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THE DEWY MORN.

A Novel.

BY

RICHARD JEFFERIES,

AUTHOR OF

'THE GAMEKEEPER AT HOME,' 'THE LIFE OF THE FIELDS,'
'RED DEER,' ETC.

' Scarce had the sun dried up the dewy morn,
And scarce the herd gone to the hedge for shade.'
SHAKESPEARE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

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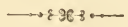
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THE DEWY MORN.



CHAPTER I.



HE sunbeams streamed over Ashpen Hill into a broad lane, a little after four in the morning. Felise was walking slowly towards the hill, which was yet at some distance, staying every moment to glance aside into the green and dew-laden hedges. On her right the hedge came to the sward; on the left a bank rose, and the hedge went along the summit.

The fragrance of the dew, invisibly evaporating, filled the air she breathed. From sweet-green hawthorn leaves, from

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heavy grasses drooping, the glittering drops dissolving brought with them the odour of leaf and flower. The larks, long since up, had sung the atmosphere clear of the faint white mist left by the night.

She found blue veronica in a bunch of grass under a dead thorn-branch, blown by the winds months ago out from the hedge. She lifted up the branch to fling it aside, and give the flowers more room and freedom ; but she replaced it, reflecting that the thorns would perhaps prevent passing sheep from treading on them.

Upon the bank there was a cowslip ; one stalk bore deep orange flowers, the others bunches yet unopened, and clothed in delicate green. Felise took the flower, which no bee had yet sipped, put it to her lips, and then placed it in her dress.

She stepped lightly round the smooth brown boulder-stones with which the lane was dotted in places—rude disjointed efforts at paving—beside which grew bunches of

rushes, safe there from the cart-wheels. Not even cart-wheels could stand the jolt over these iron rocks. She walked sometimes on the elevated sides of the ruts—the earth had been forced up by the crushing weight of waggon-loads; they were grass-grown, and the grass hung over the groove, along which weasels often hunted.

Sometimes she trod the sward by the bank, where it was short, and full of three-leaved clover whose white bloom was not yet out; then, crossing to the opposite side, she sauntered by the hedge there, letting the hawthorn brush her skirt, and the soft green hooks of the young bramble-shoots strive in vain to hold her.

An ash-branch stood out to bar her path. She stopped and touched it, and counted the leaves on the sprays; they were all uneven.

In the grass ahead the pinkish ears of a young rabbit stood up; he was nibbling peacefully, heedless of her approach. Not

till she was close did he raise himself to look at her, first sitting on his haunches, then as if about to beg, then away into the burrow.

Her white hand wandered presently among more blue veronica flowering on the slope of the bank. She did not gather—she touched only, and went on. She touched, too, the tips of some brake, freshly-green, and rising rapidly now day by day. A rush of wings—a wood-pigeon came over; he was startled, and, swerving, went higher into the air.

There was honeysuckle on the hedge above the bank, too far to reach. She took a hawthorn leaf, felt it, and dropped it; then pulled a bennet, or grass-stalk, and dropped that; then pulled a rush, and left it. A lover might have tracked her easily by the foot-marks on the dewy grass—by the rush thrown down, and by the white handkerchief which she had carried in her hand and unconsciously dropped. A robin came to look at the handkerchief before she had gone

many minutes ; he thought perhaps there might be a crumb, and he is, too, very inquisitive.

Felise sat down on a great trunk of oak lying in the lane by a gateway, and sighed with very depth of enjoyment. There was a yellow-hammer perched on the gate, and he had been singing. When Felise approached, he ceased ; but seeing that she was quiet and intended him no harm, he began again. His four or five rising notes, and the long-drawn idle-sounding note with which they conclude, suited so well with the sunshine, they soothed her still further. She sighed again, and let herself sit loosely on the oak-trunk, like the yellow-hammer. He had his back humped, and all his body rested comfortably. So did she ; she permitted her back to bow, her shoulders to stoop, her limbs to relax, and idle nature to have her own way. After a while she sighed again.

She was bathing in the beauty of the morning — floating upheld on the dewy

petals. A swimmer lies on the warm summer water, the softest of couches, extended at full length, the body so gently held that it undulates slightly with the faint swell. So soft is the couch it softens the frame, which becomes supple, flexible, like the water itself.

Felise was lying on the flowers and grass, extended under the sun, steeped in their sweetness. She visibly sat on the oak-trunk—invisibly her nature was reclining, as the swimmer on the sun-warmed sea. Her frame drooped as the soul, which bears it up, flowed outwards, feeling to grass, and flower, and leaf, as the swimmer spreads the arms abroad, and the fingers feel the water. She sighed with deep content, dissolving in the luxurious bath of beauty.

Her strong heart beating, the pulses throbbing, her bosom rising and regularly sinking with the rich waves of life; her supple limbs and roundness filled with the plenty of ripe youth; her white, soft, roseate

skin, the surface where the sun touched her hand glistening with the dew of the pore ; the bloom upon her—that glow of the morn of life—the hair more lovely than the sunlight ; the grace unwritten of perfect form—these produced within her a sense of existence—a consciousness of being, to which she was abandoned ; and her lips parted to sigh. The sigh was the expression of feeling herself to be.

To be ! To live ! To have an intense enjoyment in every inspiration of breath ; in every beat of the pulse ; in every movement of the limbs ; in every sense !

The rugged oak-trunk was pleasant to her. She placed her hand on the brown, stained wood—stained with its own sap, for the bark had been removed. She touched it ; and so full of life was her touch, that it found a pleasure in that rude wood. The brown boulder-stone in the lane, ancient, smoothed, and ground in times which have vanished like a cloud, its surface the colour of old

polished oak, reflecting the sun with a dull gleam—the very boulder-stone was pleasant to her, so full of life was her sense of sight.

There came a skylark, dropping over the hedge, and alighted on a dusty level spot in the lane. His shadow shot a foot long on the dust, thrown by the level beams of the sun. The dust, in shadow and sunshine—the despised dust—now that the lark drew her glance to it, was pleasant to see.

All things are joyously beautiful to those who feel themselves to be ; but it is only given to the chosen of nature to know this exceeding delight.

In herself rapt, the whole face of earth and sky ministered to her, each and all that made up the visible world was flung at her feet. They did homage — Felise, queen of herself, was queen of all.

It was love without a lover—love absorbed in itself. Her whole existence was quivering with love ; this intensity of life was love. She was gathering from sunlight, azure sky

and grassy fields, from dewy hills and all the morning, an immense strength to love. Her parted lips sighed—there was such store and warmth of love within them. Without a thought she thought deeply, pondering, weighed down on herself with weight of feeling. Her own intense existence absorbed her.

Till looking that way, she saw that there was now a broad space between the lower rim of the sun and the hill she meant to climb; then she got up, and went on. She had started in time to see the sun rise, from its summit, but had idled and dallied with flowers and green boughs on the way, and lost the sunrise.





CHAPTER II.



HE lane became more rugged ; then there was a sudden dip, and in the hollow of the dip a streamlet ran across. A blackbird had been splashing in the water ; and, as she came over the slope, rose up loudly calling. He perched on the hedge, looked towards her impudently from his dark eyes, half a mind to defy her, so bold was he in his beauty of blackest black and tawny bill. But as she stepped nearer he went off, again loudly calling and startling every bird in the field.

The streamlet was so shallow the small flints were only half submerged, and the water was but a few inches wide. The sand

which the blackbird had disturbed floated quickly away, leaving it perfectly pure. Felise stooped, dipped her fingers, and watched the drops fall sparkling from them. She felt the water; she liked to touch all things—the sunlight shone the brighter on her hand because it was wet.

Beyond the streamlet the lane rose rapidly, rugged and narrow; the hedges ceased, and only a hawthorn-bush here and there appeared on the banks. Presently it became a deep white groove, worn in chalk.

Felise stepped quickly now, and in a few minutes reached the foot of the hill, where the lane left the straight line, and went up the Downs aslant, so that waggons might be drawn up, which they could not have been had the track been straight.

The moment Felise's foot touched the sward, she began to run up the hill, making direct for the ridge, like a hare, or a bee bent for the thyme above. Her arched insteps, like springs, threw her forwards; her sinews,

strung and strong, lifted her easily. Her weight did not press the turf—it was for the time suspended between her swift bounds. Rejoicing, her deep chest opened, the pliant ribs, like opening fingers, made room for cubic feet of purest atmosphere. The air inhaled lifted her; she was lighter and more swift.

Forced into the blood, the strong hill air intoxicated her. She forgot all; she saw nothing—neither the sun, the sky, nor the slope itself; her entire being was occupied in putting forth her strength. Up—from thyme-bunch to thyme-bunch; past grey flat flints; past rusty ironstone fragments; past the parallel paths, a few inches wide, which streaked the hill—up, straight for the summit!

A lark, startled, fled, but immediately began to soar and sing. The landscape widened beneath; there were woods and bright fields. She did not see the fields, or woods, or hear the lark; nor notice the flints

which, like lesser mile-stones, marked her run. Her limbs grew stronger, her bounds more powerful, as her breath was drawn in long, deep inspirations. The labour increased her strength; her appetite for the work grew as she went. She ran and drank the wind to have more of herself—to have the fulness of her own existence. The great heart within her throbbed and bore her, replying to her spirit.

More flints, more thyme—a stone-chat flitted away—longer grass, more slippery, the slope steeper, still—up!

Yet the strong limbs could not bound quite so far; the feet fell as swiftly, but the space covered was not so wide. There was effort now.

Brave as may be the heart of woman, yet the high hills must try it. So great was the rush of the aërated blood, it seemed to threaten to suffocate her. The supple knees could not straighten themselves; they remained slightly bent. The pliant ribs, opened

to their widest, seemed forced outwards by an expansive power which must break them to get free. Her head was thrown back : she did not look now at the ridge ; she looked up at the sky. Surely the summit must be near ?

She would have dropped rather than give up ; she would have dropped like a hunted animal before she would have yielded.

The time when she knew she must fall was numbered now but by seconds. The strong air which at first gave such a sense of vigour was now too strong ; it began to take away her breath. She did not feel her limbs ; they moved mechanically, though still quickly. She saw nothing but the sky. Five seconds more, and down she must go : not even that great heart could bear more.

But she was nearer than she knew. Suddenly the slope became less steep, where the summit seemed planed away ; her feet went along instead of having to be lifted. She

looked and saw the thorn-bush on the ridge before her. She stopped by the bush ; she had done it—the hill was conquered.

She could not stand quite still ; she walked slowly forwards — the sudden relief to her panting chest was unbearable if she stood. Pant, pant ; throb, throb ! But her heart sang in its throbs ; her eyes gleamed with delight. She walked slowly in a circle, and came back to the old thorn-bush. She could stand now. She looked towards the horizon, blue where it met the descending dome of the sky.

First her gaze went straight out to the farthest, where earth appeared immaterial like the sky ; after that it travelled back to her, over woods, the gleam of water, more woods, which were less dense, and had glades of green meadows between them ; then rested for awhile on a red roof among sycamores and elms — home — then came nearer. And now she looked *down*, having previously looked out—down on the lane,

and on the cornfields ; thatched roofs yonder on the left, and early smoke rising ; an idle windmill ; a church-tower, round which black specks of daws were wheeling ; and corn-fields, brightly green. Her heart sang within her. She triumphed ; she was full of her own life.

In all that vast plain there was not a woman that could have done it, and not two men.

There was nothing large, gigantic, or Amazonian about her ; it was the perfection of her physical nature, not size or training. Her natural body had been further perfected by a purely natural life. The wind, the sun, the fields, the hills—freedom, and the spirit which dwells among these, had made her a natural woman ; such a woman as Earth meant to live upon her surface, and as Earth intended in the first origin of things : beauty and strength—strength and beauty.

What a latent power of love was there in that richness of blood, that depth of chest,

that greatness of heart! Pure love, pure as the spring-water that comes from the hills, was there ready to be poured forth—always full, always pouring, always the same and always pure.

Felise walked along the summit of the hill till she reached the place on the other side where it sloped downwards. There the dew had fully dried—it was the eastern slope, and so received the full rays of the sun from his earliest rising. In summer he rises with his full rays, and steps at once in all his fiery strength up over the eastern horizon. The turf was perfectly dry; she sat down, facing eastwards.

Now, for the first time, she heard the larks singing; she had been too full of her own thoughts and efforts to listen before.





CHAPTER III.



HE had seen *him* so little, and yet her passion had taken such hold of her. She knew that she had not come forth to see the sunrise and to bathe in the light of morning. It was to drink deep of the emotion which filled her ; she must go out into the broad morning where alone was room enough for the heart to breathe. Filled and overflowing with love, yet such is the insatiable nature of passion that she, who thought of nothing else, went to try and think still more.

All this had come at once, in a few weeks —all this concentration and burst of desiring ;

and with so little cause, for she had scarcely seen him. This proves that her heart had been full of love to its utmost capacity long before they had met; that incident was merely the outlet.

As she had roamed about the hills, and wandered in the woods, or by the shore, musing in deep enjoyment of the sunlight and the wind, love was coursing through each vein, filling every throb of her heart. It was this which gave such beauty to the flower, such colour to the sky, such pleasant coolness to the stream. She awoke to it in the morning as the swallows came to the eave by the window; they had been coursing long before through the air while she lay sleeping.

She threw open her window and breathed it—the sweet wind from the meadows brought it. All day the sunlight poured it forth upon the green grass and rustling leaves; she moved in it as she moved in the sunbeams. By night it was with her. An

inexpressible fulness of passion grew in her breast.

But could this be? Could anyone love without an object? Is it possible for the heart to become full and yet without an image? Not perhaps with a small nature, a narrow mind, a stunted being. With all great hearts and true women it is always the case; they love first in themselves, they love without knowing why, or whom—it is their very life. If such a great and noble woman were enclosed in a prison from youth, and permitted no sight of man, still to the end of existence she would love. The divine flame lighted in her with life would burn on to the last moment. ✕

Felise's heart was lost before she saw him. She lost it amid the flowers of the meadow, the wind on the hill, by the rushing stream. She lost it in her study among her books, her poetry of old Greece—songs of the 'Violet Land'—her 'Odyssey' and dramas of Sophocles and Æschylus; among the stars

that swept by over the hill ; by the surge that ran up and kissed her feet. The pointed grass stole it from her ; the fresh leaves of spring demanded it ; all things beautiful took it from her. Her heart was lost long since.

The streamlet in the woods is full before the dove alights to drink at it ; the flower in the grass has expanded before the butterfly comes. A great passion does not leap into existence as violets sprang up beneath the white feet of Aphrodite. It has grown first. The grapes have ripened in the sun before they are plucked for wine.

Her vigour of life was very great ; yet it was not that that sent her to the fields and woods, to the hilltop and the shore ; nor the abounding physical vigour which forced her broad chest through the clear green sea ; nor the strong muscle hidden in the rounded arm which drove her boat over the waves. The soul that inspired the effort was the love that was growing within her.

There were women in the country far larger of limb than she was ; more bulky of arm and brawny of chest—strong as reapers. They did not swim, though the sea was open to them ; they did not row and spend whole days upon the water ; they did not climb the hills and wander in the solitary valleys. They had the strength ; they could have lifted a heavier weight than she could have done ; they could have outworked her in manual tasks, yet they exhibited no energy. Such as were poor remained about their cottages ; such as were better off stayed in their farmhouses. The little circumstances of daily life were enough for them, and they were satisfied with the petty gossip of the village and the market-town.

If there were any gala in the town they were eager enough then to don their finest and trudge, or ride as the case might be, thither, earliest to arrive and last to leave. Enterprise enough for that was in them. So totally were they without imagination that a

flower-show, or a fête, or a fair roused them to the highest pitch of excitement. The band and the gay dresses, the noise and the crowd supplied what was naturally lacking in their minds. They had no colour within, and so sought it without.

They rushed to the fête or gala; for the rest, day after day, week after week, month after month, they were satisfied indoors with the petty things of the hour. The violets, the honeysuckle, the roses later on, were nothing to them; the sea nothing. It was within walking-distance, as near as the gala-field, but they never went to it.

Therefore it was not Felise's physical vigour which made her seek the sun and the hills, not that which made her row and swim. Something else beside the abundant young life of the blood was there to give the impulse. The soul of her blood was the passion within.

This gave the vigour to her white limbs as she swam, supplying the force with

which they thrust back the clear green sea ; this pulled at the oar ; this lifted her as she ran up the steep hillside. Her own heart coloured the flower she gathered, and gave a grace to the beech-trees beneath which she wandered. From herself came the brilliance of the sunlight, and the meaning in the books she read.

They did not go out into the fields, or wander in the woods, because they saw nothing there but fields and woods, nothing but grass and trees.

Felise carried with her a fresh colour for each flower, a thought for every tree, a feeling into the depths of the shadowy woods. The beauty of the grasses and the green wheat was in her ; she brought the beauty to them. Slowly undulating the wave approached her boat : the grey wave poised itself a moment beside the boat, and immediately bowed itself beneath her. She saw down to the pale furrowed sand, and the sea-weed in the shallow. In the clear water

there was nothing of itself, but her heart put a feeling there—just as she let her hand droop over into the sea.

With her soul grew her love ; this purest of love, and yet strongest of passions. Her young limbs became stronger, her young chest broader, her shoulders and her back finer : a firmer pulse throbbed in her veins. So the soul enlarged as day after day of musing passed, and those long half-conscious reveries which are to the soul as sleep to the frame. She rejoiced in the morning and the sunrise, and felt the glowing beauty of the day ; she saw the night and its stars, and knew the grandeur of the earth's measured onward roll, eastwards, the hexameter of heaven.

She saw these things because at her birth love was born with her ; the flame was lit with her life, and must burn till the end.

There are but few men, one only they say in many, many years, in whom the fire of genius is clear from youth. These are born

—such cannot be educated up from common material. There are but few women (though more in proportion than such men) in whom the divine flame of unutterable love exists from the first moment of consciousness, still growing with their growth. The mark of love was stamped on Felise's forehead.

Hence the sweetness of the morning to her ; hence the joy of swimming in the clear green sea ; the pleasure of rowing ; of running on the hills ; the beauty of the flowers. She brought to all a song — the song of her heart. So that it is true to say that she loved before she had seen the object of her love. Who should have her would have a twofold Felise—the outward beauty of the woman, the inward beauty of her soul.





CHAPTER IV.



ELISE listened to the larks as they rose and sang—now one, now two, now six or seven at once. They did not soar to a great height ; but, starting from a field of clover beneath, came up a little above the level where she sat, and sang like a chorus before her. She listened, and in her heart silently asked the same as they did aloud. Over their nests and their beloved ones they uttered their verses, in melody requiring of the sun and of the earth happiness for these, and for themselves permission to live.

Chanting their welcome to the sun, they breathlessly poured out a prayer demanding,

in a thousand trills, that the joy of day and life might descend upon their homes. They sank to the clover, but speedily came up again, restless in their gladness, eager to acknowledge the benefit of day, eager to secure fulfilment of their hopes for their young, fearful lest they had not expressed themselves sufficiently, lest they had seemed ungrateful.

Felise asked in her heart the same as they did. Her overflowing heart asked happiness for the image that now filled it; for herself only that she might contribute to *his* happiness—that she might sacrifice herself—that she might lay down her life for him.

Of old, old time the classic women in the 'Violet Land' of Greece went out to the sunrise, and, singing to Apollo, the sun, prayed that their hearts might be satisfied, and their homes secured; by the fountain they asked of the water that the highest aspirations of their souls might be fulfilled; of the earth

they asked an abundance for those whom they loved.

No more the hymn is heard to the sun ; no more the stream murmurs in an undertone to the chorus of human hopes ; no more the earth sees its wheat and its flowers taken from it to be presented to it again upon the altar in token of gratitude and prayer.

But still the larks, as then, and still the thrushes, the fleeting swallows, and the doves, address themselves to sun, and earth, and stream, and heaven. Their songs vary not, their creed does not change, their prayer goes forth to the same old gods.

Have *our* hopes and hearts changed in the centuries ? No ; not one whit.

Felise asked the same as many a deep-breasted maiden in the days of Apollo and Aphrodite. Only her heart was pure, and uncontaminated even by any sensuous myth.

The larks sang out of the fulness of their hearts ; they were not conscious that they

prayed, though in truth they did. Her heart spoke without volition, she was not aware she was praying. With all her being she demanded that joy might reach her beloved, that she might lie like the dust at his feet, in her sacrifice her triumph.

Came the sun in all his glory, and the wind from the sea ; the deep azure sky was over her, the woods and the green wheat below. The hills were all her own ; there was no one else to claim them in the morning. She alone looked at the sky, and it was hers. Could she have done so, she would have given the wide earth and all its fruits to her beloved.

