl's agony of repentance, manifested in the pale, suffering face, and her ample confession of any lapse, Phyllis proclaimed such lapse far and wide, 'phone, post, as well as mouth, being brought into requisition for the purpose. And what was worse than anything to Pearl was to be severely let alone by those whom she might have led to the Christ whom she truly loved.

Rapidly Pearl was sinking under a weight of oppression and condemnation from which she found it hard to rally. It must surely be true what the good Pastor had said in her hearing in answer to Phyllis' depreciatory comment when he sought to enlist her as a worker: "She has no gifts." "I am surprised at that," was his comment. "There," he added, with kindly indulgence, "we all think our children geniuses. But genius is not everything, is it?" "What a comfort she must be in the home." There was an awkward silence, broken at last by Phyllis saying, "I don't know about that. All I can say is that she has managed to turn everything upside down since she came, including my valuable servant." The Pastor felt decidedly uncomfortable, and remarked, "Well, an excess of zeal only wants rightly guiding. We cannot put old heads on young shoulders." As if uttering the final word as sure of his ground, he cheerfully remarked, "Well, I am sure she is a good girl." The silence now was painful. Pearl turned pathetic eyes upon her cousin. A mischievous smile played round the cruel mouth, and then, as if the effort cost her pain, she said, "As her Pastor, I must tell you that she is not the Christian I thought her. She is not strictly truthful, and is, too, very ill-tempered." Pearl almost justified the latter charge in an outburst of wrath, and, broken-hearted, fled from the room. There, on her knees, she repeated the words she found so helpful these dark, dark days.

"Oh, trust thyself to Jesus,
When tempted to transgress,
By word or look of anger,
Or thought of bitterness;
Then is the hour for claiming
Thy Lord to fight for thee;
Then is the time for singing
He doth deliver me."

"I am afraid I am the cause of this little scene," said the distressed Pastor.

"This is what I have constantly to put up with," said Phyllis, with an air of injured innocence.

Weak and trembling from the conflict, Pearl descended to the dining-room, and expressed sorrow, as was her wont when tempted to speak unadvisedly with her lips.

It was little wonder that Pearl's health became seriously affected by the strain, and it was necessary to consult a doctor. A visitor heard him say that she was very low, and Phyllis only too gladly accepted her offer to take her to her own home. Very frail Pearl looked as Mrs. Eves helped her to alight. For many a day she lay with closed eyes, too weary to speak. But gradually the worn frame responded to the love and care that were now hers. Once more her eyes feasted upon country sights. And as the two pondered over the Word of God and talked of all His loving kindness, their hearts were closely knit together. Not infrequently would they exclaim, as by common impulse, as they recalled these seasons, "Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way?"

Pearl knew that the valley must follow the mountain top experience, and was bravely facing the return to Phyllis now that she was so far convalescent. She felt ready to go anywhere with her Lord, to be anything for Him, and told her friend, with many heartfelt thanks, that she would be returning in a few days to her long-neglected duties.

Clasping her in her arms, Mrs. Eves made reply, "Never, my precious Pearl. God has given me sufficient means for our modest wants, and you and I will live and labour for the Master. What do you say to that, dear?"

And Pearl's reply was a flood of grateful tears and broken words, "Thank God, and thank you, my dear friend."

(Finis.)