

**THE EARL'S
DAUGHTER. VOL. I**

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The Earl's Daughter. Vol. I by Elizabeth Missing Sewell & W. Sewell

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ELIZABETH MISSING SEWELL & W. SEWELL

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DAUGHTER. VOL. I**

THE
EARL'S DAUGHTER.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "AMY HERBERT," "GERTRUDE," "THE
CHILD'S FIRST HISTORY OF ROME," ETC.

EDITED BY

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FELLOW OF KEENE COLLEGE, OXFORD.

Life, is energy of Love,
Divine or human ; exercised in pain,
In strife, and tribulation ; and ordained,
If so approved and sanctified, to pass,
Through shades and silent rest, to endless joy.

The Excursion.



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THE EARL'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

THERE WAS AN UNUSUAL stir in the old cathedral town of ———. It was neither a market-day, nor the anniversary of a public fête; neither the season of the annual visitation, nor of any public meeting; yet the narrow footways were thronged, and knots of idlers stood inconveniently at the corners of the streets, making their remarks upon the few carriages which enlivened the generally dull town, or noticing with interest the occasional approach of the rows of neatly dressed school children, who, with orderly steps and serious looks, were bending their way to the open square in which stood the great entrance to the cathedral. Gravity, indeed, was the pervading deportment of all the assembling crowd; but a deeper, more reverent, and anxious feeling might be traced upon the features of some, who, fully aware of the difficulties of a Christian life, were about to witness the renewal of those vows by which the ignorant and untried, the weak and the erring, in the midst of a sinful world, and about to enter upon the scene of its temptations, pledge themselves in the sight of an All Holy God, to be His in spirit, in truth, and for ever. It was the day appointed for the Confirmation of all within the diocese of ——— who had attained

the age required by the Bishop, and on few occasions had a more careful preparation been made for the due observance of this important rite. The time had gone by when the verbal repetition of the Church Catechism was alone deemed necessary for the candidates. A more zealous spirit had arisen, and many, who had themselves been allowed to renew their baptismal vows without thought or prayer, now, warned by past experience, endeavoured most earnestly to urge upon others the importance of the period which they had reached, and the real meaning of the words, which from childhood, had been familiar to their lips!

The Confirmation of that day was felt to be a most solemn act of self-dedication; and as the knights of old, when preparing to assume the insignia and encounter the perils of their order, were accustomed to fast, and watch and pray, that they might be enabled to struggle and conquer in the unknown dangers before them; so the young aspirants to the full privileges of Christianity were taught to humble themselves by repentance, and prepare their hearts by prayer, that in the hour of temptation they might not be forgetful of their high calling, and fall short of their eternal reward. The spectacle which the cathedral church of St. Mark exhibited when the choir was filled, before the service of the church began, was one of no common interest. The broad light of the sun, as its rays streamed through the stained windows, fell upon fair young faces chastened by holy thoughts, and boyish features subdued into stillness by the pressure of a strange and hitherto unfelt awe. There were countenances which told of fear and wonder, and some, it might be, of indifference; there were eyes bent upon the page in which the vow to be renewed was recorded; and lips moving in silent prayer that strength might be granted for its fulfilment;

whilst, at times, over those youthful faces there passed the shadow of a dark cloud, the cloud of the memory of sin: the vision of cherished offences, of indulged tempers,—vanity and pride, selfishness and irreverence,—the bitter fruits of an evil nature, now a second time to be publicly renounced for ever. Was it to be marvelled at, if in some then present the weakness of humanity for a moment shrank from the warfare imposed upon it, and would fain have returned to the bondage of Egypt, the indulgence of earthly inclination, rather than brave the battle with those stern enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil—which throng the borders of the land of promise?

But the wish, if it arose, was founded on error. The candidates for Confirmation were no longer free to choose. Once baptized, once admitted into the fellowship of the Catholic Church, and there could be no drawing back. The members of Christ, the children of God, the inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, could never again “be as the heathen.” They might despise their privileges, and break their vows; but the privileges had still been granted, and they must be answerable for them; the vows were still upon their heads, and so would also be the punishment for neglect. For them it could never be a question, whether they would accept Christianity: but whether, having accepted, they would renounce it; and even the most indifferent amongst the professed followers of Christ would surely have trembled to risk the woe which must inevitably follow an open, deliberate apostacy.

But although no second promise could in reality increase the binding responsibility of the first, yet the public ratification of a covenant with God must ever be regarded with awe. The baptismal vow was now for the first time fully impressed upon the con-

sciences of many by whom it had scarcely before been remembered, and they trembled as the moment approached when they were to seal it with the consent of their own lips.

The peaceful soothing words of the daily service were said, and when they were ended there stood before the altar of God, the high-born inheritors of honour and wealth, and the gentle children nursed in affluence and retirement, and the humble offspring of poverty, united by one creed, one hope, one danger, and summoned to join in one common act of self-dedication.

Together they listened to the earnest supplication which was to bring down upon them from on high the "sevenfold gifts of grace;" and then side by side they knelt, and each in turn bowed beneath a hand of blessing—the blessing of their spiritual Father in Christ.

Once more they were seated as before, to receive from the Bishop's mouth the words of advice, and warning, and consolation, which were to guide them amidst the temptations of life; and when the final benediction was given, and the full tones of the organ pealed through the long aisles, they parted even as they had met, for the greater part unknowing and unregarding, to many a distant home, never to meet together again in one place till they should stand before the judgment-seat of God, to answer for the fulfilment of the vow which had that hour been registered in heaven.

CHAPTER II.

It was the evening of the same day, a day of unwonted brilliancy and warmth. The sounds of busy life were fading upon the listening ear, the cattle were returning from the pastures, the birds were seeking their nests, the tired workman was slowly wending his way towards his home, and the deep tones of the cathedral clock as it struck the hour of eight fell with a warning voice upon the few who were still engrossed in their round of daily occupation.

The peacefulness of such an hour was felt even amidst the bustle of a crowded town, and the jar of folly and vice; but in the quiet garden of the old grey manor-house of St. Ebbe's there was nothing to disturb the hallowing effect of its influence. The low ivy-covered walls which enclosed it seemed built for the very purpose of excluding all thoughts of the busy world; the long green walks invited to regular exercise and meditation; the neatly-trimmed borders, gay with flowers, spoke of carefulness and simplicity, and appreciation of the loveliness of nature; and the quaint sun-dial, raised upon a circle of rough stone steps in the centre, gave a silent call to the unthinking to note the flight of time, whilst it bade them, in the words of Holy Writ, which were graven upon its pedestal, "watch and pray, that they might not enter into temptation." The building itself, with its weather-stained walls, and mullioned windows and deep porch, accorded perfectly with the quaint style of the garden. It was