The richness of the corn in the plain, and of the luxuriant grasses in the meadow ; the ancient oaks and the thousand elms ; the hedges hung with honeysuckle, and where the roses were coming ; the sweet waters, and the flowers that stood by them ; all that grew afar to the horizon. Nor was that enough. The dim blue sea yonder, the

bright blue heavens, the glowing light ; she would have given him all for his delight, as a goddess of old time might have taken a mortal in her chariot through the ether.

She was leaning on her arm, reclining on the sward, and the throbs of her heart vibrated through her arm to the earth. Quickened by the violence of her run up the hill it beat rapidly, causing her arm to tremble slightly. It was meet that so noble a heart should rest upon the boundless earth. There the rudeness of its beat diminished, and the vehemence of the vibration subsided.

But not so the vehemence of the passion within. The glowing light and pleasant air, the broad green wheat under, all the blue above, the beauty of the world but fed the flame. So much the more she entered into the loveliness of the day, so much the more grew the desire which was her life.

She had gone out at the dawn that she might grasp it from the sun at his rising,

that she might steal from the dewy grass and the fresh leaves, and seize her love from the purple sky. The sun had risen and the morning was opening into day, but she was insatiate, still she wished for more. She had fed herself with the light, and dew, and loveliness of the sunny morn, yet her hunger grew with all she fed on. There was no rest for her in the sunlight, on all the wide earth.

If in the time to come she should have her dream, would even then her heart be satisfied? Could she ever love enough to relieve her love?

The one over-mastering desire was to give—nothing for herself, all for him. To give him all things; to ask nothing in return. Her desire was immeasurable—she looked greedily on the earth spread out at the base of the hill—that she might pour plenty at his feet, that she might give him the loveliness of all.

The larks were still singing, but she was

not listening now. Their notes were far away, as if they sang higher than the clouds. Tears gathered in her eyes, and dimmed the view of the beauteous morn. Her breast heaved once, and her breath paused in her throat, checked by a sigh. A deep prayer can but end in tears—a prayer like this which has no words, but gives a life instead of them. It was not sorrow, it was the unutterable depth of her joy in the love that held her.

He knew it not—what of that? He might never know—what of that? She had given her life to him, and it was a joy to her that she had done so. But with that joy there mingled the undertone of knowledge and of thought, that she should never, never, not even if his arms were about her, be able to fully pour forth her heart, making him understand her. How could he understand her? How could she ever tell him? And all that she could ever do for him under the happiest circumstances could not amount to one

hundredth part of what she wished to do. She felt in that moment of tears that the fruition of human wishes can never equal the desire. The limit is reached long, long before. All falls so short.

Her breath came freely again, and she saw the distant sea clearly—the mist in her eyes was gone. Once more the larks sang sweetly, and she listened. If we cannot reach to ideal things, at least we can do much, nearer to earth. The larks cannot rise to the heavens, but they sing high above their nests, and their voices are sweet to all below them.

Felise raised herself higher on her arm, and looked boldly at the blue sea-line. Her heart rose again ; the strong courage in her inspired it. Bright and beautiful as the morning she rose to her feet, dauntless and resolute. Her will was strengthened by love, made ten times stronger. Bold as the sun, unabashed as the day, she would have her will ; she claimed love as her right. Come what might, she would be his.



CHAPTER V.



HE sun had now grown fierce, and Felise, rising from the ground, walked along the hill, whose summit gradually declined. These hills of chalk are generally very steep in front, and laborious to ascend if attempted there ; but at the rear they are much easier, and present no difficulty. In this they resemble human life, for the aspiring, whether in letters, politics, or commerce, find the utmost trouble in climbing up the precipitous frowning brow which defends the prize ; but once on the top, sigh to observe that the back of the position, which was hidden from them, could have been easily ascended, and that after all they

are only elevated in a trifling degree above their neighbours.

Immediately beneath the hill was a field of clover, and beyond that wheat ; next came a large wood, extending round the hill to the left : a brightly-gleaming stream ran into and was lost in the shade of the wood. To the right were meadows, reaching as far as the eye could see through the crowded trees in the hedgerows. Among these Felise recognised her home, a mile or more distant, the roof and chimneys only visible above the foliage. The line of the sea appeared where another ridge of hill stooped, and rose again. It was five miles to the shore.

Turning to her left, Felise went over the ridge, and descended the slope, which was very gradual, about half-way, till she reached the shade of a solitary beech-tree growing there. She had been so full of her thoughts, and so insensible to her physical sensations, that the sun had heated her unpleasantly before she was aware of it,

and the cool shadow of the beech was a relief. She leaned against its smooth trunk, and looked over a hollow valley, or plain, between several ridges.

They sloped down, one line behind the other, and a third across these; a fourth farther away, drawn along in those gentle outlines that look so easy to copy on paper, and are so difficult. The pencil can rarely hit the exact curve—there is always a tendency to exaggerate; and some of the cleverest draughtsmen say the only method by which these illusive lines can be rendered is to gaze at them, and sketch without looking at the paper—that is, to let the pencil obey the mandate of the eye without the intervening connection of the mind, yielding the faculties entirely to the curve.

This enclosed plain was grass-grown; a few hawthorns were scattered about it, and beneath where she stood three or four beeches grew in an irregular group. She was now facing in the opposite direction—

her present right was her former left. A rude track—merely two ruts in the sward—went over the hill on her right.

Just as she was beginning to feel refreshed in the coolness, her glance became sensible of a movement in the distance. Something had crossed over the third ridge, and descended out of sight into the hollow between it and the second. She did not look that way in time to see what it was, but supposed it to have been a shepherd.

While she leaned against the bole of the tree idling, she took out her penknife, a slight thing with a mother-of-pearl handle and a thin narrow blade. Why are ladies' penknives so feebly made? Directly you begin to cut with one, the blade shakes and turns, or threatens to go right back, in spite of the spring.

Felise took the blade itself between her finger and thumb—as the handle was useless she hafted it with her white fingers—and began to cut out a slice of the bark of the beech.

This tree has a rind, smooth, and readily incised. It is not very thick, yet thick enough for a marked notch to be left if a strip be cut out. Felise forced the tender blade through the bark, and drew two parallel lines; then she loosened and tore out the thin strip between these, leaving a straight perpendicular stroke, or |. The sap glistened in the groove.

She did it in mere idleness, quite thoughtlessly, and without intent. Now see what follows from one stroke, and how careful people should be before they begin anything. How can you tell where it may lead you?

She contemplated the glistening groove; and then, suddenly taking more interest in the work, began to draw two more parallel lines from the top of the first aslant to the right. This incision was somewhat shorter; it did not descend quite so far as the | It was connected with the first at the top. When the strip of bark was peeled out there

were two glistening lines of sap, in shape something like half the conventional arrow-head on Government property—**N**.

In a minute or two she began to add to this piece of work a further stroke, ascending from the descending one, also to the right, which, when peeled, left a strange Ogham-like character—**M**.

So soon as she had done this she was startled at her own deed, and tried to rub it out with her soft hand, which was likely to produce much effect on the bark of a tree. Rub it as hard as she might, there was the incision, and she could not make the bark grow again. It is not so easy to undo what has once been done. The beech would not obliterate that mark in twenty years. The very thought increased her trepidation; her cheek grew warm—everyone who passed would see it for twenty years.

The reflection that although they would see it they might not understand it, did not occur to her. What was so plain to her

must be evident to others. Guilty people always imagine everyone is watching them—that everyone detects their secret. Some one might be looking now. She looked up, and immediately drew close to the tree, hiding behind it.

While these labours had been proceeding, the figure which had appeared over the third ridge, to disappear immediately in the hollow, had come up again over the second ridge, gone down into the second hollow, and was at that moment, when she looked up, descending the first slope into the grassy valley at her feet. It was a man on horseback.

When he reached the level sward, he pushed his horse to full speed, and galloped at a great pace straight across the plain. He seemed to be making a bee-line across, as if intending to ride up the opposite ascent.

Felise involuntarily grasped her penknife so tightly that the point pricked her finger. This drew her attention to the fact that a beech-tree six or eight inches in diameter

is not shield enough to conceal a well-developed form ; or else she did not care to hide now ; or else she was curious to see which way he was going ; or else—a woman has so many reasons for everything she does it needs a volume to record them ; but what she did was to step away from the tree, and in front of it, into full view.

Her lips were slightly parted ; her form rose a little, for she had drawn herself up unconsciously to her full height. Her eyelids drooped, and a dreamy expression came into the beautiful grey of her eyes. The deep attention with which she gazed partly overcame the involuntary muscles, so that her heart beat slower, and her breath was scarcely drawn.

The horseman rode straight towards the hill, but at the foot turned to the right, and began to go round the valley. He had changed his mind, or thought perhaps that he should find no better place for a gallop than in this natural circus.

Instantly her breath came quicker, and her heart beat faster; the nerves had relieved the muscles. He was not going away yet.

In following the outline of the plain, he must pass close to her, though much lower, and just the other side of the clump of beeches. The curve brought him nearer and nearer, till she thought he must see her; yet he did not appear to do so. Thud, thud—an occasional click as the hoofs struck a stray flint. He was looking straight at her! Surely he saw her? No; he rode on, and his back was turned as the curve of the grassy circus took him away.

Felise sighed, and then frowned; she could not understand it. She was in the full view of everyone who entered the valley; she might have been seen from the opposite side. Certainly their acquaintance was slight; still, he would hardly pass her like that.

He had not, in fact, seen her at all, intent

on his gallop, on his horse, and especially upon his own thoughts. But to this circumstance the circular shape of the grassy circus contributed ; for it is a curious fact that anyone standing on the side of a round cavity, or inside a round building, may be overlooked.

Suppose a circular room ; stand close to the wall, and if a person glance casually in at the door, he will very likely fail to see anyone there. Though she was now full in the glowing morning sunlight, he did not see her ; his mind was deeply engaged, and the retina is not so sensitive at such moments. He was riding fast to ride down his own thoughts.

As he came round to the spot where the rude track went over the hill to the right, Felise's breath came slow again, lest he should turn and go along the waggon-road, which she knew would have led him home. He did not—he came on ; and for the second time passed her, unconscious of her

presence. The nearer he came the higher grew the colour in her face and on her neck ; as the strong horse took him away, so the colour faded. When the sunlight suddenly breaks forth from a cloud, how instantly the flowers bloom afresh!—so the quick rosy flush lit up her delicate neck instantly, but it sank back slowly.

. In passing the group of trees he was so close that the expression of his face was visible. His forehead was a little contracted with a frown ; the line it caused was not deep, so that he appeared more hesitating than angry. He was undecided ; he was seeking decision from the unhesitating stride of his horse.

Comparatively his face was small for his height ; he was not all face, as we see some men, whose countenances seem to descend to the last button of their waistcoats. His head was in just proportion, the summit and finish of his shape, as a capital of a column. His hair had a shade like the gold of Felise's, yet not in the least like hers, for

his was deeper, browner, as if the sun had burnt it, as it had his cheek. Had it not been cropped so close, his hair would have curled; in the days of Charles II. such hair would have been of priceless value to a cavalier, curled locks flowing to the shoulder.

In outline his countenance was somewhat oval, his features fine—a straight nose and chin well marked, but not heavy. He had a short beard, and his head showed the more to advantage, because he had a good neck, not too thick. His eyes were blue, and framed in firmly-drawn eyebrows and long lashes. Though well built, he was slender rather than stout; his hands were brown, but not large.


The features indicated a temperament almost too sensitive, feelings too delicate for the roughness of life, which still has to be sustained by the rude plough and by labour in all weathers, as in the days of our most remote ancestors.

He rode without a saddle, only a bridle. The horse was a large bay, almost large enough for a weight-carrying hunter; a handsome creature whose flanks might have been polished like fine wood, they shone so. Round spots on the skin were less dark than the adjacent surface—a dappling or graining which varied in hue as the animal turned, and the light was reflected at a different angle.

The third time he came round to the waggon-track he drew rein, as if about to change his course, and walked his horse. Felise impatiently moved her foot, and the dreamy expression in her eyes gave way to one of annoyance. But he went by the waggon-track, and continued along the circus, still at a walking-pace. This time, as he approached the beeches, he saw her.



CHAPTER VI.

 HE knew he did, although no alteration was perceptible in his manner. Watching him so narrowly, she felt that he had seen her, yet there was no visible change. Eyes that love have a way of seeing more than is understood by scientific people, though they may analyze light with the spectrum and the polariscope, and all the other appliances together.

At the beeches he rode slowly up towards her. All at once he turned again, and began to descend the hill away from her; then, as suddenly, slipped off his horse to

his feet, and walked towards her up the slope.

‘Good-morning!’

He did not offer his hand; their previous acquaintance was extremely slight. She held out hers, and he took it.

‘Can I direct you?’ he said, a little awkwardly.

‘Oh, I know the way!’

‘I did not know; I thought——’

‘I came up to see the sunrise,’ she said, explaining; ‘but I was too late.’

‘It is a beautiful morning,’ said he.

No very brilliant conversation yet; as a matter of fact, people who are *tête-à-tête* for the first time in their lives do not talk brilliantly. Much, however, may be conveyed by tone and manner.

He did not look at her more than courtesy demanded: he looked at the sward, at the tree, anywhere but at her; yet his nature was truthful.

She looked straight in his face; she did

not disguise her wistful glance. If he could only have let himself gaze into her eyes! But he would not. Her right hand moved restlessly; she almost put it on his shoulder.

They were both bareheaded. She held her hat in her left hand; he had taken off his when he saluted, and had not replaced it. The bright sunlight shone on her golden hair, and on his short brown-gold locks. Their shadows touched on the sward.

‘I have been watching you riding,’ she said. ‘I wish I could ride like that without stirrups.’ Implied flattery, Felise.

‘It is very easy.’

‘But you went very fast; and such a big horse, too.’

‘So much the easier; the motion is so much more pleasant than with a small horse.’

‘Let me stroke him,’ she said.

Together they walked a few steps down the slope; the bay had quietly set himself

to feed on the sweet sward. She stroked him, and admired him. There was an emphasis in her manner as if she would rather have stroked certain brown-gold locks near her. She asked him twenty questions about his horse Ruy.

He answered all, but merely answered them, without any enthusiasm or desire to continue the conversation. Twice he said time was going on, and touched his watch-chain, but did not look at his watch for courtesy's sake.

Felise glanced hastily round to find some subject to talk of. The trees—what trees were they? She knew perfectly well.

‘Beeches,’ he said; ‘they grow on a chalky soil.’

‘Where does that road lead to?’ pointing to the waggon-track.

‘To Welcombe.’

As if she had not followed it twenty times, till she could look down upon his house. Anything to make him stay, to make him

speak, that she might see him, and hear his voice.

‘You have not called for a very long time.’

As if he was on visiting terms. He had called once on mere formal business.

‘How is Mr. Goring?’ he was obliged to ask.

Then followed three or four sentences—three or four moments more—about her uncle’s health, and his fondness for planting trees.

‘Why does he not look at me?’ she thought. ‘Can I not make him look at me?’ Then aloud, sharply: ‘Mr. Barnard!’

He could not help but look, at the sound of his name. He saw a face full of wistful meaning upturned to him. Her golden hair had strayed a little on her forehead, three or four glistening threads wandered over it, asking some loving hand to smooth them back. The white brow without a stain, a mark, a line; no kiss there but must be

purified by the touch ; it was an altar which could not be tainted—which would turn taint to purity. Large grey eyes that seemed to see him only—to whom the whole world, the hills round them, the sky over, was not—eyes that drew him towards them, and held his vision in defiance of his will. If once you look over the side of a boat into the clear sea, you must continue looking—the depth fascinates the mind. Some depth in her rapt gaze fascinated him.

Her eyebrows arched—not too much arched—the curve of the cheek, roseate, almost but not quite smiling, carried his thought downwards to her breathing lips. Her lips were apart, rich, dewy, curved ; they kissed him by their expression, if not in deed. In that instant his heart throbbed violently ; the beat rose to thrice its usual rate.

The first moment of awaking to a happy morning, the daylight that means a joyful event ; the first view of the sea in youth, when

the blue expanse brings tears to the eyes—in these there is some parallel to the sudden, the extreme, and the delicious feeling that shot through him. To reach the ideal of human happiness it is necessary to be for the moment unconscious of all, except the cause. For that moment he had no consciousness except of her, such was the power of her passion glowing in her face.

Even Felise, eager to retain him with her, and unhesitatingly employing every means, could not maintain that gaze. Unabashed and bold with love, she was too true, too wholly his, to descend to any art. Her gaze, passionate as it was, was natural and unstudied; therefore it could not continue. Her eyes drooped, and he was released.

Immediately, as if stung to a sense of his honour, he placed his hands on the horse, sprang up, and seated himself.

‘I—I have much to do,’ he said, embarrassed to the last degree, and holding out his hand.

She would not see it. She took the bridle, and stroked Ruy's neck, placing her cheek almost against the glossy skin. Obeying the pressure of his knee, Ruy began to move slowly. She walked beside him, holding the bridle; but Ruy's long stride soon threatened to leave her behind. For very shame, he could not but stay. At a touch Ruy halted. She looked up at him; he carefully avoided her glance. The horse, growing restless, began to move again; again, for courtesy's sake, he was compelled to check him. Not a word had been spoken while this show was proceeding.

Barnard's face grew hot with impatience, or embarrassment, or a sense that he was doing wrong in some manner not at the moment apparent. Sideways, she saw his glowing cheek. It only inflamed her heart the more; the bright colour, like the scarlet tints in a picture, lit up his face. Next he controlled himself, and forced his features and attitude to an impassive indifference.

He would sit like a statue till it pleased her to let him go. Ruy pulled hard to get his neck free that he might feed again.

She stooped and gathered him some grass and gave it to him. Twice she fed him. Barnard remained silent and impassive. Still not a word between them. The third time she gathered a handful of grass, as she rose her shoulder brushed his knee. She stood there, and did not move. Her warm shoulder just touched him, no more; her golden hair was very near. She drew over a tuft of Ruy's mane, and began to deftly plait it. Barnard's face, in defiance of himself, flushed scarlet; his very ears burned. He stole half a glance sideways; how lovely her roseate cheek, the threads of her golden hair, against the bay's neck! Ruy was turning his nostrils round to touch her, and ask for more grass. She swiftly plaited his mane.

At that moment another horse neighed over the hill; they both looked round—no

one was in sight. But Ruy answered with a neigh, and in the same instant stepped forward. Barnard pressed his knee; Ruy began to move faster. Barnard bowed; his voice was temporarily inarticulate, and he was gone.

In a few minutes, he gained the waggon-track; and, without looking back, pressed Ruy at a rapid pace up the ascent, and disappeared over the summit. She went back to the beech, and in the shadow watched the next ridge. In five minutes man and horse came into view, climbed, and went down, like a ship at sea beneath the horizon. She saw them for the third time passing over the third ridge, and then, knowing that she should not see them any farther, turned to go. She soon regained the lane, where a farmer on horseback overtook and passed her, raising his hat. It was his horse that had neighed to Ruy.

Felise walked swiftly, and in the centre of the lane. The dew had dried from the blue

veronica and the cowslip. Instead of wandering from side to side, looking at the flowers, and touching the green sprays, she went straight on. She did not notice a black-bird's noisy note as he sprang up startled from among the young brake fern. The oak-trunk which had formed her seat was not looked at. Her mind was full of one thought, and she did not regard outward circumstances.

A shepherd with his dog at a gateway saw her go by; a man riding a thill-horse met her, and forced his horse, with the harness hanging and jingling, up into the nettles and brambles, to give her a royal right of road; ten or twelve haymakers, men and women, were filing across the lane out of one field across to another. They halted, and let her pass through their ranks. Some children with them shouted joyously at the sight of her. Neither the touching of hats, nor the curtseys, nor the voices of the children calling to her, attracted her a moment. Her

mind was full of one thought, and she saw nothing.

At home she immediately ran upstairs, shut the door, and sat down. In another moment she got up to look at herself in the glass. Her cheeks were scarlet, partly the exertion, partly sunburn, partly excitement. The sun had scorched her face; love had scorched her heart. What had she done? Was it well, or wrong? Did he understand? He *must* have understood. Yet, perhaps, he might not have done so; he would not look at her. Their eyes had met but once.

Her face, her neck, flushed scarlet; she felt as if her very fingers tingled with shame. That she should have shown him so plainly her meaning—that she should have actually held his horse by the bridle to stay him from leaving her!

With as violent a revulsion of feeling she laughed, caught up a brush, and brushed her hair, and revelled in the thought of her

boldness. She wished she had done more.

‘Why did I not hold his hand instead of his horse’s bridle?’ she asked herself.

Suddenly she burst into tears, leant back, and became perfectly pale. A faintness came over her; everything before her eyes was black as if it was night. She did not faint—she slowly recovered; and, going to the window, began to sing in a low voice. A girl came round the corner of the house.

‘Mary, bring me a rose for my hair.’

In that simple country household, Mary Shaw was their only attendant. She was, however, young and good-looking, pleasant, and almost a friend. There was much affection between them.

