

## CHAPTER XXII--Mother Anne

There was no punishment. The tender little creature grew as a blossom grows from bud to fairest bloom. His mother flowered as he, and spent her days in noble cherishing of him and tender care. Such motherhood and wifehood as were hers were as fair statues raised to Nature's self.

"Once I thought that I was under ban," she said to her lord in one of their sweetest hours; "but I have been given love and a life, and so I know it cannot be. Do I fill all your being, Gerald?"

"All, all!" he cried, "my sweet, sweet woman."

"Leave I no longing unfulfilled, no duty undone, to you, dear love, to the world, to human suffering I might aid? I pray Christ with all passionate humbleness that I may not."

"He grants your prayer," he answered, his eyes moist with worshipping tenderness.

"And this white soul given to me from the outer bounds we know not--it has no stain; and the little human body it wakened to life in--think you that Christ will help me to fold them in love high and pure enough, and teach the human body to do honour to its soul? 'Tis not monkish scorn of itself that I would teach the body; it is so beautiful and noble a thing,

and so full of the power of joy. Surely That which made it--in His own image--would not that it should despise itself and its own wonders, but do them reverence, and rejoice in them nobly, knowing all their seasons and their changes, counting not youth folly, and manhood sinful, or age aught but gentle ripeness passing onward? I pray for a great soul, and great wit, and greater power to help this fair human thing to grow, and love, and live."

These had been born and had rested hid within her when she lay a babe struggling 'neath her dead mother's corpse. Through the darkness of untaught years they had grown but slowly, being so unfitly and unfairly nourished; but Life's sun but falling on her, they seemed to strive to fair fruition with her days.

'Twas not mere love she gave her offspring--for she bore others as years passed, until she was the mother of four sons and two girls, children of strength and beauty as noted as her own; she gave them of her constant thought, and an honour of their humanity such as taught them reverence of themselves as of all other human things. Their love for her was such a passion as their father bore her. She was the noblest creature that they knew; her beauty, her great unswerving love, her truth, were things bearing to their child eyes the unchangingness of God's stars in heaven.

"Why is she not the Queen?" a younger one asked his father once, having been to London and seen the Court. "The Queen is not so beautiful and grand as she, and she could so well reign over the people. She is always

just and honourable, and fears nothing."

From her side Mistress Anne was rarely parted. In her fair retreat at Camylott she had lived a life all undisturbed by outward things. When the children were born strange joy came to her.

"Be his mother also," the duchess had said when she had drawn the clothes aside to show her first-born sleeping in her arm. "You were made to be the mother of things, Anne."

"Nay, or they had been given to me," Anne had answered.

"Mine I will share with you," her Grace had said, lifting her Madonna face. "Kiss me, sister--kiss him, too, and bless him. Your life has been so innocent it must be good that you should love and guard him."

'Twas sweet to see the wit she showed in giving to poor Anne the feeling that she shared her motherhood. She shared her tenderest cares and duties with her. Together they bathed and clad the child in the morning, this being their high festival, in which the nurses shared but in the performance of small duties. Each day they played with him and laughed as women will at such dear times, kissing his grand round limbs, crying out at their growth, worshipping his little rosy feet, and smothering him with caresses. And then they put him to sleep, Anne sitting close while his mother fed him from her breast until his small red mouth parted and slowly released her.

When he could toddle about and was beginning to say words, there was a morning when she bore him to Anne's tower that they might joy in him together, as was their way. It was a beautiful thing to see her walk carrying him in the strong and lovely curve of her arm as if his sturdy babyhood were of no more weight than a rose, and he cuddling against her, clinging and crowing, his wide brown eyes shining with delight.

"He has come to pay thee court, Anne," she said. "He is a great gallant, and knows how we are his loving slaves. He comes to say his new word that I have taught him."

She set him down where he stood holding to Anne's knee and showing his new pearl teeth, in a rosy grin; his mother knelt beside him, beginning her coaxing.

"Who is she?" she said, pointing with her finger at Anne's face, her own full of lovely fear lest the child should not speak rightly his lesson.

"What is her name? Mammy's man say--" and she mumbled softly with her crimson mouth at his ear.

The child looked up at Anne, with baby wit and laughter in his face, and stammered sweetly--

"Muz--Muzzer--Anne," he said, and then being pleased with his cleverness, danced on his little feet and said it over and over.

Clorinda caught him up and set him on Anne's lap.

"Know you what he calls you?" she said. "'Tis but a mumble, his little tongue is not nimble enough for clearness, but he says it his pretty best. 'Tis Mother Anne, he says--'tis Mother Anne."

And then they were in each other's arms, the child between them, he kissing both and clasping both, with little laughs of joy as if they were but one creature.

Each child born they clasped and kissed so, and were so clasped and kissed by; each one calling the tender unwed woman "Mother Anne," and having a special lovingness for her, she being the creature each one seemed to hover about with innocent protection and companionship.

The wonder of Anne's life grew deeper to her hour by hour, and where she had before loved, she learned to worship, for 'twas indeed worship that her soul was filled with. She could not look back and believe that she had not dreamed a dream of all the fears gone by and that they held. This--this was true--the beauty of these days, the love of them, the generous deeds, the sweet courtesies, and gentle words spoken. This beauteous woman dwelling in her husband's heart, giving him all joy of life and love, ruling queenly and gracious in his house, bearing him noble children, and tending them with the very genius of tenderness and wisdom.

But in Mistress Anne herself life had never been strong; she was of the fibre of her mother, who had died in youth, crushed by its cruel weight, and to her, living had been so great and terrible a thing. There had not been given to her the will to battle with the Fate that fell to her, the brain to reason and disentangle problems, or the power to set them aside. So while her Grace of Osmonde seemed but to gain greater state and beauty in her ripening, her sister's frail body grew more frail, and seemed to shrink and age. Yet her face put on a strange worn sweetness, and her soft, dull eyes had a look almost like a saint's who looks at heaven. She prayed much, and did many charitable works both in town and country. She

read her books of devotion, and went much to church, sitting with a reverend face through many a dull and lengthy sermon she would have felt it sacrilegious to think of with aught but pious admiration. In the middle of the night it was her custom to rise and offer up prayers through the dark hours. She was an humble soul who greatly feared and trembled before her God.

"I waken in the night sometimes," the fair, tall child Daphne said once to her mother, "and Mother Anne is there--she kneels and prays beside my bed. She kneels and prays so by each one of us many a night."

"'Tis because she is so pious a woman and so loves us," said young John, in his stately, generous way. The house of Osmonde had never had so fine and handsome a creature for its heir. He o'ertopped every boy of his age

in height, and the bearing of his lovely youthful body was masculine grace itself.

The town and the Court knew these children, and talked of their beauty and growth as they had talked of their mother's.

"To be the mate of such a woman, the father of such heirs, is a fate a man might pray God for," 'twas said. "Love has not grown stale with them. Their children are the very blossoms of it. Her eyes are deeper pools of love each year."