‘You must be main lear [very hungry],’ said Mary, when she brought the rose; ‘you have been up Ashpen.’

‘I am—*very* hungry,’ said Felise.

‘Such a nice breakfast waiting for you.’

‘I couldn’t eat a morsel,’ said Felise.
‘How long the days are! I wish it was night!’

‘It isn’t seven yet,’ said Mary.

‘Oh dear! These summer days are so long!’

‘Yesterday you was saying how glad you were they was so long.’

‘So I am.’

‘There now! who’s to know what you means? That’s how all good-looking ladies goes on—that’s how they worries the men-folk.’





CHAPTER VII.



AFTER Barnard had ridden over the third ridge, uphill and down, at a merciless rate, he checked his speed: first to a trot, then to a walk, and finally halted altogether. Next he turned Ruy's head away from home (a change Ruy did not much like), and slowly retraced the route he had come away from Felise Goring.

But at first not very rapidly. It is the first few steps that are difficult, even in sweet things: hesitation, trembling, indecision accompanies them. Once well started on the flowery path, and the pace constantly accelerates. In ten minutes he was at full

gallop back towards her. He had not the least idea what he was going to do—what excuse he should make for returning—whether he would go so near as to speak, or what.

He soon saw that she had left the spot. He rode up to the solitary beech and dismounted, mechanically repeating what he had done when she was there. So great criminals go through a dumb show in their sleep of guilt ; so great pleasure leads us to step again in our happy foot-marks. He looked at the beech, because she had been there, and caught sight of the incision in the bark. What was this ?

The cuts were so thin, he guessed at once it was her work : a man would have slashed out larger strips. He traced the lines with his finger : one straight descending stroke, and a small V attached to it at the top on the right side. When his finger reached the end of the ascending groove, involuntarily he drew it down the uncut bark, as if another

straight stroke had been there, and recognised in an instant what the incomplete character stood for ; *i.e.*, M. A capital M—his own initial ; Martial Barnard.

He took out his own knife, and cut the stroke necessary to complete the letter.

Hurrying to Ruy, who was feeding, he got up, and rode round the hill, and into the lane. Though so far behind at starting, his speed was thrice hers ; he thought he could easily overtake her. But she had progressed farther than he anticipated, and he found himself near her home without seeing anything of her. Then he asked himself what should he do if he did overtake her ? Could he ride up—could he speak to her ? What could he say ?

At this moment when Barnard let his horse walk, Felise was scarcely a hundred yards in front, but concealed by a turn of the lane.

‘M,’ he said to himself, ‘might stand for many other names—for Martin, for Mark ;

perhaps, after all, it was only a freak—an accidental resemblance to an M, and no letter was intended.'

But the look—the look which had held him ; the depth of those beautiful eyes ; the wistful expression of the face—he saw it before him as he saw it at the moment. Should he ever forget it?—he felt that it would never fade. As he thought of it, he looked down, and saw the plaited piece of mane. He cut it off, and put it in his pocket-book.

But in the pocket-book there were dates, and entries referring to—no matter ; he took the plait from the pocket-book, and placed it with his watch.

His conduct? To forget past vows ; to follow another woman ; to let his mind dwell upon this new face—could anything be more despicable?

He turned Ruy with some violence, and walked him back up the lane. But why should he be better than others? Why set

up to be so ultra-honourable? Was he not free in the eyes of the world?

As he pondered, still with her face before him, he saw a handkerchief, white and delicate of texture, almost under Ruy's hoofs; for the horse, left to himself, had chosen to walk on the sward near the hedge. Martial got down, and picked up the handkerchief. There were the initials 'F. G.' in the corner. It exhaled a slight perfume, the sweet delicate odour of the beautiful woman to whom it belonged, and he kissed it. With this he might ride up to her house even; it would be an excuse.

No; he could not—he must not. He remounted, and pursued his way along the lane, round the hill, back to the solitary beech with the glistening letter cut in its bark.

He reproved himself for permitting himself even to think of her; so he spoke aloud, as it were, mentally. At the same moment he was inquiring, Did that look mean any-

thing? If so, was it real—was it true? Or was she heartless, and merely using a lovely face to play upon him? Surely she was too beautiful; and yet—why should she select him for such a glance? Their acquaintance was but trivial, and Barnard, to do him justice, was without conceit. She could not mean it; and yet, and yet!

And so the summer day wore on. To one it was too long, because she did not know how long it would be before she saw him again; the other took no heed of the glorious sunlight, because a face floated before him.





CHAPTER VIII.



SOME ten or twelve days afterwards Felise started to bathe, telling Shaw to follow in a quarter of an hour with her towels. It was about eleven, and all the dew long since dry; the garden-path was hedged on either side with peonies, whose large flowers hung heavily. Open the folio-petals like the leaves of a book, and you will find the imperial purple of the heavens at sunset deep within the volume.

Beyond the peonies her skirt rustled on grass, grown high under apple-trees, and the shade of the apple-boughs crossed her shoulder as she walked. She saw her uncle,

Mr. Goring, at a distance, busy at his bees. A swarm hung from an apple-bough, and, clad in his net, he was charming them into a hive. Gardening and bee-keeping, planting trees, and all similar pleasure-work, is of no interest unless you do it yourself. He did everything himself, and knew every shoot, because he had himself pruned the branch.

Felise went on along a filbert-walk—Goring's own planting—then out by a yew-hedge higher than her head, and past the sundial. On the northern side of the sundial, under a sycamore, with the tall yew-hedge in the rear, a seat was placed; it was Felise's favourite resort, because there was a view of the distant hills, and in the afternoon of the sunset, from this place. He had planted the grounds so thickly with trees that this was almost the only spot where a view could be obtained.

Next she walked beside a hawthorn-hedge. Goring had made a gravel walk parallel with

the hedge, which led through the meadow to a copse at hand. There was a narrow valley between two slopes covered with wood; a copse had always been there, but Goring planted the summit each side with beech, and dotted American scarlet oaks about, besides cutting green walks among the ash, where, on turning a corner, you came unexpectedly on a bed of flowers or strawberries.

So soon as she reached the copse and had put her hand on the wicket-gate she heard the rush of falling waters. For some reason it was not audible till the wicket was reached, thence at every step in the wood it increased in volume of sound. A little stream from the chalk hill ran through the wood; years and years ago it had been banked up, and a pool made, in which there were trout. The pool was large enough for a boathouse; by the boathouse was a special compartment constructed for Felise, for bathing purposes.

Here she had learnt to swim; Goring taught her. Surrounded by wooded hills, and absolutely private, there could not have been a choicer place for bathing. The sea was so near—five miles is very little to country people—and Felise displayed so wilful a resolution to go out upon it at all times and seasons, that Goring never felt safe till she could swim. Of course she beat her teacher. ‘Papa’—he was only her uncle, though, as she had never known her parents, she called him papa—was getting grey. She could beat him swimming—three to one.

Felise moved more slowly in the ash-wood, listening to the rush of the water as it fell over the hatch of the pond. It rendered her thoughtful. Climbing up the embankment which held the water in, she sat down on the beam of the hatch. Behind her the water dropped in an arch, ten feet deep, into a gully nearly crossed by ferns, which perpetually nodded. The spray struck them and bent them down; they rose up and were

struck down again ; and so on all day and night.

Before her the pool stretched out, an acre or two, broad at this end and deep, and narrowing up to a point where the stream ran in. The wood came down close on three sides ; on the fourth, at her left hand, was a narrow strip of sward. The boathouse, on the right, was in shadow, being overhung by beeches ; all the rest of the mere in bright sunshine.

Felise put up her sunshade and listened to the rush of the cataract. Though it seemed to fill the ear, the notes of a blackbird in the wood were distinct above it ; they pierced the diffused sound of the waterfall. A chaffinch perched close to her ; there were some long-winged flies floating about ; the finch darted out and took these almost from under her parasol.

She was thinking. She had been up to the downs, and had visited the beech-tree three times since. She looked for her mark

cut in the bark, and found it had been completed. Some one had added the stroke which rendered it intelligible as an 'M.' Who could have done that? Her first thought was that it was Martial; he had returned, seen what she had been doing, guessed, and finished it.

This was what had actually taken place; but first thoughts are not always accepted. If he had done it, then her secret was out. Could it be called a secret after that interview? Her cheeks burned; she had so desired he should know, yet now she supposed he did know, she recoiled. For a moment only, however. If he had guessed and had completed the letter, then she was only too glad.

But had he? He had tried so hard to get away from her. He did not take the least interest in her. Possibly he thought her bold—troublesomely bold; then he would not be likely to have returned to the spot where she had been a weariness to him. It must have

been some shepherd lad whiling away the slow hours in the shadow of the beech who had carved the last stroke of the letter.

Yet she did not know. Heart said one thing : thought another. Heart said, ' He did it ; he is not *quite* indifferent to me ; he has been here ; he knows—he understands.' Thought said, ' He is entirely indifferent ; my face, my form does not please him ; why should he come back ? Oh no ! this was the work of a shepherd lad.' Yet she did not know. But if he had returned once, perhaps he would come again ; so she went to the place three times, waited for an hour or two, and saw nothing of him. Of course not ; he did not care. He never gave her a thought.

Yet she did not know. He might have revisited the spot at some other time of the day. So the battledore and shuttlecock of argument and suggestion continued in her mind. But the fact was indisputable that she did not see him ; nor did he call to see her.

If he really understood her—if he cared to understand her—surely he would have called. Though their families were not on visiting terms, a gentleman can generally make some pretence if he wishes to call. He had not been—he had not even ridden by, for she had been in the garden, and watching the road half the time. He did not want to come. Therefore it was not he who had completed the letter on the tree.

He did not care about her. She picked up a small stone and pitched it at a lazy trout idling at the surface of the still water. The fish shot away into the depths instantly ; but her thoughts did not go away into oblivion.

He did not care for her. But he must care for her ; she must make him care. It was impossible to influence him unless she could see him, speak to him, convey her heart to him, not only by words, but by those innumerable little ways which speak louder.

The weeks would lengthen into months, the months into years, and still perhaps he

would not come ; he would never care for her unless she could converse with him. Influence depends wholly on personal contact. No magic is known by which one person can attract another if outside the sphere of personal communication. Unseen, unspoken, how affect ?

She began to feel the immeasurable weight of separation which has slowly ground so many weary hearts to the very dust of desolation.

She realized for the first time in her life the powerlessness of women. They cannot stir, they cannot move in the matters that concern them most dearly ; they are helpless ; at the mercy of the petty events called circumstance. If by any happy chance circumstance threw her into Martial's society, in time he might love her. By chance only. How many years till that chance happened ? Possibly enough it might never occur at all.

Time would go on. He would see fresh faces—faces that pleased him better—he

would be wiled away by some other woman, fortunate in the fate of circumstance. A thousand little incidents might drift him farther away than he was now. 'She could not interfere. Strong and resolute as she was, what could she do?

Felise instinctively glanced all round her; she looked at the wood; at the path down the embankment; the nodding ferns; at the beeches far up on the summit each side; across at the willow-grown streamlet. She felt suddenly alone. She was by herself, not merely in the physical sense of no other person being near, but alone morally. Recognising that she could not command the society she desired, forced her to feel absolutely solitary. A crowd would have made no difference, she would have felt the same.

She could wait? Yes, like 'Mariana in the moated grange,' in the sunshine, in the evening, in the morning, still with the same burden on her lips, 'He cometh not.'

Hundreds, shall we not say rather thousands, do so wait. I saw a face, a woman's face, at a window to-day, as I was strolling past a residence the style of which betokened wealth. Upon that face waiting had set its seal unmistakably. She was waiting—she had been waiting years. No end to waiting. Such faces are common enough. Woman's life seems to be nothing but waiting, sometimes.

She had unconsciously placed her elbow on her knee, and leant her face on her hand; the very thought of waiting bowed her down into an attitude of pensive regret.

How bitter it is to be a woman sometimes! On the other hand, no one triumphs like a woman when she does triumph. Cæsar's spoils and car rolling through applauding Rome, are but gewgaws to the triumph of a woman.



CHAPTER IX.



HE very thought of the waiting depressed her ; as if a darkness had fallen on her heart in the midst of the sunshine. Her gloom had increased till it verged on anger—the two are near together ; gloom and anger are like twins. She grew angry, she knew not with what, and stood up. The blackbird who had been singing uttered a loud ‘ching-ching,’ as if alarmed at her change of attitude ; a moorhen at the other end of the little lake scuttled into the bulrush-flags.

She stood up in the sunshine, lowering her sunshade, drawn to her full height, her features set, a slight flush on her cheeks. A

silent and unchangeable resolve had been forming in her mind. She would, she must, she would have him with her. If he did not love her—if he could not love her—there was the end. But he should be in her society; he should feel her presence; he should see the meaning in her eyes; if she had any beauty he should come within reach of its power. He should talk with her, sit by her, do as she was doing; not once, or now and then—continually, till by degrees his heart warmed, if it could warm towards her.

The forms of society were nothing to her—she had already broken them. What the world said did not trouble her. She was reckless, ready for the most violent effort. She did not care; she would. She did not stamp her foot, the resolve was too deep to require a tangible emphasis; there was no fear of its vanishing.

Her features resumed their natural expression, her attitude became easy, but her cheeks grew hotter. Though she looked

straight in front she saw nothing. Her whole consciousness was rapt in resolution.

It lasted a moment, and then the question arose, How ?

Immediately she raised her sunshade, and sat down again. It is curious that when we act, we stand ; when we think, we sit. The difference is discernible in actors on the stage : so long as they address each other standing, the play is followed with interest ; the moment they sit down, though the dialogue be ever so brilliant, people take up their opera-glasses and look round them.

Stage-players should always stand—it lends a force to the smallest incident. To lie down is more effective than to sit, it is next to standing ; as, for example, the power Sarah Bernhardt exercises extended on a sofa—not a chair.

Felise thought and sat down. She asked herself, How could this be accomplished ? She thrust away from her mind the contemplation of the powerlessness of women, and

concentrated her ideas upon the way it could be done. She would not submit; she would not wait, to the burden of 'He cometh not.' She would force circumstances to her will, and mould her fate in her hands. The precipice was perpendicular, yet she would scale it. It was natural for a woman to attempt the impossible.

All the strength of her limbs seemed to support her resolution. Should she who could race up the steep hillside, who could swim, not only in this level lake, but in the swelling sea, who could run apace with the hounds—should she tamely stand by and see her prize fall to another winner in life's battle?

The strong limbs, the deep chest, the intense sense of life within her, urged her to the effort, and promised success.

Her face would never be seen at a window as the face I observed. Her nature was too strong, too vehement; if she failed, she would be utterly broken; if she failed, the end would

come quickly. She could not live without her love.

Some dim presentiment of this perhaps passed through her mind, for a tear came into her eyes. If he could not love her when she had gained her immediate object, what then? Of that possibility she dared not think.

The question was, How? How obtain access to him—how bring him into her society? Not for once, or twice, but day by day. To be with him hour after hour; her heart beat faster at the idea of it. To look into his face; to hear his voice; to come to understand his thoughts; to have one existence with him—the happiness would be almost too great. That alone—merely to be in his society—would be sufficient reward for all the sacrifice she could make. It must be, but how?

Has anyone thought for an instant upon the extreme difficulty of knowing a person? Really to know him, or her, to speak in a friendly way, to visit and re-visit, and con-

verse without reserve, and become company with, and part of their group. Acquaintance is often difficult enough to acquire; to really come to know a stranger, or comparative stranger, is most difficult.

People's entire destiny depends upon those whom they know. One's friends lift one or depress one to their level. A genius is raised up to the skies, or struggles unnoticed in the grimy ranks accordingly as his acquaintances happen to be first-class or third-rate. Some men are fortunate from their youth, and are thrust forward upon the gilded shoulders of money and title till the world accepts them. So all-important is it on what level we begin life.

We cannot select our company. Our power in this matter is simply negative; we can avoid what is notoriously bad, but we cannot thrust ourselves in upon the good. A soldier may steadfastly refrain from the canteen, but he cannot invite himself to the officers' mess.

The greatest difficulty in the world is to know people. How are you even to let them understand that you wish to know them—which would often expedite the desired end very considerably? Reflect upon the vast multitude of people who enter and depart from London every day in 2,200 trains. How can you know any one of these?

There is a pretty woman in every train. This is a physiological fact which I have often observed, but how are you going to get introduced to them?

It is possible to be invited to the same dinner-party, to belong to the same club, the same hunt, to go so far as to salute whenever meeting, and yet not to know one another. The cordial greeting, the pressing invitation, the glad spirit is wanting. It is a nod and nothing more.

But for a woman to introduce herself to a man—to select her acquaintance and her friend from the ranks of the other sex—is it not almost impossible?

We live in little groups. These groups have not been formed upon any definite principle ; they have grown up in the course of time, partly from family causes, partly from casual introductions, also from causes that defy analysis. Each of these little groups is complete in itself, and those outside it cannot get in. Observe a train, you will find that it runs upon rails ; another train may be near, but cannot move itself upon those rails ; each train has its metals. These groups remain in their grooves.

Yet the singularity of the thing is that although perseverance, application and admitted merit will not prevail to get an outsider into such a group, the merest outsider may enter at a moment's notice by some little chance.

Women consequently marry inside this group, with some one with whom they have been brought into contact through family connections. Or else they leap, as it were, quite beyond the group, and are carried away

by a total outsider accidentally met. If they do not belong to any group, and do not meet an outsider, then they have to continue unmarried. They cannot choose their friends, or their partners ; they can refuse (the negative) ; they cannot select.

Some method is clearly required by which people without scandal or solecism might communicate with each other, and make it understood that they wish to be acquainted. At the present moment, even a man cannot ride up to a house and say, 'Sir, I admire your niece (or your daughter). Permit me to visit you. So-and-so are my references. I await your reply after you have made inquiries.' But why not? It would be quite reasonable ; people would soon agree to the custom.

However, the ladies would demand a corresponding right. Could they not be permitted to send a card with a few lithographed words in a conventional sentence amounting to a permission to visit them ?

The very novelists, with all their ingenuity, have been troubled for ages to discover a means of introducing their characters to each other. Sometimes they cause their heroes to break a leg and be carried into a stranger's house, where they are nursed, and win a heart. Or a horse runs away with the lady, who is gallantly rescued. In real life such events are as rare as legacies. A lady, in Boccaccio's collection of stories, ingeniously uses the confessional as a means of securing a lover, showing that the difficulty was felt even then.

Half the flower-shows, the working-parties, the 'causes' got up and pursued so zealously, are only supported because people unconsciously recognise in them a means of mixing with each other.



CHAPTER X.



HERE was nothing in the position of Felise Goring or Martial Barnard to prevent their knowing each other. They were much in the same position. Felise depended upon her uncle, who possessed a comfortable house, the most beautiful grounds (laid out and planted by himself); who could provide a bountiful table, but could scarce summon up a coin. She had little beyond some fine pearls, once her mother's. As for Barnard, he occupied a very large farm; his family had been once well-to-do, but he really had nothing. Outwardly he was a desirable match—his family had had something of a

county reputation—financially speaking, he was undesirable. His education, his manners, his ideas, were much above his pocket. An impecunious pair; neither of them had anything to recommend them.

But there was no obstacle whatever in their position to prevent their knowing each other, except the insurmountable one that they did not know each other in the social sense. Their families had not visited; their connections did not belong to the same group. The houses were not more than three miles apart, but they were effectually isolated. Such cases must occur to everyone; there must be thousands of them. There was nothing between—only separation.

They had met thrice. Once in the previous autumn, when Felise was following the harriers on foot, for she ran as swiftly as Atalanta. They sat near each other at lunch. Once Barnard called upon Mr. Goring in the winter in reference to some formal

business about the water-course. The third time was on Ashpen Hill, just after sunrise. There had been no formal introduction, and there was nothing in these accidental meetings likely to lead to their meeting again.

The difficulty lay in the vacancy, as it were—the lack of anything to lay hold of. No slender thread existed by which communication could be effected. Without a doubt Felise would not have hesitated to have gone at once straight up to his hall-door ; but then—oh, the cunning of woman !—she knew (their cunning comes without teaching) that to be too openly forward, especially if there were witnesses, as there would be, would probably defeat the object.

Still there was nothing she would not do if necessary. She must ; she could not live without his society. But if possible it should be effected insidiously, so that the object might not be too immediately displayed.

Felise ran over several expedients in her mind as she sat on the beam of the hatch.

Feigning an interest in some old book, and pretending to have heard that he possessed it, she could call and ask for the loan. Walking a long distance she could become faint and weary while passing, and beg to rest. She might trespass on the grounds and sketch till she was seen. Most likely some one's curiosity would bring them out to talk to her.

There were some ladies at his house, cousins she believed, not very young; these might be useful if once spoken to. On the other hand, very likely they would detect her purpose, and set obstacles in her way. Or she could whip the stream for trout till she crossed his path as he went his rounds about his farm; he could hardly avoid coming to speak to her. Perhaps he would attend some of the public entertainments occasionally given in the town of Maasbury, a few miles distant. She could manage to leave the building at the same moment, and confront him in the doorway.

She must see him, and he must see her face. Perhaps if he saw it frequently, it might please him.

She went and knelt at the edge of the still pool, and looked over at her own reflection in the water. Felise made no affected secret to herself of her beauty ; she knew that she had beauty, and did not conceal it from herself in any form of self-depreciation. She delighted in it ; it pleased her intense, vigorous life to look at it. She enjoyed a sensuous repose while contemplating her face, or even her bare arms sometimes as she dressed her hair. She enjoyed herself.

Her eyelids drooped slightly, the expression of her eyes became softer, her lips parted in the very least ; it was something like how she looked when love was throbbing in her veins—only not so vehement, because she was receiving instead of giving. Her own existence came back to her. The glow of youth and loveliness was reflected back into her mind.

How beautiful it must be to be beautiful !

How delicious it is, even for the plainest of us, to sit before that which is beautiful, and sink into a semi-unconscious state of happiness! For it is happiness to gaze at that which is lovely, whether a living face or a pictured one.

What lovely faces some of the Italian painters have chosen for the Madonna! No theological persuasion is needed to induce us to gaze at her. Such beauty naturally creates a sense of delicate reverence; it delights and purifies at once. An evil thought is impossible before it; the heart, for the moment at least, becomes morally beautiful in correspondence with the pictured face.

Felise gazed down at herself in the still clear water, and enjoyed her own beauty. She loved herself for being beautiful. This was apart from thought of Martial; it was herself for herself; just as she joyed in her strength when she swam, in her swiftness when she ran. A sensuous and yet a delicate pleasure.

And Martial? It was a triumph to her to look at herself—he must see her face frequently; could he refuse to love?

But men vary in their standards of loveliness, and some do not apparently care for it at all. Differ as they may, however, unless perfectly indifferent, there are some whose beauty is so apart and distinct, that it must be acknowledged. Yet not necessarily loved.

If Martial admitted her beauty in time, would he even then love her? He might admire and turn away.

Still gazing at her face, Felise thought she discovered something more there than loveliness; she thought she saw the power to call forth passion in another's breast. In that thought she dreamed in the midst of the day.

Of all time all that have lived have been covetous of possessing this power; see the legends which have been invented of charms, which concealed about the person rendered the wearer attractive; read the sorceries of

ancient Rome ; go across then to Scandinavia, and listen to the bugle whose sound drew the maidens to the player. Man and woman alike, so do not condemn woman.

Some failings are far more desirable than that which passes for virtue. This is one of them. Felise did desire to be loved ; she acknowledged it to herself ; she dreamed in the thought that perhaps she possessed the power—if only he could see her face frequently. If!

Rising from the water's side she went on to the boathouse, and shut herself in the compartment prepared for dressing.

The idle trout were floating but just beneath the surface of the illumined pool. Now and then one would touch the surface with the tip of his lips, causing the tiniest ripple, which immediately returned to the level. He seemed as if he had a partial mind to the midges which moved to and fro ; nothing could be easier for him than to take them. In fact, he had not the least appetite ;

he was merely idling. Had a skilled angler cast the line so gently as not to cause the least splash, had the most tempting fly been dropped on his very mouth, the trout would have regarded it without interest.

Some greenfinches came down to drink at the shallow edge, where there was a strip of sward. After they had sipped they departed up the valley over the wood, laughing in their gossip as they went. A dove flew up into a beech on the same side of the pool, but did not 'coo;' he remained perched and observant. Several times a thrush brought food for her young who were hidden in the ferns and tall grasses by the sward, and each time returned without descending to them, as if there was a stoat lying in wait.

Among the grey-green bulrushes, farther up the pool where it contracted, the moorhen was now feeding again complacently, and two black little ones swam beside her. Under the shadow of willows by the shore, there the golden lamps of the yellow iris shone. Sun-

light lit up the broad clear surface—so clear that the rays penetrated nearly to the bottom even in the deeper parts. Continually flowing, the roar of the cataract over the hatches rose like the excited sound of a multitude crying for the show to begin. A pleasant, soothing rush of splashing water; the very sound diminished the summer heat.





CHAPTER XI.



ELISE opened the door of the bathing-room, and stepped out upon the platform before it. She stood in the shadow of the beeches behind ; all the rest of the pool was in bright light. Her bathing-tunic was blue, bordered with white, and fringed with gold—such a tunic as might have been worn by a Grecian maiden.

It was loose about her shoulders, they were nearly bare ; her arms quite so. In the shade the whiteness and purity of her skin was wonderfully beautiful. It gleamed in the cool shade, more so than the yellow iris flowers, though they had the advantage of bright colour.

The beauty of a perfect skin is so great, to gaze at it is happiness. The world holds no enjoyment like the view of beauty.

Her white feet were at the very edge of the dull boards, so that her reflection was complete in the water had anyone been looking from the opposite shore. She put up her hands to settle the strings of pearls in her hair, to make certain that they would not come loose. It was Felise's fancy to wear her pearls—her only jewellery and dowry—when she bathed out of doors in the sunshine. She decked herself for the bath—the bath not only in water, but in the air and light—as if she had been going to a temple in the ancient times.

With her hands employed at the back of her head and arms raised, the contour of her form was accentuated. The deep broad chest, the bust, the hips, filled out. The action of lifting the arms in this manner opens the ribs, decreases the waist, slightly curves the back, and extends and develops

every line. A sculptor should have chosen her in such an attitude.

In a moment, lifting her hands and joining them high above her head, she dived—the pearls glistened as she passed out of the shadow into the sunlight, and the water hid her completely.

The dove flew, startled from his branch in the beech ; a swallow that had been coming to drink, as he flew, mounted again into the air.

She rose at some distance from the diving-platform, and immediately struck out slowly, swimming on her chest. Her chin was well out of water, and sometimes her neck ; her chest held so large a volume of air that she was as buoyant as a water-bird. It needed no effort to keep afloat ; all her strength was at liberty to be used in propulsion. Swimming towards the hatch, presently she turned and came back to the platform, then out again into the centre of the pool, where she floated, dived under, and floated again.

Gathering energy from practice and the touch of the water, she now swam on her side, following the margin of the pool all round, so as to have a larger course. Twice she went round without a pause—swimming her swiftest, equal, in a direct line, to several hundred yards. Still joying in the sunlight and the water, she continued again for the third circle. Her passage was even swifter, her vigour grew with the labour.

The water drew back the tunic from her right shoulder, which shone almost at the surface; her white right arm swept backwards, grasping the wave; her left arm was concealed, being under her, and deeper. It is the fastest, the easiest, and the most graceful mode of swimming. In the moment when her rounded right arm was sweeping backwards, clearly visible in the limpid water—just as the stroke was nearly completed—the sculptor might again have obtained an inspiration. For at that moment there was repose in action, the exertion of the stroke

finishing, the form gliding easily, the left cheek resting as if reposing on the surface.

At the completion of the third round, Felise swam to the shallow grassy shore, where Shaw was now waiting for her.

‘Oh, how you do panck!’ (pant), said Shaw, laughing, as Felise walked up out of the water on to the turf, and sat down at the edge of the shadow of the beech. Her breast was heaving with the labour, her deep grey eyes shone as if enlarged; there was a slight increase of colour in her face. She was not in the least exhausted; she was exhilarated to the utmost. Shaw chatted beside her; Felise neither heard nor heeded, she was full of the influence of the air and light and limpid fountain.

There was something almost sacred to her in the limpid water, in the sweet air, and the light of day. The flower in the grass was not only colour, it was alive. The water was not merely a smooth surface, the air not merely an invisible current, the light not

merely illumination. As if they had been living powers, so they influenced her. A feeling entered her from them : the light, the air, the water, the soft sward on which her hand rested, life came to her from them.

With them she felt her own life, she knew her own fulness of existence. Like this the maidens of ancient Greece sang to the stream when they filled their urns. Even Socrates the wisest sat pondering in reverence by the stream. Felise was full of the delicious influence of the great powers of nature. This susceptibility rendered her love so rich and deep.

She sat leaning on her left hand, her knees lying sideways, and her right hand on her ankle ; the upper part of her form in shadow, her limbs in the brilliant light. The beams fell on her white rounded knees ; the right knee being uppermost was entirely in light, but it cast a partial shadow on the left one.

Twins in exquisite whiteness and shape they reposed together, the under one a little

in advance. The knee-cap (which in woman is small), slipping naturally aside, left a space on the summit of each knee smooth and almost level, perhaps in the least degree concave. Upon these lovely surfaces the light rested lovingly; in the wide earth there was no spot the sun loved so well.

The rounded supple knee is where the form hinges; there all is poised. They are the centres from which beauty rises. With the knee all grace begins; they bend, and at the same moment the neck bows, and the forehead droops. Resting on them firmly the shape rises, the neck is straightened, and the brow thrown back. All is poised on the knee.

Because of its varying mood of grace the knee can with difficulty be seized in sculpture or painting. The least flexure alters the contour. Now from head to foot it is the flesh that is beautiful, that which covers and conceals the bones and muscles under its texture. Such is the rule,

to express beauty you must delineate the adipose tissue; the knee is the exception.

Here the bone—the knee-cap—is but thinly covered, and there is cartilage and sinew; not much more than the skin hides them. Here is the only place where the bone and sinew can approach the surface—can be recognised—and yet not interfere with the sense of loveliness. Why so?

Because at this centre motion commences; the idea of motion is inseparable from it, motion in graceful lines. In walking it is the knee that gives the step, in the dance, stooping to gather flowers, bending to prayer; from the knee passion springs to the arms of her lover. We have seen these movements and admired them, and the eye transfers their grace to the knee.

But it is also of itself shaped. There alone the bone and sinew assume an exquisite form. I cannot tell you why the human heart yearns towards that which is rounded, smooth,

shapely ; it is an instinct in the depth of our nature.

The knee is so very human, so nearly sorrowful in its humanity ; sorrow seeks its knees, sadness bends on them, love desiring in secret does so on its knees. They have been bent in many moods in so many lands so many many centuries past. Human life is centred in the knee. In the knee we recognise all that the heart has experienced.

Beautiful knees, the poise and centre of the form ! Were I rich, how gladly I would give a thousand pounds for a true picture of the knee ! and if the coloured shadow on canvas were worth so much, how many times multiplied the value of the original reality !

However indifferent the person may be—the individual—to see the knee is to love it for itself.

The shadow of the upper one partially encroached on the lower ; round about the under knee, too, the short grass rose. Immediately behind, the least way higher than

the upper knee, the bullion fringe of the tunic drooped across the white skin. Her left hand rested among the daisies; her feet reached nearly to some golden lotus flowers.

The left, or under foot, was much hidden by the grass; the grass touched warm, having been hours in the sunshine. The upper foot was visible, and two straight strokes—two parallel dimples crossed the large toe (the thumb of the foot) at the second joint.

She held her ankle lightly with her right hand, so that her right arm descended beside her body. Bare from the shoulder in its luxurious fulness, it reposed against her. The slight pressure of its own weight enlarged it midway between the shoulder and the elbow. But the left arm being straightened appeared, on the contrary, largest at the shoulder.

That shoulder—the left—raised a little higher than the other, on account of her position, was partly bare, the tunic having slipped somewhat. Unconsciously she pressed

her cheek against it, feeling and caressing it. Her shoulder lifted itself a little to meet the embrace of her cheek, and the tunic slipped still more, giving it and that side of her bust freedom to the air. She liked to feel herself; the soft skin of the shoulder met the softer cheek; her lips touched the place where arm and shoulder are about to mingle.

Shaw thought Felise had finished bathing, and kneeling behind her, undid her hair, which fell and reached the grass. It was somewhat wavy, very thick and long, and delicate in texture. As it descended it concealed the beautiful shoulders like a mantle. She took her strings of pearls from Shaw, and held them in her right hand; she valued them greatly, and scarcely cared to let even Shaw carry them.

A red butterfly came by and hovered about her knee, inclined to alight, but perceiving that it glistened with the water, flew onwards over the pool.

Felise moved her feet among the grass,

she liked to feel it ; she extended her foot to the golden lotus flowers. But the moment of luxurious enjoyment of the sunlight and the air, the liberty of the tunic, was over ; her active nature reasserted itself ; she rose and walked towards the bathing apartment to dress.

‘ There’s a rabbit in the ferns,’ said Shaw, following her ; ‘ I heard him rustle twice. Wonder why you won’t talk to-day, now. If I was to run round the water like you swim round, I should die of pançking [panting], I should.’

She looked as if such exertion would overcome her : short, plump, and merry.

Felise took no heed of Shaw’s chatter ; she was thinking how to accomplish her resolution.





CHAPTER XII.



FEW days after Barnard met Felise on Ashpen, he was walking by the side of the little estuary where the trout-stream entered the sea. It was a lonely spot, but he looked round to see that no one was near. Then he took from his pocket Felise's handkerchief, and the piece of mane which she had plaited; and rolling them carefully up round a heavy pebble, he stepped to the edge of the low cliff and hurled the pebble as far as he could into the sea.

Next, he walked home rapidly, mounted Ruy, and rode up to the solitary beech-tree on the downs, under which Felise had stood. The letter 'M' showed much more plainly

now the sap had dried—it appeared very distinct. Barnard got off his horse, and taking out his knife cut a circle round the entire letter, which he then tore off, leaving nothing but a circular mark on the tree. The strip of bark he broke in pieces, and flung in various directions; then re-mounted, and rode home. Thus he got rid of every trace of that morning's interview.

He would not be fooled any more; or, rather, he would not fool himself a second time. Why should he persuade himself into a state of feeling that was not natural to him? Felise was nothing to him.

To understand his proceedings it is necessary to very briefly recount a part of his history. Like every young man when he surmounted his teens, he thought it was proper for him to fall in love. There was a young lady in Maasbury town, the daughter and heiress of Mr. Wood, a wealthy wine merchant, from whom the Barnards had had their wine for some years. Rosa was a few

months younger than himself, bright and talkative ; in appearance of the middle height. She had a low forehead with much dark hair about it—the forehead was not really low, but the hair came down it.

Her eyes were brown, the eyebrows well arched, the lips a little thin, but red and laughing. Perhaps her smile was the most effective of her attractions, but she had a very fair figure, and much of the glow of youth in her cheek. Rose was indeed decidedly good-looking, not so much from any especial quality as the aggregate of her appearance. She was clever, and fond of reading, and she was the heiress to the merchant's money. No one could have found fault with Barnard's choice ; the lady was eligible in every way.

Accordingly he began to pay his addresses to her in a manner which soon distanced every competitor. In the first place he was handsome, and in rather an unusual style ; full of life and animated. He was the pre-

sent representative of a good family. He rode a splendid horse. It was very nice to go over to the Manor House Farm on a picnic. Then there was no other gentleman in the neighbourhood at all his equal; they were boors in comparison, and a woman naturally likes to carry off the leading individual.

Barnard had received an exceptionally good education, and, what is much more important, he had moved in good society as a lad when manners are formed. Some rich and high-placed friends had taken him with them into houses in London not easy to enter. They had designed him to occupy a forward place, and even talked of Parliament. But a quarrel accidentally arose between them and Barnard's parents, and the boy had to suffer because his elders disagreed. Barnard returned to the country and the somewhat solitary life of a farmhouse.

By nature his ideas were elevated and

aspiring ; he read much, and of the most varied authors, and some of the spirit of the great dramatists and poets entered into his mind. Youth is always romantic ; Martial's romance was heightened by a quick imagination which coloured everything. As he moved about the hills, and by the sea, his ideas went with him, and the scene was filled with figures and thoughts.

When he fell in love with Rosa—or believed that he had done so—he transferred these romantic imaginings to her. He surrounded her with a cloud (as the immortal goddesses were enveloped), and hid the real woman from himself by the fervour of his fancy. Though he did not write verses, he looked upon her, and acted towards her, as a poet might. There was a delicate refinement in all the attentions he paid her which could only proceed from a sensitive and highly-wrought nature.

Rosa really loved him, but she was not in the least what he thought ; he had conferred

upon her attributes which she was incapable even of understanding. She would have made a good wife under ordinary circumstances, but she was commonplace. She loved without passion ; she had neither the fire of love nor of ambition. There really was no fault to be found with her ; but she was not what Martial fancied she was.

This lad's courtship continued for some two years, during which he exhausted every extravagance a poetical nature is capable of. Every exalted sentiment in his favourite poets and dramatists he associated with Rosa.

Towards the end of the two years, however, a change began to take place. We all know how slowly the tide rises or ebbs, and so in life. Alterations commence and proceed a considerable length before they are recognised. A certain feeling of weariness overcame him. He went to see her as frequently as ever, yet he found himself less eager to start, and felt a sense of freedom

when the evening was over and he rode home.

He received an invitation to visit a friend for a fortnight, and upon his return it seemed to him that Rosa had completely changed. Where was the grace, the beauty, the glow that had fascinated him two years ago? Where was that indefinable attraction he had experienced so powerfully? He could look at her now without emotion.

The truth was the dream was fading, and he was beginning to see the woman as she was, and not as he had painted her to himself. He had poured out all his heart to her—now he had nothing further to give, he saw her as she really existed.

He had met her too soon. If he had not known her till he was forty, possibly he might have married her as a matter of judgment.

Once a lover sees his mistress as commonplace, the spell is over. Rosa wearied him, and he soon found his attendance upon

her a burden. Yet he was bound by his own previous conduct to continue it.

An incident now occurred which should have been welcome to him, as giving him his freedom, but which he considered to bind him still more strongly. His cousins, who resided at the Manor House free of expense, required a sum of money to convert a lease into a freehold. Their fortune consisted of the lease of several well-situated houses in a fashionable watering-place, which they sublet to great advantage. The houses had not many years now to run, and they were bemoaning themselves at the prospect of losing their income, when an unexpected opportunity occurred to purchase the freehold at a moderate price.

They begged Barnard to let them have the money in payment of an old debt due from his father to their father. One brother had borrowed from the other, and had never been able to repay the principal without endangering his position. True, he had re-

paid sums of £50 and £100 on several occasions ; true, the children (these ladies), since their father's death, had resided at the Manor House.

Their education had been paid for, and since they came to womanhood an annual sum equal to the interest on the loan had been handed over to them. The actual loan in these varied ways had been returned over and over again, yet it had never been formally repaid.

Martial was too young and too generous to plead these things, and the extremely exhausted state of his own finances. He promised to let them have the money, but he had to borrow it, and the knowledge of this came to Mr. Wood's ears.

Mr. Wood had never supposed Barnard to be wealthy ; still, when a man lives in a fine house—almost a mansion—keeps a good table, and rides a good horse, even a keen merchant can sometimes scarcely believe he is deep in the abyss of poverty. But when

he found that Barnard had been borrowing money he made inquiries, and discovered that the accepted suitor of his daughter and heiress was really penniless.

Mr. Godwin, the agent or steward of the estate of which the Manor House Farm was a part, had even been heard to say that Barnard only remained a tenant upon sufferance, for his rent was in arrear.

As a matter of course, Mr. Wood upon this informed his daughter and Barnard one evening that their engagement must be broken off for the present. If Barnard succeeded some day in regaining a position, he would be welcome indeed. If not, as a gentleman, he must see that Rosa could not be his. Not to prejudice Rosa's chances, Barnard must in future be more sparing in his visits.

From different causes the lovers received this intelligence calmly enough. Rosa shed a few tears, and then reflected that after all Martial could still call once a week. In time

the seasons would alter ; there would be good crops, and Martial would have money. Besides, they were both very young, and by-and-by, when Mr. Wood saw how constant she was to Martial, he would relent ; she was sure he would. Her estimate of the circumstances was probably accurate. She did not weep any more, but went about her usual employment cheerfully.

Martial worked himself into a fever of excitement (not that he let her see his irritation), but his annoyance was with himself, because he did not feel any indignation. He knew, if he would admit the truth to himself, that it was a welcome release from an irksome position. But he ought to have been burning with indignation—he ought to have called upon all the gods, and at least persuaded Rosa to elope with him.

Instead of which, a sense of complacency stole over him. He could walk and ride and read without the inward necessity of associating every idea with Rosa.

But just in proportion as he felt this sense of complacency, so he resolved to force himself to remain faithful to his first choice, to confirm all his vows, and ultimately to carry them into effect. He wrote in this vein to Rosa, promised eternal constancy, and when he saw her, renewed his promises; yet even in the act of speaking he could not help noticing that her eyes showed no trace of midnight tears, nor did her manner seem the least degree less cheerful.

Still, no matter what he thought, he must conscientiously carry out his plighted word; it was his duty; the duty of every lover. He ought to do it; the fitness of things demanded it. To be constant under all circumstances was the *rôle* of his position. Romance ruled him as powerfully as ever, although his illusions had ceased. Each week his one call became more and more a labour; each week he resolved more firmly to fulfil the original understanding to the letter.



CHAPTER XIII.



ABOUT three months after this explanation and the repudiation of the engagement, it happened one day that Martial was following the harriers on the hills, when, to his surprise, he observed a lady running on foot with such speed that she kept pace with the horsemen. He could not help noticing her grace, and admiring the swiftness with which she ran. He saw her quite close several times during the day.

As he rode homewards, he stopped to speak with a friend, who asked him to take some refreshment (a collation had been on the table all day for passing sportsmen), and

it so happened that a lady whom Felise had met in the field had brought her there for the same purpose. By accident Martial sat opposite Felise, and her face from that hour was painted irremovably in the chamber of his mind.

He did not see her again in the field, for Felise fancied that she had attracted undue attention. Bold as she was in her own love's cause, she was sensitive to observation at other times, and she did not run again after the harriers.

But in the winter it happened that a little matter of business arose between Barnard and Mr. Goring about a watercourse in which both were interested, and in order to settle it amicably a personal interview was desirable. Barnard rode over, and for the second time met Felise. On this occasion the interview was even shorter and more formal, but it was long enough to confirm Martial's first impression.

Week after week, as he sat by Rosa, he

saw the face of Felise. He did not feel the least emotion of love for Felise, but he saw her face before him. Day by day his weariness increased, till his position towards Rosa became intolerable. He could not endure her ; it was a misery to him to spend even the short time now permitted in her presence. It was not hatred, it was worse—it was utter *ennui* and dislike. The more this grew upon him, so much the more, according to his code, he was bound to conscientiously attend her.

No fresh-sprung passion for Felise mingled with this revulsion. All his ideas of Felise were simply admiration, the admiration given to a picture. The singular loveliness of her features and the grace of her form took a deep hold of his artistic nature, but his heart did not throb. Her influence was negative. She had not inspired him with passion, but she had thrown up the object of his previous admiration into unpleasant relief.

He now saw only too plainly that Rosa

was only pretty ; pretty, because she was young. He did not like a low forehead overhung by a quantity of dark hair. Her figure was not full ; her shape looked flat to him now ; her walk was clumsy ; and he observed that she brought down the toe of her boot after the heel, making a second stump distinctly. These two clumping noises irritated him. Somehow her dresses never suited her, though they were expensive ; her conversation was insufferably insipid. In fact, he was for ever unconsciously comparing her with Felise, and continually finding out additional defects.

All he wanted was to be free ; he did not want Felise, but he wished to be free of Rosa.

He looked back upon his extravagances with such disgust as to feel ready to kill himself for having committed them. The quotations, for instance, from his favourite poems, which he had applied to Rosa—he put the very books away out of sight, that

they might not remind him. Unless it was necessary, he carefully avoided entering the town, simply because she lived there; yet he called every week, and paid her the same attentions.

The disgust with which he looked back upon his own former sentiments was much stronger than the dislike he felt towards *Rosa* herself. Though he now saw her defects so distinctly, he could not help owning that she had committed no fault. His anger was with himself.

Despite his efforts to forget, and despite the putting away of his books, every now and then he caught himself applying the old quotations to *Felise*, to whom they fitted exactly.

This rendered him still more irritable; nothing on earth should ever induce him to commit such fooleries again. He did not love *Felise*, and he did not want to love her. Had he not read about love he should never have loved at all, nor understood what it

meant. Such reading ought to be destroyed, placing, as it did, stilted and unreal ideas into young people's heads.

A man did not need anything of the kind ; a man ought to be quite independent of such fancies ; a man should be quite free and independent, and walk about, and whistle, and think of nothing. Fellows who were always paying court to women became effeminate and contemptible. A woman's servitor, such as he had been—and still was—was despicable. He despised himself thoroughly. He easily found examples in history to support his new views, such as that of Alexander the Great, who conquered the world, and was reported indifferent to women. But Mark Antony quitted the stage at the end of a petticoat. Ignominious !

At the same time, he was always thinking about the beautiful face of the woman he had seen but twice. Several times he rode towards Mr. Goring's house, thinking that he might see her in the garden as he passed,

but on approaching turned back, accusing himself of disloyalty to Rosa. After these rides he had fits of contempt, despising himself for even thinking of a woman.

Still, he reasoned that it was quite possible to admire beauty, and yet to be perfectly heart-whole, and to avoid the absurdities of which he had been guilty. Artists employed the most handsome models they could find, but did not fall in love with them. His admiration of Felise was purely artistic. Any other woman—if as beautiful—would have suited him as well to look at.

Currents of thought or emotion go on for a long time in the mind before a step is taken. The step came at last; Barnard began to omit his weekly call upon Rosa. First, he missed a week, then a fortnight, then three weeks. The commonplace woman for a time was perfectly satisfied with his explanations—the pressure of work in the spring season, and so on. It was quite right he should attend to the farm, since, if not, he

could not marry her. The intervals between his visits were tedious, still they passed.

But when Barnard did not call for an entire month, an uneasy feeling came over her. She began to think about him in a different strain, and soon recollected numberless trifling circumstances which increased her anxiety. Rosa had never encouraged his extravagances, but she missed them. Certainly Barnard was not so attentive as he had been.

At last she determined to go over and see him, and did so. He accompanied her home, and, so far as outward manner was concerned, she found him unchanged. Her subtler instincts being aroused, she was all the same confirmed in her dread that Barnard was beginning not to care for her. As he did not call again, nor write, she was sure that he had ceased to love her.

This commonplace woman, accordingly, after weeping silently out of sight at night for a little while, composed herself, and ad-

dressed a short letter to her former lover. In a few simple sentences she told him that she saw plainly enough he was tired of her ; and that being so, she wished him to consider himself perfectly free. She loved him with her whole heart, and she should always be his. That was all ; there was no passion in the letter, but it was strictly true—she would always be his.

Barnard was deeply hurt—not at her conduct—but at his own. He felt a most pitiful coward to have won a woman's heart and then to have left her like this. He was utterly ashamed of himself—this bitterness was the punishment of his romantic follies. Without the least trace of conceit on his part, he was aware that Rosa really loved him. Wherever he went, or whatever he did, here was a woman always thinking of him, and always adhering to him. Easy to absent himself from her presence, impossible to turn her mental gaze away.

The question may be asked, whether it

was not better for him to have broken with her, than to have remained at her side always wishing to be away.

If anyone is disposed to greatly blame Barnard, two things must be borne in mind: firstly, that there had been no viciousness in his conduct; secondly, his youth. Even now he was but five-and-twenty. Not for an instant had he foreseen the result of his folly, and he now sincerely regretted it. Still, there the result was.

The cruelty to Rosa was very great. No fault, no frivolity, an earnest quiet girl, and suddenly cast down from the position of sedate happiness she reasonably expected. The circumstances were very hard upon her. Suppose, for a moment, we exonerate Martial from all blame, how cruel it was to Rosa that Felise should possess so beautiful a face!

The mere fact of Felise's existence was a cruelty to her. The existence of one woman is incompatible with the happiness of another.

But for Felise's existence Barnard was in no degree responsible; fate had prepared this thing for Rosa to 'thole,' that fine old English word which conveys the sense of enduring at the hands of something irresistible.

Martial saw the cruelty of it all to her, and that pity made him feel tenderer towards her than he had done for a long, long time. Forgetting her commonplaceness and his weariness, he thought of her in a sorrowful, far-off way, which, if Rosa could have known and understood, would have burnt her heart like molten iron. But for all his tenderness he did not go to her.

The bitterness of his extravagances recoiled on his own head. Memory constantly brought back to him some sentiment he had uttered, or fancied he experienced, and which now mocked at him.

There is nothing more terrible while it lasts than for a man to despise himself.

After several days spent in this way, Mar-

tial said to himself that he must do one of two things—either he must go back to Rosa and honourably carry out his promise, no matter at what cost to himself, or he must sell off the stock and emigrate. In the backwoods of America he could hide himself, and perhaps in time forget.

Though he was the tenant of fifteen hundred acres, his finances were in such a critical condition that to sell off and quit would be perhaps the wisest thing to do while yet fifty pounds remained to his credit. He should not see any beautiful faces in the backwoods. His rifle would console him; he took it down and looked at it—it was one of Lancaster's small oval bores.





CHAPTER XIV.

SWAYED first one way and then the other, Barnard rose one morning extremely early, bridled Ruy, and started for the hills, resolved to ride to and fro till he had made up his mind, and then to abide by the decision he came to.

Destiny arranged that that very morning Felise, with her heart full of love for him, went up on the hill to see the sun rise.

Now, when Barnard at last saw her, he naturally rode in that direction. As he approached he recollected the unfortunate circumstances in which he was placed, and half turned away. Something, however, caused him to again turn, and speak to her. Yet he

could not look at her—he felt like a felon. He tried to leave her—his admiration of her beauty compelled him to stay ; yet all the while bitterly conscious of the cruelty to Rosa. With an effort he was conquering the charm, when he met her gaze so full of wistful meaning, charged with passion. Proof as he was to love, his heart beat quick and heavily ; he felt dizzy for the moment.

Recovering himself, he re-mounted his horse, but Felise held the bridle and plaited a lock of Ruy's mane. His face grew hot with shame and a feeling he could not understand. At last a passing horse neighed, Ruy answered and moved, and Martial went without a word, for in fact, such was the conflux of his feelings, he could not speak.

When he had ridden a mile or two, and was descending towards his own house, suddenly he began to ridicule himself. Why should he not speak to her ? Why should he be so sentimental about Rosa ? Why should he not have enjoyed the moment ?

Was he to be bound down more than other men? What other man with such a face before him would have rudely parted without a word?

Round he turned and galloped back after Felise; but, just as he was on the point of overtaking her, his mood again changed, and he rode back.

On finding Felise's handkerchief, once more her beauty became the uppermost thought; he took it with him, and placed the lock of plaited mane in his pocket—not in his pocket-book, which contained entries of the dates—the epochs of his courtship of Rosa, the first kiss, the whispered 'Yes.'

He kept the handkerchief for a few days. That passionate glance dwelt in his memory; every time he thought of it, his heart quickened its pace involuntarily. Barnard had had experience enough to feel that such a look must have a meaning. Yet it could not be, she could not care for him; she had hardly seen him, and with all his faults, Barnard

was not so conceited as to suppose that a woman could fall in love with him at first sight.

Was she then a coquette? Never. Such a face could not be that of a flirt. A woman with a face as lovely as the Madonna might, by stress of circumstance, if her heart was deeply engaged, be drawn to folly—if too great love be folly.

But she could not coquet; she could not feign; whatever she was, she must be true. What, then, could she mean? In studying this problem he found himself forgetting the cruelty to Rosa.

All at once he began to abuse himself. What did it matter to him what she meant? he did not feel the least interest in her, except as something to look at? These sentimental questions belonged to that school of love whose tenets he had forsworn. How ever could he be so foolish as to occupy himself again with such follies?

This tendency must be crushed in the

beginning. Nothing should induce him to commit such follies, and to submit to such a loss of independence a second time.

So he walked down to the sea, hurled the handkerchief and the lock of Ruy's mane into the waves, and afterwards cut out the letter 'M' from the beech, getting rid of every material trace of his interview with Felise.

According to some philosophers, human beings should be strictly kept from the view of anything lovely or desirable, in order that they may enjoy peace of mind and devote their lives to duty. It is certainly a fact that if we once see an interesting picture we like to see it again ; and if we can, we purchase it, and hang it on our walls to look at day by day.

Martial's picture being in his mind, could not be hurled into the sea like the handkerchief wrapped round a pebble. Felise's face, that passionate gaze, haunted him, and argued with him.

The Picture said : ' You can look at me

without the least harm to yourself. Of course you are quite indifferent now, your heart is dead—it is an extinct volcano. Such ashes as remain are in no danger of ignition. At your time of life, after your experiences, you are superior to that sort of thing. You are able to sit by the fire without burning yourself. As a man, it is your right to enjoy some pleasure in the world. But there, no man would hesitate a moment—you are a coward; you are afraid your fresh resolutions would break down; you cannot trust yourself; you are still full of your original extravagant sentiment.'

'It is false,' said Martial. 'I can gaze at you without an emotion.'

'Then do so,' said the Picture, 'and prove yourself what you pretend to be.'

'I defy you,' said Barnard; and accordingly, saddling Ruy, away he rode and passed by Mr. Goring's house, thinking to see Felise in the garden. He repeated this several times, but it so chanced that Felise

was not to be seen. Barnard observed that the garden in front by the road was merely a lawn; possibly she would be more frequently in the flower-garden at the rear, or fishing, or boating, at the trout-pond, of whose existence he was aware, having often followed the course of the stream.

For certain reasons, which will appear presently, Barnard had now to make his journeys on foot. One evening he came over, entered the copse (there was no keeper), and, remaining well hidden in the brushwood, succeeded in getting a distant view of Felise.

She was sitting by the sundial, where she could see the sunset.

Next morning Martial made another attempt, and as he was coming through the copse, very nearly stepped out right in front of her, as she sat on the beam of the hatch by the pool.

He crouched down behind the fringe of ferns. Alarmed at his presence the black-bird ceased to sing; the thrush dared not

enter the fern to feed her young, which had left the nest; and the dove, though he alighted in the tree, did not coo.

The Picture said: 'Here is a splendid opportunity to study me.' Martial studied it. He was so near that every change of expression was visible. He wondered why she had not heard him walking in the wood, but soon saw that she was absorbed in thought.

To know her thought was impossible—to trace its varying course easy. When she stood upright he understood that she was full of resolution. Presently she knelt at the water's edge and brooded over her own reflection. She was then dreaming, but of what?

Next she went round to the boathouse, and I think if Martial had known what was going to happen he would have taken the opportunity, while her back was turned, to steal away through the wood. I think so. Some things, however, are great temptations;

and a very, very great temptation renders a fall worthy, and ennobles the guilty. Still he had no idea but that she was going to row on the little lake.

Suddenly she appeared on the platform in her bathing-tunic, and lifted her arms while she readjusted the pearls.

He said to himself, 'If I could only carve that attitude in marble!' The next instant she dived.

A good swimmer himself, he understood and appreciated the grace and strength with which she swam round the pool, especially when on her side. But when she came out of the water on the sward and sat down within three or four yards of the fringe of fern behind which he was concealed, he became so agitated he dreaded every moment he should forget himself and rustle the bushes beside him by some exclamatory movement, for such slight movements are exclamations.

The dew upon her knees, wet from the

limpid water, glistened in the sunshine. Till this instant he had never met anything that answered to the poetry—the romance—in his heart. Full as he was of the deepest admiration of beauty, till this moment he had never seen it.

It was his own idea of loveliness—the idea within him—which he had applied to Rosa, and endowed her with what she had not, as the sunset colours a dull wall.

Before those beautiful knees he could have bowed his forehead in the grass, in the purest worship of beauty. They were sacred; a sense of reverence possessed him.

A sudden accession of fresh life filled him, as if he had inhaled some potent life-giving perfume—such as the ancient enchanters threw into the flames.

He had been crouching, now he knelt—the slight rustle he caused was that which Shaw heard. His breathing became so low it seemed to have ceased. It was like the first view of the sunlit sea, never again

experienced, never forgotten; a moment of the most exalted life. This wondrous loveliness purified and freed his soul from the grossness of material existence.

Such is woman's true place, to excite thus the deepest, the best, the most exalted of man's emotions. At such a moment she is the visible representation of something higher than logical expression can be found for. To use the words in another sense, she is the tangible expression of a 'truth higher than the truth of scientific reasoning.'

There never lived anyone more capable of appreciating beauty than Martial; he was almost too sensitive, because the very violence of his emotion prevented him from feeling the pleasure he might have done. It was a passion more than a pleasure.

Fortunate boy to have seen such beauty! Fortunate Paris before whom the three goddesses came; such a moment was worth a thousand years.

After she had gone with Shaw, Martial

remained in the fern for some time, basking in the memory of her.

The day that followed he felt exhilarated, as if he were drinking champagne. He had a secret spring of delight within; he had only to recall what he had seen.

He said to himself after a time: 'I have seen her, and I do not love her. My follies are over. Her beauty has only caused an æsthetic admiration. She is only a picture to me, and I have convinced myself that I can look safely upon the picture.'

How joyful this was! (The cruelty to Rosa was quite forgotten.) He should never again do anything foolish, never more commit extravagances or cultivate moral sentiment. He was quite superior to it. Never before had he known such freedom; all the casuistry he had imbibed from books of love had disappeared. The proof of it could be observed in this circumstance. It was laid down in all of them that if you looked upon unparalleled beauty you must love it; but he had looked

—he had been, and still was, in a trance of admiration—yet he did not love. On the contrary, the sight had given him liberty—perfect freedom of the heart.


He was happier than he had been for two years, because his self-contentment had returned. He had recovered his youth.

He could use every opportunity of studying the picture. But he would not speak to her, nor let her come to an interview with him. He would not be wearied with glances—such follies were at an end. She should be kept at a distance whence, unruffled by frivolity, he could admire her calmly as a work of art.





CHAPTER XV.

‘OU will not have a rise,’ said Shaw. ‘’Tis too bright. Let me come and tickle them ; the water’s low.’

She would have pulled off her shoes and stockings and tickled the trout under the stones in high delight if Felise had permitted. They were standing in the porch, Felise with her fly-rod ; Shaw just touching her here and there to complete her toilet, as an artist adds little touches daintily after the picture is finished. Felise had lately been singularly particular about her dress when she went trout-fishing. There was something of a set, preoccupied expression on her face.

On the contrary, Shaw's round rosy countenance was full of change, lively, with some sly humour. Her blue eyes sparkled; her brown hair was disordered with work and hurry; her neck, without a collar, was soft, white, round—these peasant girls often have good necks; her figure plump, so that hooks and eyes were constantly bursting. She loved her mistress dearly, and yet almost feared her. Shaw's was one of those faces that prepossess at once, so sweet, good-natured, and happy.

‘Where are the flies?’ said Felise; ‘you have forgotten the flies.’

Shaw rushed upstairs and rummaged about. On her return, panting, she declared she could not find them.

‘Go and look again!’

Shaw went, and again returned empty-handed, out of breath, and puffing.

‘You are too plump,’ said Felise. ‘I will go and see.’

Shaw blushed at the allusion to her plump-

ness till her white neck was rosy, but insisted on searching a third time. Before she got upstairs Felise found the fly-book in her pocket, so forgetful had she been.

‘Now, isn’t that just like it?’ said Shaw. ‘They would say you was in love,’ blushing again herself.

Felise went across the lawn (Goring and his man Abner Brown, as usual, were at work in the garden), and across the road into the meadows opposite. She did not try a cast here, for the stream was shallow and so near the hamlet the boys would be certain to have disturbed everything. Farther down she crossed by a footbridge, and left the bank of the brook to make a short route across by Glads Mill. In the rickyard by the mill she paused a moment to look down into the mill-pool.

To construct the pool it had been necessary to excavate deeply in the chalk; the water was far down, and the precipitous sides arose like walls from the surface. At one

end the water entered in a cascade, having been led here by a winding water-carrier. If anyone fell into the pool they could not escape, however well they might swim; to climb up the chalk was impossible, but to prevent such an accident the edge of the pool was fenced.

Scarcely anyone ever passed without at least casting a glance down into the deep dark water, which, it was said, the sunshine never reached. Black and still, unruffled while the wind blew above, it was always the same, and always waiting—waiting like Fate. The chaunt of the old millwheel, its quivering boom as it rolled round heavily, was re-echoed in the hollow, and the rush of the cascade formed a hissing undertone.

Standing in the doorway, leaning on the hatch, the miller touched his forehead as she went on into the meads again. Some were already mown, and the grass turning to hay; in some the grass rose almost to her knee; then there were pastures full of buttercups.

The hot summer sun shone on the brook, and, as Shaw had foreseen, she did not get a rise.

Felise cast where the stream rushed round a boulder; she tried at a fall—at the bend where a streamlet joined the brook, where a shallow broke up the water; but she never threw twice. The fly touched the surface and was snatched away, and she walked on to the next likely place. With a curl of her wrist the line rushed out and dropped, and was immediately withdrawn; so quickly was it done that it hardly interrupted the rapid pace at which she walked. By degrees she began to miss all the places not very attractive, and tried only those which she knew were the best, and which she could not pass while making any pretence at fishing.

Throwing at one of these, her fly caught in a bush on the opposite side. A boy who had been haymaking, but had left his rake to watch the fishing, eagerly rushed forward, and had already one foot in the water to

wade across and release it, when she jerked the rod sharply, snapped the gut, and went on. The boy remained sitting on the bank, with one foot in the stream, wondering at her.

Felise did not attach another fly, but cast the line just as it was without a bait. She could walk faster, having to use less care not to entangle the hooks.

From the pools, where the bright sun illumined the bottom, the trout rushed to shelter under dark roots of trees, as her form suddenly appeared on the bank. At the shallows and eddies the trout sought the deeper water or distant stones. Fly-fishers step gently, somewhat back from the bank, careful not to alarm the fish by sudden appearance or any jerking movement. Felise strode on swiftly, dipping her flyless line from time to time. She did not follow the curves of the brook, walking across the bends and so joining it again.

The farther she advanced the less attention

she paid to the brook, till she ceased even pretending to cast. Her pace now became slow, and she lingered, especially by pathways; sometimes she walked up and down instead of straight on; sometimes she leaned against a tree, or sat on a rail, all the time glancing round—upon the watch.

These were Martial's fields. The grass was his by the brook, the green wheat on the hills close by, the copse on the slope.

Presently she wandered from the brook towards the copse, along an old and partly-disused rugged track between green nut-tree bushes that shut out all but the sun above. June roses flowered on the briars arching over the narrow lane, and honeysuckle, creamy-white, touched her shoulders as she passed. Felise, who had been so fond of wildflowers, did not notice the first wild roses, or the honeysuckle. Her heart was dry and heated as the sun heated the ground.

A little way apart from the disused lane

stood an ancient barn by the wood. The great doors were gone, the planks as they decayed taken for firewood; the vast hollow within was empty but for a broken plough. Swallows flew in and out carelessly to their nests on the crossbeams. Two high Spanish chestnut-trees stood by the barn, and she sat down under one of them.

In the olden times of farming, when wheat was really golden, there had been a prosperous homestead much farther down in the valley, and the wheat was stored in this great barn. The homestead was now occupied as a cottage by a labourer, the barn was empty, and the farm thrown together with others and joined to Barnard's large holding. Like many other deserted buildings, the barn was reputed to be haunted—a sort of partial reputation, for if asked no one could say what shape its spectre took, or what crime it was supposed to be expiating. Standing solitary, its desolation alone seemed to have suggested the idea. The places where man's footsteps

and life have once been retain for years a memory of his presence in the guise of shadowy apparitions.

The swallows had the barn by day, the bats by night ; the owls had deserted it—they like mice, and there were no mice where there was no grain. The spot was absolutely solitary ; hedges and trees hid the brook and meads ; the wood on the hill closed the view in front. A rabbit who had been feeding, and at the sound of Felise's footsteps hid behind some nettles, finding her to stay quiet, came out again to nibble.

There were songs in the wood, though it was now the heat of the day, and the call of the cuckoo ; Felise did not hear. When the heart is full it absorbs the senses to itself—hearing, sight, all are possessed by its passion.

This was the fourth time she had been here. The rod was a mere pretence ; her object was to cross his path and meet him, as if by accident. But she had not been success-

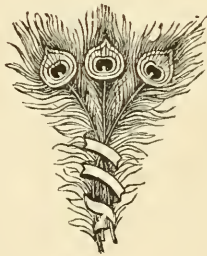
ful, though she knew he must be frequently in the fields. She had stayed near where his haymakers were at work, near where others were weeding the arable lands ; by the paths, and had not seen him. When weary of waiting about, it had become her custom to resort to the solitude of the deserted barn, and there rest unseen.

Since her resolution was formed that morning at the trout-pool before her swim, she had accomplished nothing. Separated, without word or glance, how was it possible to advance her wishes ? Felise's strong and eager nature was already weary of this slow process of waiting till chance should throw him in her way. Sooner or later, if she persevered in haunting the locality, she must meet him ; but how long would it be first ?

Time seems so much longer in summer ; the morning and the evening are far apart, and there is space between them for such a multitude of feelings, or for the same feeling to repeat itself so often. The long days

became very heavy upon her ; she could not endure the waiting.

Felise started again from the ancient barn, and instead of returning to the brook followed the foot of the hill beside the wood. Some wheat-fields succeeded ; after awhile she came round the hill and stepped into a private roadway which led direct to the Manor House. Erect and unfaltering she went straight towards Martial's residence.





CHAPTER XVI.



EN minutes or so after she had quitted the chestnuts by the barn, Martial himself stepped out from the wood, having waited till he considered she was far enough away not to see him. He followed her at a distance, taking care to keep some hedge, or bush, or other object between them.

The study of this work of art had led him, day after day, on foot down towards Mr. Goring's, sometimes as far as the trout-pool, sometimes more openly to the mill. He caught a glimpse of her occasionally in the garden or in the road, as she crossed to visit one or other of her cottagers. Presently he

discovered that she was fishing the brook, and as he knew every mead and every hedge it was not at all difficult for him to follow her, and yet remain himself unobserved.

Three times he had followed in this way, watching her motions with an opera-glass when he could not safely approach very near. The movement of her arms, the shape of her figure as she cast the fly, her pose when she leaned against a tree or sat down to rest herself—not the least inclination of her beautiful form escaped him. He forgot himself, he lost himself utterly in the abstraction of his intense observation.

The third time (the fourth to Felise) becoming bolder, Martial contrived to pursue closer than he had hitherto done, and he was able to do this because she walked rapidly and did not look behind her. He now began to notice several things: first, she fished down stream, which is contrary to the maxims of the fly-fisher; next, she walked quickly and near the edge of the brook, while fisher-

men usually move gently and stand back from the bank; thirdly, she never gave a second cast, and she passed several promising places without a trial—but all these, it was true, might arise from her inexperience of fly-fishing.

But when a boy suddenly rose out of the brook—startling him by so sudden an appearance—and offered him the gut and the three flies which he had waded over and secured, Martial began to think there must be something else beside inexperience in all this.

‘Her be fishing without any fly,’ said the boy.

Martial walked on cogitating, and by-and-by saw that Felise slackened her pace where two or three footpaths crossed the fields he occupied. There she walked up and down, and seemed to be waiting. She had quite forgotten the fishing; she was waiting—for whom?

He saw now that the fishing was merely a pretence—who would attempt fishing in

earnest such brilliant mornings, and the water low, too? She was waiting for some one.

Martial did not care for her in the least; she was nothing to him (nor any other woman), a mere stranger afar off, a picture. His indifference to her was absolute. Yet such is the vanity of a man, that when it occurred to him she was seeking a rendezvous with a lover—some one else—his heart thumped and his brow contracted.

He remembered the passionate glance she had once given him; he said to himself bitterly, 'These women are all alike, false, deceitful, unworthy of serious consideration. How fortunate that I have done with them!'

Then he settled himself to wait angrily for the appearance of the lover, that he might see how base a woman could be. After a time Felise went away to the barn; he pursued and watched her from the wood. He saw the swallows descending over her head to the great doorway of the barn. He thought he saw a certain sadness in her

countenance ; doubtless she was disappointed that the lover did not come.

He followed her again when she left the barn : he could not understand where she was going now, when to his astonishment she walked straight up to his house ; the door opened, and she disappeared within.

Immediately it flashed across his mind that it might be himself she was endeavouring to meet. Read by such a light the glance she had given him became less deceitful ; yet he could not think it. Why should she desire to meet him ? He had not sought her. Though he had all the vanity which is proper to and becomes a man, Martial was without the least trace of that conceit—a completely different thing—which leads fools to imagine every woman in love with them.

That a woman might want for some purpose of her own to deceive him with passionate glances he could grant to himself. That a woman should really desire his society he did not think possible.

But why had she gone to his house? Those paths by which she had lingered were on his tenancy; he used them constantly. What was the secret meaning of these acts?

Indifferent as he was to her, he waited impatiently for her to reappear. He would not go in while she was there; to meet and speak to her would be contrary to his resolution to have nothing more to do with such follies. It was some time, perhaps an hour, before Felise came out, the eldest Miss Barnard with her; Miss Barnard took her across the fields, and was evidently showing her a shorter way home (as if Felise did not know).

Martial went indoors and waited for his cousin. He had no need to ask any questions; Miss Barnard commenced at once to tell him how Miss Goring had been trout-fishing, and felt fatigued from the sun, and had begged a glass of milk. How she had stayed and chatted, and how pleasant she was and singu-

larly handsome, and so interested in Dante and all that related to Italy.

Miss Barnard had lent her her album of scraps about Dante, and had been invited to visit at Beechknoll. How delightful it was to make the acquaintance of some one of an intellectual turn at last ; you know they are all so prosaic, they talk nothing but corn and sheep at Maasbury—and so on, and so on.

Martial pondered, still more puzzled. Felise weary, Felise fatigued ! The woman he had seen keep pace with the harriers, who had gone up on the highest hill to see the sunrise, who swam round and round the trout-pool faster than he could have done himself ! Felise weary—never ! And if so, why to *his* house ? There was a cottage (the former homestead) nearer. No, there was something else at the bottom of this. Felise had evidently flattered his cousin's hobby. Deceit again. A work of art might be beautiful, yet it was nothing but false paint.

He did not believe that she had called merely from fatigue, nor that she felt any interest in Dante. What, then, was her object—could it possibly be himself?

How fortunate he was not at home, so that she had not the slightest opportunity of practising her glances upon him! How fortunate that his days of folly were over! Martial congratulated himself; after all, as everyone must commit some foolishness, it was better to have got it over, as he had done, in early youth. The experience was so valuable, and would protect him.

A little restless after all this thinking, Martial did not remain at home, but ascending the hill, watched the picture walking home as far as he could with his opera-glass.

Felise had found the eldest Miss Barnard, who chanced to be at home, a pleasant lady, dark and comfortable-looking, with a manner which at once put people at their ease. She made her unannounced visitor welcome; in such visits, where people do not know each

other, they run over a string of subjects to find something to answer for conversation. So Miss Barnard brought out her photographs of Dante subjects, and presently her scrap-book, containing the allusions and references to Dante she had collected from current literature.

This middle-aged English lady, who had never been out of England in her life, and probably never would, had conceived an extraordinary admiration of all that was Dantesque.

I think that those who have an imaginative corner in their hearts are better than those who have not. They have a shrine—to a shrine we bring our aspirations; there they accumulate and secretly influence our lives.

Unscrupulous Felise looked at the Dante collections with kindling interest, listening the while for the creak of an opening door, for the heavier footstep which foretells a man, watching even the spaniel in the armchair, who would be sure to start up at the approach

of his master. Unscrupulous Felise—has love ever any scruples?—pressed Miss Barnard to visit them at Beechknoll, and at last, having stayed as long as possible, left, not at all dissatisfied. Although she had not seen Martial she had opened up communication between the two houses. Something had been gained. She walked homewards in a happier, or at least a less restless, condition of mind.





CHAPTER XVII.



AFTER passing the old mill and the deep, dark pool, she turned aside from her homeward path, and crossed to a cottage by the roadside. She entered the garden by a wicket in the hedge ; oak-trees spread their broad boughs above the thatched roof, and the border of the garden was gaudy with tulips, wallflowers, and parti-coloured daisies. Every inch of the enclosed ground was green with some vegetable or other ; a minute and microscopic care had evidently been spent on every spadeful of earth the garden contained. One would hardly believe that so small a plot could produce so great a variety.

The flagstones before the door were white and clean ; there was no porch, and the door was open. Felise looked in, but there was no one within ; she sat down, however, on a stool outside the door, and soon noticed something moving behind the screen of green which concealed the small extent of the garden.

An aged man, much bowed, supporting himself with a hoe and a walking-stick, slowly came towards her ; he had been weeding.

‘ She bean’t at home, she bean’t,’ he said, alluding to his wife. ‘ I was a-trying to do a little bit of weeding. And how do Abner do, miss ? Do he do now ? A’ was a sprack boy. I hope he suits Mr. Goring.’

This hope he had expressed every time Felise had called these four years, during which his son, who was still a boy in his eyes, had assisted Mr. Goring in the garden. Felise petted the old people ; Godwin, the estate-agent or land-steward, had been heard to say that she spoiled the whole village.

‘Sit down,’ said Felise, offering him the stool; but the old man, with trembling eagerness, refused it, and brought himself out another, upon which he crouched, his elbows on his knees.

‘You didn’t have much luck a-fishing, now, did you?’ he said. ‘Bless you, miss, there bean’t half the fish there was in the brook when I was a boy, and they bean’t so eager for the fly. As I was a-saying, I hopes Abner be useful now; I don’t know what we should do if it weren’t for he, for I can’t do no work, nor my old missus neither. She be gone to get some wood to bile the kettle; hope as Mr. Godwin won’t catch her. He be a hard man, Miss Goring; ’tis amazing how he can be so hard.’

‘You are not allowed to gather the dead wood now, then?’

‘Not since Lady Day, miss. No; Mr. Godwin he came round and give them all notice that he should summon any of them as took the wood. There was something I

wanted to tell you, miss—didn't Abner tell 'ee? Maybe you haven't seen him to-day. But as I was saying, I hoped to get about and do a bit of hoeing this spring—but bless you, I can't do it. I got out in the road, and I was obliged to sit down on the flint-heap. 'Tis hard to be old, miss, and be twisted with the rheumatism. Perhaps my missus will recollect what it was when she comes in, if you will wait a moment, miss.'

'The garden looks very nice,' said Felise. 'What a lot of trouble you take with it!'

'Ah, that I do,' said the old man brightly. 'I bides in un a'most all the day, and I thinks about un most of the night—I kind o' lives by he. They will never take me away from my garden, will they, miss? They couldn't do that now, surely.'

'I should think not, indeed.'

'How be the barley looking, miss? Did you notice as you was agoing along. There be generally some barley at the foot of the hill on Mr. Barnard's land. A' be a likely

young man, but they do say the farm bean't looked after as it should be. Young blood is young blood, and what with riding about and sporting—let me see, what was I going to say? You knows the barley, miss; it have got black knots on the stalk. Bless you, I could use to do everything with the barley—I was a barleycorn man in my time. I could plough, that was the first thing; and sow the seed, miss; and hoe it, don't you see, when it came up—it be a pretty plant now the barley, bean't it? And I could reap it, and thrash it when we used to have the flails, and malt it—that's what a-many couldn't do. Many's a winter I've spent a-malting—there's always a good fire. And I could brew the beer, and drink it too, afterwards—ha! ha!

The barleycorn man chuckled at the thought of his exploits with the beer.

'Have you got any ale for your dinner?' said Felise.

'Bless 'ee now, where should we get any

ale from? Abner don't bring any home, except what he carries in hisself.'

Felise opened her purse; there was a solitary half-crown in it. The coin had been there this month past, while she deliberated what she should do with it. Coins were very scarce at Beechknoll.

She gave the old man the silver, and told him to buy a pound or so of beefsteak and a little ale.

The poor old fellow was dried up for lack of blood in his veins; his stiffened joints cracked as he moved; his cheeks were a dull yellow like creased parchment; he was alive, but there was scarcely a drop of blood in him. Good juicy meat and the ale to which he had been accustomed in his youth was what he needed. He thanked her, but very quietly, with a subdued voice, very different to the high squeaky treble in which he had been talking; and, after thanking her, he remained silent. His chatter came from his head, which was growing feeble;

his silence from his heart, which was yet alive.

‘What is it they say about Mr. Barnard’s farm?’ said Felise.

‘He be young blood, you see, miss,’ began the old man, glad to be garrulous again, and to escape from feeling to gossip. ‘They do say he be short of money; some say he have had to borrow.’

‘The Barnards are not very rich, then,’ said Felise partly to herself, happy that at least there was not that obstacle between her and Martial, to whom she could bring no dowry.

‘Bless ’ee, no; they bean’t rich——’ But he was interrupted by a step on the path, and his ‘missus’ came through the wicket in the hedge. ‘What, ain’t you got no wood?’ said the old man.

‘He’ve took it away,’ said the old lady, curtsying to Felise. ‘I be terrable glad to see you, miss; there be something I wants to tell you——’

‘I knowed there was something,’ said the old man.

‘Who took your wood away?’ asked Felise.

‘Why, Mr. Godwin, to be sure. Do you call that a gentleman, now? He took my faggot away from me hisself.’

‘Not the dead sticks you had gathered?’

‘Yes, he did; he took it away and throwed all the sticks in the hedge, and dared me to touch any more, or to step on his land or the Squire’s land after ’em.’

‘It is very arbitrary,’ said Felise.

The angry old lady ran on at great length, bitterly reproaching the steward. Mr. Godwin had forbidden them to touch the fallen branches; last autumn he forbade them to gather the acorns, though brought to him for sale. As they no longer worked upon the estate, being too old, they must not gather wood or acorns, or even mushrooms.

‘He be the meanest man as ever lived,’ said the old woman. ‘A’ be as rich as ever

can be. Now, you knows Martha—little Martha; she went a-blackberrying last year, and Godwin he met her and took her blackberries from her—that he did. I suppose the Squire doan't know nothing about it, but Godwin says 'tis the Squire's rights. But you come in, miss—you look here!' cried the old woman, rushing indoors and returning, before Felise could follow, with a letter in her hand.

The letter contained a formal notice to quit the cottage and garden. It seemed that the steward had several times warned the aged couple that they must leave; but, no notice being taken of his verbal orders, a legal instrument had at length been sent.

'Ah, I knowed there was something,' said the old man. 'But, bless you, they won't turn I out of my garden, now—will they?'

'That they will, you old fool!' said his wife, shaking him; 'you'll have to go. And there bean't no place for us but the workus, as I knows on. There bean't another cottage

in this place; they be all full up to the roof.'

'Lodgings must be got for you somewhere,' said Felise, 'and Abner will help.'

'But there bean't no lodgings,' said the old woman; 'and my old man, he won't live away from his garden.'

'They may as well bury me,' said the old man, dropping on his stool. 'They there peas be fine to-year; there'll be another dish there soon. I thinks the apples be set well to-year.'

'I will speak to papa—to Mr. Goring,' said Felise. 'Perhaps Abner has told him. We will do what we can for you, be certain. I cannot think Mr. Godwin really means——' she hesitated, for she knew the hardness of his character.

'Ah, yes, he do mean it!' said the old lady. 'He be one of they as do mean things, and do 'em too; I hopes as his new horse will pitch him in the road and break his neck!'

‘No—no.’

‘Ah, but I do though! There’s the old man gone pottering down to they peas. It be shameful, bean’t it, how we be served! And after we have a-worked here all our lives—*he* have a-worked here nigh seventy years, and I have a-worked fifty-five afore I was took bad and couldn’t do no more. It be shameful, miss, it be! and thank you very much, but it ain’t no good you trying—old Godwin be a flint!’

Felise went on homewards, eager with the impetuosity of her nature to do something to right this wrong. I have, in part, literally translated the language in which the old couple spoke, that it might be more easily intelligible; they did not say ‘ah,’ but ‘aw;’ ‘un’ for ‘him’ and ‘it’ indiscriminately; they pronounced ‘v’ for ‘f,’ ‘ää’ for ‘a,’ and so on.

Mr. Godwin was a very hard man, yet he had but slightly strained the unwritten laws of country life in ordering this aged and helpless couple to leave their dwelling. Nine

out of ten cottages belong to the landowner, though the immediate supervision—the letting—is entrusted to the tenant on certain conditions. There are, as a rule, fewer cottages than are needed, so that there is a struggle for them, especially on the part of the young who wish to be married. From this scarcity of cottages most young couples reside for years with the parents of the wife or husband, an arrangement never very satisfactory.

The chief condition of cottage-occupation is that the cottager shall work for the farmer upon whose farm the cottage is situate. Or at least, if not for him, for some one on the estate. The moment any difference arises, the labourer has not only to leave his employment but his home. This, if he be a married man, generally means that he must leave the hamlet, because all the other cottages are full. The custom is the last relic of feudal times, for while this condition endures the labourer must still be a serf.

It is a custom fatal to the cottager's social progress, in reality injurious to the interests of landowner and farmer—especially to the landowner — and diametrically opposed to the interest of the country at large, because it forces the agricultural population to be nomadic instead of settled.

Injurious as it is to those who maintain it, this feudal survival will probably be fought for with the utmost bitterness when the question comes before Parliament. Once abolished, and people will wonder why it ever existed.

This aged and helpless couple broke the unwritten law, for having grown old they could no longer work. They occupied a cottage without giving any return in the shape of labour upon the estate. They were in the way—there was the workhouse for them—they could not want a home at their time of life.

Many a warm-hearted old farmer has such a couple in a cottage on his farm, and permits

them to linger there till death. The unwritten law is not always so harshly interpreted. Still, it exists, and Godwin, a man of the hardest character, interpreted it according to his nature.

But the occupants of the cottage had broken the law in another manner ; their son, Abner, worked for Mr. Goring, who was not a tenant of the Squire, and consequently while Abner lived in a landlord's cottage he took the power (horse-power if you like) of his muscles off the estate. Some one else had the benefit of his strength.

There was, too, the possibility of Abner marrying and taking his wife home to his parents, after the country fashion. By-and-by he would become the actual occupant, while his horse-power was expended on another's land. Those who occupied houses on the estate must work for the estate ; if not, they must go.

To go, to an aged and helpless couple of eighty-four and seventy, meant the workhouse.

By the most cruel and iniquitous rule it is possible to imagine, it is not permitted to give assistance from the poor-rates to the oldest, the most helpless, and deserving of the population if they dare to live at home. They must go to the poorhouse, that abomination of desolation. This most brutal regulation would arouse the indignation of every educated person in the country if what it means could be plainly exhibited.

Abner's crime was unpardonable—he was living in a house belonging to the estate, and working for a man independent of the estate. Mr. Goring owned the land he occupied ; he was not only independent, but a resolute upholder of every species of independence. He was paying Abner about two shillings a week more than he would have earned if in the employment of a farmer.


The young man was intelligent, and had a loyal manner—I do not know how else to describe it—he took an interest in what he was doing, and therefore to Mr. Goring he

was worth more than an ordinary labourer. But this was an extremely unpopular arrangement both with farmers and labourers. The labourers hated to see one of their own class paid better than themselves; the farmers objected because it was an example which might lead other men to ask for more.

Felise knew little of these matters—she had of course heard of them, but you could hardly expect her to enter into such affairs. She was, however, well aware of Godwin's hardness, and his character for harsh interference. Godwin and her uncle had had many and many a set-to; in fact, quarrels were continually occurring between them. Godwin had frequently threatened litigation, but had never resorted to it, yet with curious inconsistency called once a month on an average to invite Goring and Felise to his house, which was not more than half a mile distant. They had never accepted the invitation.



CHAPTER XVIII.

ENTERING the garden by a side-path, Felise heard two voices in loud altercation, or rather one voice stridently asserting itself over the other, and she paused where she could see the disputants through the open window.

Goring in the whitest of white shirt-sleeves—just as he had left his spade—was standing by the mantelpiece, resting his firm chin on his hand, and steadfastly regarding the steward. His high forehead, partly bald, and flecked at the temples with grey among the brown of his hair, expressed calm intellect reposing in itself. Not the nervous, eager brain which seeks preferment and must thrust

itself to the front ; the intellect which reposes and reflects.

There was almost too much mind for action behind that noble forehead ; it was the thinker, not the doer. The clear, steel-blue eyes under their thick eyebrows, the set mouth and the firm chin, at the same time indicated an immovable will ; a man who would have his way without the least outward noise or ostentation. His strong frame—a trifle bowed, as those of men usually are who work with their hands for pleasure or profit—and great breadth were fully exposed by his negligent costume ; his brawny throat, indeed, was visible.

‘If only papa would work among men instead of among trees, what a leader he would be!’ thought Felise.

Mr. Godwin, with his hat on (not an intentional rudeness), stood by the table on which he struck his fist, clad in dark brown and wearing gaiters. He was of full average height, stout, and strongly built ; he appeared

capable of exceptional endurance. His fist on the table was brown as a piece of oak that had been exposed all the winter to the action of the weather. His face was neither ruddy, brown, nor black, but a mixture of the three; it was ruddy from a fulness of blood; it was brown from wind and rain; it was black from sun. His face might have been cast in bronze, so remarkable was the appearance of hardihood.

His features were regular, and, except that the cheeks were somewhat too full, might even have been said to be handsome, but they were cast in a set expression; his mouth—the worst feature, being without curve—did not smile; his brow had a line constantly there. This fixidity, and the extremely weather-beaten hue of his complexion, seemed to announce a concentration of character that made most people shrink from him. Mr. Goring was brown from the sun, yet beside Godwin he looked fair.

Godwin's voice was loud; he hurled his

words and shut his lips tight immediately ; but his language was correct, for he was well educated. Possibly his exceptionally hardy nature had something to do with his pitiless character. A man with thousands in his pocket, but who was content with a coarse fare of bread and bacon, or even bread and cheese, was not likely to feel much sentimental sympathy for weaker beings.

His family had all been alike ; ‘hard as crab-apples’ was the saying of the countryside.

Every tenant upon the estate spoke in the highest terms of Mr. Godwin to his neighbour. At the public dinners Mr. Godwin was mentioned with the deepest respect. ‘A shrewd, first-rate man, Godwin ; knows his business ; a good fellow, too, at bottom.’ Alone, in private, there was not a man who did not hate him ; but not a man would have dared to admit as much even to his wife.

In Mr. Goring’s calm glance there was

perhaps some little admixture of amused disdain. Godwin glared with his colourless grey eyes, the angrier because he could not impress the person he was attacking.

‘You cannot show a scrap of paper,’ Felise heard Godwin saying. ‘I’m certain there is no such deed. You have no more right to fish than you have to give that rascally labourer of yours more money than anyone else.’

‘I believe,’ said Mr. Goring, ‘that the law permits me to pay what wages I please.’

‘It does not permit you to trespass and to leave gates open, so that cattle stray and do damage. You’ll have to pay for it, Goring—mark my words! What right has she to trample down the grass and do every species of mischief? Even if you do possess, or claim to possess a right to fish, it does not extend to her.’

‘Was it me, then?’ asked Felise suddenly, coming to the window.

‘You are the culprit,’ laughed her uncle.

‘Why, you have the rod in your hand—you’re caught.’

Godwin looked at her, and instinctively removed his hat. He growled something in his throat. He did not speak, but he had the grace to be silent.

‘You are accused of poaching, trespassing, and doing every species of mischief,’ said Mr. Goring. ‘Come in and defend yourself.’

Felise smiled, and went round the house to the front door; but on turning the corner started, became pale, flushed again, and then stepped quickly towards a horse Abner had care of. It was Ruy—Martial’s horse.

Was *he* here, then?

She stroked Ruy’s neck, looked inside the hall, returned, stroked him again; in her agitation she scarce knew what to do, or say, or think.

‘Is Mr. Barnard here?’ she said at last.

‘No, miss,’ replied Abner.

‘But—but——’

‘Mr. Godwin came on him,’ said the man.

Godwin riding Martial’s favourite—how was this? Felise instantly felt that there was something wrong, and Godwin’s dark face appearing at that moment in the hall seemed sinister to her. His pale grey eyes—colourless like water—shone in the shadow of the doorway. She could not ask him any questions, but she did not withdraw her hand from Ruy’s neck. The horse rubbed his face against her shoulder.

‘I’ve just bought him,’ said Godwin, softening his voice as much as he could. ‘Do you like him?’

‘Yes.’

He began to gather the bridle in his hand, taking it from Abner. Godwin was so near her that her dress touched him. She felt his direct glance beating upon her, as the hard sun beats on an exposed rock. There was no cessation in his glance.

She remembered the remark of the

cottager that Barnard was not rich, that young blood spent money. Could it be that Martial was in difficulty? How else came he to part with his horse? Her heart quailed; quick sympathy confused her. She did not move aside that Godwin might mount, but stood by Ruy.

Godwin's colourless eyes were bent unswervingly upon her face; he had the bridle in his hand, but he was in no haste.

In her agitation Felise did nothing but stroke Ruy, who was growing impatient for his manger — so affection is wasted upon those whose sole thought is provender.

'I am afraid I gave too much for him,' said Godwin.

Mr. Goring smiled; the idea of Godwin giving too much for anything was good.

Felise was running over in her mind everything she could think of that would be likely to draw out the truth, yet without betraying her interest in Barnard.

'Have you had him long?' she asked.

‘No, only a week or two.’

‘From whom did you buy him?’—as if she did not know.

‘Barnard of Manor House.’

‘Did you give much?’

‘Seventy pounds.’

‘Why did he want to sell?’

‘Wanted the money; but I dare say there’s something wrong with the horse. I shan’t find it out for a month or two—Barnard’s too sharp for me.’

Mr. Goring, in the porch, smiled sarcastically. If Godwin gave a man the character of sharpness, it went without asking that he was anything but shrewd at such matters as a horse-deal.

Still stroking Ruy—her dress rustling against Godwin, Felise for the second time delayed the impatient horse; just as she had on the hills one morning.

‘Mr. Godwin wants to mount,’ said Goring at last.

‘I forgot,’ said Felise, and moved away;

the steward, however, did not seem in any great hurry. He got up leisurely enough, but reined Ruy with so powerful a hand that the horse stood quiet, and Felise touched his neck once more.

‘Will you come over and see us?’ said Godwin. ‘My sister would be very pleased if you would; the meadows are dry now, and the path easy.’

‘I will come,’ said Felise, to her uncle’s astonishment.

‘Soon?’

‘To-morrow morning.’

Then she looked up at Godwin’s cast-bronze face, and asked in the most matter-of-fact tone she could assume :

‘Why did Barnard sell—why did he want money?’

‘Because he’s a fool,’ said Godwin rudely. She flushed—he thought it was because of his rudeness.

‘Beg pardon,’ he said. ‘You will be sure to come to-morrow morning?’

‘ I will.’

Still Godwin lingered, Ruy fidgeted ; Goring wished to go to his garden-work, but Godwin did not start. A moment passed without a word being spoken, when Felise slightly bowed and went in ; Godwin immediately rode off without a word.

‘ Are you really going to visit them ?’ asked Mr. Goring.

‘ Yes, papa ; unless you object.’

‘ No, I don’t object—still, you know the man’s character.’

‘ That he is a tyrant, yes ; but I am going to see Ruy.’

‘ Ruy ?’

‘ Oh, I mean the horse. I heard his name just now. He is a beautiful horse, isn’t he ?’



CHAPTER XIX.



IS it best to have a strong imagination, or to be entirely without it ?

An imaginative mind creates for itself a beautiful world ; but upon entering into practical life, at every step, first one and then another portion of the structure is shattered till the entire fabric falls to pieces. Dust under foot and bitterness to the taste are all that remain ; a void heart, a hopeless future, a weary present. The commonplace crushes the ideal as a cannon-ball might a statue.

The world, therefore, has long since decided that the imaginative is to be avoided. Have nothing to do with books, pictures,

sculpture, with thought or dream. Above all things be practical.

Those who do not possess an imagination are clearly the gainers in this life ; horses, carriages, money, expensive wines, or, if they prefer it, the solid applause of well-to-do folk, are given to them. The imaginative dream of flowers, but the practical possess a garden. The infinite superiority of the non-imaginative is established.

Robert Godwin had never any difficulty in choosing between these two courses—the imaginative and the practical—because he had not even imagination enough to see that there were two courses. By nature he was absolutely devoid of imagination. He took things as he saw them, and the idea of there being anything beyond never occurred to him.

There were the hills visible from his window ; he knew by experience that hills were steep, and that a horse had to pull against the collar to draw him over them. The

higher they were the thinner the soil, the smaller the crops, and the less rent to be obtained. Occasionally he glanced at them to see if the descending or ascending mist, the clearness or dimness of outline, promised rain or sunshine—and so much for the hills. This practical knowledge completed his concern in these mounds of chalk.

The depth of the rich blue sky, the sweep of the clouds, the sunrise, the colours of sunset, the stars so clear seen at an altitude—these mere imaginative things were invisible to him altogether. He simply did not see them, any more than if a thick curtain had been drawn before his eyes.

The thoughts which flow from the contemplation of the azure, the noble hope of sunrise, the god-like promise of the stars, were to him non-existent; as he could not see the things that suggested the thought, so his mind was blind to the thought itself.

Yet further, that scarce definable culture—that idea which exists in the heart and soul

independent of outward appearances—the sense of a beautiful inner life—so delicate a music was soundless to his ears.

The ground was solid under his feet ; the sky afar off a mere translucent roof ; the sun a round ball of heat, never seen unless he chanced to be driving westwards towards sunset. He measured trees, and put a red mark against those to be felled, so many every year ; they were timber—wood ; they were hard, oak some of them ; he could tell the cubical contents, and how many feet of planking they would saw up into. The shape of the oak, the shadow, the birds who came to it, all its varied associations—its dream—had no meaning to him. Sometimes he saw the sea, its green plain, from the higher ground ; but it did not attract him to the shore.

Through the woods in spring-time his feet waded among pools, broad lakes of azure-purple, acres upon acres of blue-bells, so crowded they could not swing ; he crushed

the tender anemone ; he passed the white June rose.

Robert Godwin never walked by the sea, nor gathered a flower.

The old books which had accumulated in the house of his forefathers remained upon the shelves untouched. Since his school-days, when it was compulsory, he had never opened any other book than the almanack.

He handled cattle and sheep, he inspected horses, he visited men at plough, at harrow, at harvest, at building, at sawing, smith's work, every kind of labour. He attended markets and fairs, he drove and rode to and fro ; he kept his accounts ; he looked to every detail of the estate and of his own farm. He was always in action ; when he returned from a long day's round, so soon as he alighted he walked briskly down into the garden to see if the gardener had fulfilled a full day's task.

Robert Godwin drove men as cattle are never driven. For cattle are let linger by

the roadside that they may crop the clover which likes to grow in trodden places ; cattle are permitted to drink at the pond, and to rest in the shade of the elm-trees. The evening comes and they are turned into a field to graze, and chew the cud, and consider, as it were, till the morning.

No man rested that Robert Godwin could get at to drive. His own farm labourers, the men who did the estate work, the woodcutters, the drain-diggers, the masons and smiths, the very messengers to and fro the Squire's house and his farm—he drove them all. He would waylay the rural postman at six in the morning, and bully him for not coming at half-past five : what business had he to waste time taking a draught of milk at the farmhouse yonder ? He should be reported. Robert Godwin stood at the stile and shouted to the children, and threatened them with the stick if they did not hasten on to school.

Yet when Robert Godwin's back was

turned and the hedge had hidden him from view, the ploughman relaxed his hold on the stils of his plough, and the team stayed as he listened to the peaceful caw of the rooks. But Godwin's back was never turned upon himself. He drove himself for ever. He was always up at six, often at five; from then till dusk he moved to and fro his own farm, and the estate he managed; after dusk a cheap candle was lit for him, and he worked at his accounts till bedtime. He never listened to the caw, caw of the rooks.

Reading by the open window of a sunny day, when the mind for a moment pauses from its dwelling on the page, and the glance goes out into the light, it is very pleasant to hear them—these peaceful rooks caw, cawing over to their favourite furrows. Doubtless you have heard them and rested. Robert Godwin never heard them.

Incessant physical occupation was a necessity of his existence. But surely there must have been times when, his hands being still

and his frame reposing in the early evening, 'between the lights,' his mind roamed in reverie, when fancy bore sway, when a dream or thought came to him ?

No. When his hands were still and his frame reposed, his mind was simply vacant, like that of a horse looking from his stable-door, or a dog by his kennel. He saw the wall, or the fireplace, nothing more. His mind was simply quiescent—vacant—like a mirror turned face downwards, as old country-folk place them on the bed in a storm of thunder and lightning.

In such a position the glass reflects nothing, and so when his hands were still Godwin's mind reflected nothing. It did not work within itself. Thus it was that on lying down at bedtime he fell instantly asleep, sound, undisturbed, complete, like an animal's. No long train of aërial fancies passed through his mind ; that organ, like a muscle unemployed, fell into perfect repose.

This incessant work was not persevered in

as a 'religion,' such as it is the fashion nowadays to 'dignify' toil for the benefit of those who own factories. Nor was it the restless energy of a great genius, for Godwin had no ambition, and to drive nails in a carpenter's shop would have contented him as well as to lead the army at Pharsalia. Nor was it nervous restlessness; he was quite without nerves. It was his nature.

Just as rooks fly because they are rooks, so Godwin worked because he was Godwin, worked and accumulated money, and drove himself, and every human being with whom he came into the smallest contact, and knew no more rest or fatigue than the old mill-wheel.

His forefathers had had money; it was a family, a hereditary trait--this faculty for accumulation. Robert got together more, and it was whispered that he had lent a large sum to the Squire. Certainly his will was law on the Cornleigh estate; it was no use appealing to the Squire, who merely referred applicants back to his steward.

There could not have been a more faithful steward. There was not a halfpenny wasted on that property, not the value of a rusty nail. Economy, rigid control, perfect accounts; every shilling brought to the board. Everything organized and in order; no confusion, no uncertainty. Above all, no weak paltering with tenants who had had losses, or suffered from illness or infirmity; no feeble yielding to the entreaties of the widow, or the fatherless children, or the unfortunate. The same rigid rule was applied unflinchingly to all alike, so that there could be no favouritism: 'Pay or go.'

The steward allowed no time, consented to no compromise. 'Pay or go.' Three omnipotent words, which brought to the Squire's pockets an unfailing supply of gold twice a year.

Some did, indeed, say that the reputation thereby acquired prevented tenants with large capital from applying when farms were vacant; they would rather go farther and

have more freedom and kindness of treatment. However that might be, for the present, at all events, the Godwin rule was a success.

It was thought that the succession of bad seasons must necessitate a relaxation of this iron government, but fortune sometimes favours the hardest natures, and in this case favoured Robert Godwin. By a piece of good luck that neighbourhood did not suffer so severely at first as many districts; the crops were below the average, but not so seriously; some little allowance had to be made, but not much; the tenants certainly lost money, yet they could not make out a sufficiently pressing case to obtain much reduction of rent. Of late there had been more serious complaint. No appreciable difference was caused in the Godwin government.

He was ever on the alert, just the same, to detect the least infringement of the strict letter of the agreement; ever ready with

objections if any expenditure was applied for ; always watching for an opportunity to assert the authority of his master.

A labourer began to build a hut on waste ground by the wayside. Godwin had the materials carted away, as he had commenced without permission from the lord of the manor. A cottager had made a garden in a hedge, leaving enough of the fence each side to prevent cattle straying ; he worked on the estate, but Godwin spied out the encroachment and had quickset thorns planted among the potatoes.

The thatched roofs of the cottages in one of the hamlets were rotten, and let the rain through ; the poor inhabitants begged for repairs. Nothing of the sort : they could buy straw and repair the roofs if they wished ; if not, the wet might drip on their beds.

Enclosure of the common had already begun when Mr. Goring came forward and contested the right of Cornleigh Cornleigh, Esq., to enclose. Godwin blustered and

thundered; letters were written on blue paper; but public opinion had been drawn to the question, emissaries from powerful societies appeared on the scene, and the scheme was let drop.

Some day, perhaps, Mr. Goring would leave. These objectors have never much status or stability. They are not fixed like great hereditary owners. The Pope is dead—long live the Pope! The interests of hereditary estates are handed on generation after generation, much like the will of Peter the Great; but objectors, such as Mr. Goring, usually disappear in a few years. The hand that repairs the embankment once withdrawn, the sea soon rushes in.

Godwin was ceaselessly on the alert to extend the authority of his employer. Foot-paths were stopped, and odd corners of waste ground enclosed with stone walls costing thrice the value of the land, in order that no one might 'squat' and presently assert a right to a few square yards of their own country.

These proceedings were by no means confined to the outlying agricultural places, where the well-to-do people were almost all tenants, and the remainder poor and without organization. Robert Godwin attacked the town with equal zest and equal success. The Cornleigh Cornleigh property included a considerable part of the town, and his 'rights' extended more or less over the rest.

Except by long and costly legal process it was impossible to tell where those 'rights' really began or ended. The steward made the fullest use of this uncertainty. Old by-ways and paths were blocked, corners enclosed, possession asserted and taken, and not a voice was raised. The whole town was straitened, and a band as it were drawn tight about it so that it could scarce breathe.

The park was closed, though the inhabitants had used it for a hundred years as a recreation ground, and had undoubted claims to roads across it. Not a voice was raised.

Old inhabitants retained a respect for 'the family,' and would not oppose its will. Tradespeople wished to enjoy its custom and patronage, though, as a matter of fact, they got neither, as 'the family' bought all they required in London; still they did not like to shut the door in their own faces. There were not enough shoemakers in Maasbury.

Long since there had been a glove industry in the surrounding villages—an industry at which the poor folk worked in their own cottages. For the most part it had disappeared, yet to this day the magistrates could distinguish the hamlets where it had once flourished by the records in their books. To this day half the cases brought before them came from these hamlets.

Your artisan who works at home—your cottage glovemaker, or shoemaker—is a terrible radical, a fearful character, a frequenter of taverns, a fisticuff fellow, and above all things a contemner of authority.

He will get into trouble for no other purpose than to show his despite of authority. His descendants had it in their blood, and still continued to exhibit the same disposition. But the industry had died out, and there were no shoemakers to speak of in Maasbury town. Consequently Mr. Godwin ruled as he chose.

The result was that the property was trimmed, walled, enclosed, and improved in every possible manner. Had it been set out to sale, the auctioneer could have honestly laid stress on the singular completeness of the estate. It was in perfect order. The 'family' reaped that advantage.

A breathless hatred of Robert Godwin prevailed from north to south, east to west, of that broad stretch of land. From the tenant of a thousand acres, and the wealthy tradesman (like Rosa's father) down to the miserable old woman in her shanty, living on tea and soaked bread, the hatred of Robert Godwin was universal.

The well-to-do exhibited this feeling by asking him to every entertainment they gave—invitations seldom accepted, for Godwin was a solitary man—by publicly praising him at every meeting, by treating him with the greatest respect, and by holding their tongues in private. No one ever abused Robert Godwin.

Even the old women did not curse him, as they do in story-books, for they have come to learn—these old women—in the nineteenth century that curses are as harmless as thistledown. They looked after him as he passed—simply folded their arms and looked after him.


His mind, hard set upon the subject in hand, was clear and practical, consequently upon agricultural topics, and such as came within his reach, Godwin could make a good speech. He frequently spoke, expressing himself in plain and forcible language; his speeches appeared in full in the local

prints, and were even transferred to the London agricultural papers. He possessed a considerable reputation of this kind, and justly so, for he spoke out of the fulness of practical knowledge.





CHAPTER XX.

XCEPT I describe Robert Godwin's works and that which he did, it is impossible to describe him. For he was not a thinker, a dreamer, a man of feeling; there was no light and shade in his character. To understand him you must know not what he felt, but what he *did*. Now these were the works of Robert Godwin.

I do not think that he intended to be harsh in his dealings with his fellows. It was simply an absolute want of imagination. He was no set villain of a piece, no unscrupulous tyrant for the sake of evil. There was no cruelty in his nature. No one ever

saw him thrash his horse mercilessly, or kick his dog.

Of the suffering to human beings caused by his conduct, he was entirely oblivious, nor could you by any possible method have explained it to him. He lacked the imagination to put himself in the place of the wretched.

It was this faculty which enabled the torturers in the Middle Ages to tear human creatures limb from limb, to thrust red-hot iron into the victim, to smash every bone on the wheel, to carry out orders of so ghastly a character that not even the sober historian in our time dares to record them on his page. They remain in Latin—as it were whispered in ancient books.

In our day this faculty is by no means extinct: twelve hundred men announced themselves possessed of it when they applied for the hangman's office.

I call it a faculty, for really it seems so, instead of the lack of a faculty; just as cold

—frost—seems to one's feelings a real thing, and not merely the absence of heat.

Robert Godwin had not the least idea of the misery he often caused, simply because he possessed the faculty of not seeing—the faculty of no imagination. That he seemed in most cases devoid of rancour was often remarked; after quarrelling most furiously, he would shake hands next day as if nothing had happened. But then there was nothing in his goodwill—he had no goodwill.

He was absolutely honest, except in a horse-deal, in which it is mutually understood that every man shall cheat his neighbour. His mere nod was his bond. The word of Robert Godwin was like the signed and sealed bond of a great railway company—negotiable; his word was negotiable. That is, if a man said Godwin had promised, you dealt on the faith of that bare word.

This much said, last of all, Robert Godwin was no hypocrite. He made no profession of Christian charity; he never entered a church.

Not that he was an opponent of the Church ; he was simply indifferent.

No one ever got touch of Robert Godwin. The man was always alone. While he measured a tree with the woodman standing by ; while he rated the ploughman ; while he bargained in the market, hustled and shoved by the crowd ; while he spoke in public ; if you sat with him in his house, still Robert Godwin was apart, separate, a distinct personality. His spirit never blended with the society about him.

His sister had lived with him as house-keeper year after year, and she knew no more of him than a stranger. He made no mystery of anything, yet he was impenetrable. She had inherited the Godwin faculty of no imagination ; her mind, once the household duties over, fell at once into vacancy. She sat still and grew immensely fat.

The reason of Godwin's intense personality was his concentration. He was fixed, absorbed in himself ; he neither saw nor heard any-

thing. He was conscious of himself only. The curving outline of the hills, the white clouds, the sunset, were invisible to him.

Riding away on his new horse Ruy from Mr. Goring's porch that lovely summer day, Robert Godwin went straight into the town, executed some business there, returned home, put up his horse, and at once walked out into the fields to his men. He never stayed his hand till night; when the last labourers had gone slowly homewards, he was still doing something.

But even the long, long summer evening — Felise passed it sitting by the sundial dreaming—the long summer evening went away at last. Dusky shadows crept out and filled the corners of the fields; the orchards became gloomy; the large bats flew to and fro in the upper air; the lesser bats fluttered round the eaves.

Robert Godwin took his candle up into his bedroom, which was at the same time his study or private office. Probably in his grim

father's time it was the only room in which he could find any peace, and the habit of working there having once been established could not be set aside. The washstand was placed by a small window—a window deep in the embrasure necessitated by a thick old wall. Upon one end of this washstand Robert wrote; it was a large stand intended for two ewers, but only one stood on it, cobwebbed, for it was never used.

At the end of the washstand next the window Robert had his ink, his pens, and blotting-paper; his letters, documents, and papers were on the window-ledge, piles of them which could be seen from the garden beneath. Here he worked every evening, in solitude, by the light of one cheap candle.

This evening Robert worked later than usual, till his sister, weary of waiting, had her supper, and presently retired. By-and-by the last letter was finished, the last account added up, the last note jotted down; there was no more writing to be done. He took

his letters out to the gate by the road, where he had a private box cleared by the mail-cart driver who passed about midnight.

Next he went round to the other gate in the garden to see if it was locked. From thence he visited the stables, and heard Ruy move in his stall; and then round the rick-yard to see if any wandering vagabond dared to creep under a rick to sleep. As he passed the pump in the yard he tried it, to see if it acted properly; his hands could let nothing alone. Finally, he crossed his arms on the top bar of the gate leading into the meadows, and looked straight out across the fields.

Something, perhaps a hare, rushed away; he did not regard it in the least. The dog in the kennel yawned, shook himself, and looked out at his master, who never stroked him.

Dew was falling thickly, and in the distance a thin white vapour marked the course of the stream. The still trees, heavily laden with their foliage, were silent; there was not the

faintest rustle, and nothing appeared to move in their shadows. Once a bird, perhaps a whitethroat, chattered a little in the hedge; but his voice sank quickly. In the warm stillness of the summer night there came a far-off rushing sound, very faint; it was the cascade at the trout-pool where Felise bathed.

Above, the clear sky was full of stars, and among them the beautiful planet Jupiter shone serene. The sky was of a lovely night-blue; it was an hour to think, to dream, to revere, to love—a time when, if ever it will, the soul reigns, and the coarse rude acts of day are forgotten in the aspirations of the inmost mind.

The Night was calm—still; it was in no haste to do anything—it had nothing it needed to do. To be is enough for the stars.

Robert did not notice any difference in the night; he had seen hundreds of nights. He was listening for the roll of the mail-cart

wheels. After a time they came ; the cart stopped ; the driver collected the letters, and went on. There was no delivery by this mail, only a collection.

Robert returned to his bedroom, took off his coat, looked at his bed, and put on his coat again. He did not care to lie down. He lighted a great stable-lantern, and went out of doors again.

The hasp of the gate against which he had leaned was a little shaky and loose ; he found the tools, went to work, and put it to rights. Then he went into the orchard to the garden-house, and examined the gardener's tools, one by one, to see if they had been roughly used, or injured ; if so, the man must pay. The man had been digging ; with the lantern in his hand Robert paced the distance dug to see how many yards he had completed.

Robert went to the stable, looked in at Ruy, climbed up into the tallet, and spied about to see if any forage had been stolen.

He examined the carter's collection of horse-hair—his perquisite—to see if it was accumulating too fast.

He brought out a stool and saw, and sawed up firewood till he had made a goodly heap. He would have done more, but that would encourage waste. If only a little was cut up, only a little would be used.

He planed a piece of timber intended for the head of a gate. He counted the poles aslant against the wood-pile. Nothing else remaining that he could do, he returned to the garden, took off his coat, set the lantern on the grass, and dug where the gardener had left off. While he dug the night went on—the night that was in no haste to do anything; and by degrees a pale light grew up above the eastern horizon. The dawn comes early in summer.

Still Robert dug steadily on till the other mail-cart—the down mail—approached. He stopped and listened; the driver did not pull up, so there were no letters. Robert scraped

his boots, put away the spade, blew out the lantern, and went indoors.

By the pale white light he looked again at his bed; but he could not lie down. There was no rest in him that night. He lit his cheap candle and went up into the attic overhead, where he had not been for years. The shutters were perpetually closed up there, so that the place was partly dark, although streaks of dawn came through the chinks. The great bare room was full of ancient lumber.

He set the candle on an oak press and fell to work, sorting the confused mass which strewed the floor. Old chairs—some broken, some perfect—a picture or two, hair-trunks, books, bundles of newspapers, pieces of chain—odd lengths thrown aside—nameless odds and ends, such as candlesticks, parts of implements, the waste of a century, all covered with dust, and dead black cobwebs. Dead cobwebs thick with dust, not the fine clean threads the spider has in use; webs which had been abandoned fifty years ago.

The skeleton of a bird lay at the bottom of a hollow in the pile, perhaps an injured swallow that had crept in there to die. A pair of flintlock pistols, the flints still in the hammers, were in very good condition, scarcely rusted; Robert snicked the locks and examined them carefully. He was black with dust and cobwebs.

Chairs and furniture he threw on one side, boxes on another, papers and books in a corner, and soon began to make order of confusion.

The light of morning came stronger through the chinks; the flame of the candle appeared yellow. The alchemy of light was changing the sky without.

He worked on till footsteps sounded on the paths outside, the carters had come to see to the horses. There was some one at last to drive.

Robert went downstairs, and out to the pump; there he washed himself in the open air, as he had been made to do years and

years ago in his stern old father's time. The habit adhered still; the man was indeed all habit. Then he visited the stables, and began to drive the carters; the night was over, the day had begun.

Overhead and eastwards there shone a glory of blue heaven, illuminated from within with golden light. The deep rich azure was lit up with an inner gold; it was a time to worship, to lift up the heart. Is there anything so wondrously beautiful as the sky just before the sun rises in summer?

There was a sound of cart-horses stamping heavily, the rattle and creak of harness, the shuffle of feet; a man came out with a set forehead, grumbling and muttering; the driver was at work.

No one heeded the alchemy proceeding in the east, which drew forth gold and made it shine in the purple.



CHAPTER XXI.



SINCE Robert Godwin could not by the effort of a lifetime have summoned up sufficient imagination to tell his own story, I must do the romance for him, and explain why he could not sleep that night. You now know the man, who could rout about dusty lumber that his hands might be employed, who could not see the sky. Here is his romance.

Nine years ago, that very time of the year, Robert Godwin, starting forth into the fields one day, saw a trespasser in a meadow of mowing-grass. A trespasser rolling about in the sacred mowing-grass, wilfully damaging it—with the aid of a dog, too.

To walk among mowing-grass is a guilty thing, you must understand, in country places. This meadow in particular did not concern Godwin, but the fact of trespassing did ; he could not have passed a trespasser without ordering the criminal off any more than a dog could pass a bone. He walked rapidly towards the place, full of hard language, bitter words and threats, swelling with eagerness to drive this daring human being. As he came near he was astounded at the absolute *abandon* of the youthful sinner ; she not only trespassed, she revelled in her wickedness.

It was a girl about ten or eleven, tall for her age, and with her a great spaniel ; together they were making themselves joyful in the flower-strewn grass.

Sometimes she ran, and leaped, and danced in the beautiful sweet grass which rose above her knees. Sometimes she threw herself at full length in it, lying down on the breast of the earth, as a swimmer lies on

the breast of the sea. As children dance and play without much covering on the sands in their innocence, so in her wild gambols her short frock permitted the shape of her limbs to be occasionally seen.

Her hands were full of clover-blossoms; she threw them away and gathered the large daisies; she scattered the daisies and took buttercups and blue veronica; she laughed and whistled—quite a real whistle—she caught her foot and tumbled, and shouted. The spaniel charged her as she lay extended, charged over her and rolled her down again. Together they romped, utterly unaware of the Terror that was approaching them with swift strides.

Her long golden hair, one mass of ringlets, was spread about upon the grass, as she lay on her back—the spaniel had his heavy paws on her chest—one knee was raised among the golden buttercups, and the sun shone on its exquisite whiteness. She was panting and laughing, almost unable to move from

the weight of the spaniel and her own exhaustion.

The Terror was very near—the Terror could easily have captured her; but now a singular incident occurred.

At a distance of ten short paces Robert Godwin stopped, looked fixedly, suddenly turned on his heel, and returned the way he had come without a word.

Almost directly his back was turned the spaniel saw him, and began to bark; and the girl sat up and began instinctively to arrange her frock, and get her hair in order. But Robert Godwin did not look back.

The child was Felise Goring, then but recently arrived at her uncle's upon the loss of her father, whom she could not regret because she had never known him—he had been in India so long. She remembered the grass—just remembered it—about the house she had lived in when she first began to walk. She came to it again from the streets and confinement of a London suburb.

Imagine the child's delight—the fields to roam in—liberty—the great dog; all the happy sunny freedom children enjoy in the country. No matter how kind their parents may be, no matter how fortunate their circumstances, the children in cities never know the joyousness of the country.

The grass to walk on; the flowers to gather; the horses to watch; the new milk; the delicious butter; the brook to ramble by; the pond to fish in; the hay to throw about; the very ladders to climb; and the thick hedges to get in as if they were woods. No gold can purchase these things in cities. They are to be pitied whose youth has been spent in streets, though they may succeed to the counting-house where millions are made.

All of you with little children, and who have no need to count expense, or even if you have such need, take them somehow into the country among green grass and yellow wheat—among trees—by hills and streams, if you

wish their highest education, that of the heart and the soul, to be completed.

Therein shall they find a Secret—a knowledge not to be written, not to be found in books. They shall know the sun and the wind, the running water, and the breast of the broad earth. Under the green spray, among the hazel boughs where the nightingale sings, they shall find a Secret, a feeling, a sense that fills the heart with an emotion never to be forgotten. They will forget their books — they will never forget the grassy fields.

If you wish your children to think deep things—to know the holiest emotions, take them to the woods and hills, and give them the freedom of the meadows.

It is of no use to palter with your conscience and say, ‘They have everything; they have expensive toys, story-books without end; we never go anywhere without bringing them home something to amuse them; they have been to the seaside, and actually to Paris;

it is absurd, they *cannot* want anything more.'

But they *do* want something more, without which all this expensive spoiling is quite thrown away. They want the unconscious teaching of the country, and without that they will never know the truths of this life. They need to feel—unconsciously—the influence of the air that blows, sun-sweetened, over fragrant hay; to feel the influence of deep shady woods, mile-deep in boughs—the stream—the high hills; they need to revel in long grass. Put away their books, and give them the freedom of the meadows. Do it at any cost or trouble to yourselves, if you wish them to become great men and noble women.

Indulgent to all, Mr. Goring was necessarily yet more indulgent to this great beautiful girl suddenly thrown on his hands. For she was beautiful already, although with that unshapen, uncertain irregularity which promises better in childhood than regularity.

If a girl's features are regular as a child, if already lovely, it is rare for her to be a beautiful woman. Neither the face nor the form must be finished too soon.

Felise's face suggested, her form already hinted at, loveliness to come when the bold first strokes of Nature were filled in.

To recognise such strokes of Nature in their inception, and to observe their relation to each other and to the general shape, is a pleasure of the most exquisite kind. If the growth and unfolding of a flower be beautiful, how much more so the growth of a woman !

Robert Godwin's thought from that hour never varied from the child whom he had intended to have driven with harsh reviling from the meadow. I do not say that he loved her from the moment he saw her ; he had no imagination. His heart was not prepared with fancy and ready to love ; but his thought dwelt upon her, and love steadily grew within him.

So intensely concentrated a nature could not love by halves—could not admire, or sigh, and pass on and amuse itself elsewhere. Once set, the plant grew and filled his whole life. It came about in time that Robert Godwin never thought of anything else but Felise Goring.

While his hands worked, as you have seen them; while his lips uttered hard words, or while his mind added figure to figure at his washstand-desk, Felise filled his entire inner existence. He lived in a dream, this dreamless man; he was absorbed in one idea—an idea so fixed that his mind was vacant. His hands moved with no consciousness behind them, as the wheels of a machine go round.

Work over, he slept at once without any interval of love-like reverie; for he carried Felise instantly with him into his slumber, so fixed was her image in his mind. His abstraction was complete. The form of Robert Godwin walked among the fields, and rode along the roads; the lips of Robert Godwin

gave forth articulate sound ; the signature of Robert Godwin was traced upon the cheque—but Robert Godwin, the personality, was not there. His mind was with Felise.

It is said that women above all things like to be loved. Very rarely is a woman loved as Godwin loved, such utter abstraction, such loss of self-existence, such death of self-existence. The woman that he loved should have been happy. But in Paris they say, that woman is indeed happy to be loved, but only when the lover can minister to her vanity.

Robert Godwin had no knowledge whatever of such studies of woman's heart, some base and worthless, some true ; yet his clearness of intellect (consequent upon the shortness of his view, not its breadth ; he held everything, as it were, close to his mind, as people with dim sight hold all things close to their eyes)—his clearness of intellect instinctively told him that Felise was not for him ; he could never be anything to her.

The Parisian would put it in this way: He comprehended that there was nothing about him that could flatter or excite her vanity.

He loved her and gave her up at the same time. He loved her more and more as the years drew on, and year by year he acknowledged to himself that the gulf between them grew more and more impassable.

At that moment in the meadow he was already forty; she was ten or eleven. Yet it was not the difference of age; it was the total, world-wide difference of personality.

Now he was forty-nine, Felise nineteen—nearly twenty. Nine great wedges had been driven in by Time to split their lives asunder.

Upright, strong, without one grey fleck in his dark hair, Godwin had not altered an atom in those nine years. He was as vigorous, as full of manhood as at twenty-one. But still he was forty-nine; he was on the verge of fifty.

Can you imagine a woman in solitude weighing these words on her lips, 'He is on the verge of fifty'?

Yet it was not the years ; it was the total, the world-wide difference of personality. Godwin, all these nine years, had held the matter up close to his mind, and every day the certainty grew more certain, the fact more palpable, that she was not for him. By no possible manner of means could Felise ever come to care for Robert Godwin.

In all that time scarcely a day went by that he did not see her. The two houses were hardly half a mile apart ; the girl was in the fields constantly, and he was always riding or walking across them. He never purposely approached her, but his path frequently brought him near ; sometimes they met. Her existence was always before his eyes.



CHAPTER XXII.



HE thought of nothing but the sun and wind, the flowers and the running stream. She listened to the wind in the trees and began herself to sing. The child was led along by unknown impulses, as if voices issued from the woods calling her to enter. It would have been impossible for her to tell why she was so happy in the freedom of the fields.

Not once now and then, or one day only, when the smiling hours of early June lit the meadows, but every day, the year round, Felise went forth with the same joy.

She trod the paths to their utmost ending, through meads and wheatfields, round the

skirt of copses where pheasants feeding hurried in at her coming, or wood-pigeons rose with a clatter from the firs. Climbing the rugged stiles, treading the bending plank stretched across the streamlet, stepping from stone to stone in the watery ways where woods and marshes met, up the steep hill where the shepherds had cut steps in the turf, she traced the path to its ending. Through the long lanes, hazel-boughs on one side, hawthorn on the other; along the rude waggon-tracks winding in and out the corn; by shadowy green arcades of the covers; by deep valleys, sunless because of the massy beeches high on the slopes.

There was not a spot made beautiful by trees and hedges, by grass and flowers, and sun and shade, that she had not visited and lingered in. She knew when each would look at its loveliest—the corner of maple-bushes when the first frosts had yellowed the spray and strewn the sward with colour of leaves; the row of oaks when the acorns

were ripe, and the rooks above and the pheasants beneath were feasting ; the meadow where the purple orchis grew in the first days of May ; the osier-beds where the marsh marigolds flowered, and again in the time of the yellow iris.

She knew where the hill, lifting itself in a bold brow thrown forward from the range, gave a view over the wooded plain almost to the horizon ; where the downs opening in a pass, the broad green sea gleamed out to the clouds.

The place where the stream ran at the foot of a cliff, overshadowed by the trees on the summit ; where it came again to sweet meads, moving between its banks without a sound except what the birds made for it calling in the sedges.

The time when the fields were fullest of flowers ; the time when the green wheat began to grow tall, and to contain wheatears like hidden treasures among its innumerable stalks ; the time when it became golden ; the

time when the partridges called at even in the short stubble.

The sound of the wind in the oaks and in the pines ; the rush it came with across the grass ; the rustle of the dry corn swinging.

The light of the sun shining on the green sward, on the tree-tops, on the clouds at sunset.

Storms darkening the face of heaven ; strong gales casting fragments of branches afar from the trees ; thunder rolling back in heavier echoes from the hills ; lightning springing athwart the darkness.

The blackness of frost ; the white of the snow ; the crystal rime in the early morning ; the heavy days of long, long rain ; moaning wind in the elms.

The first swallow, and the hawthorn leaf green on the dark bough ; the song of the nightingale ; the first call of the cuckoo ; the first apple-bloom ; the first scent of the hay ; the first sheaf of wheat ; the first beech-boughs turning red and gold.

The coming of the redwings, and the field-fares ; the thrushes singing again in the mild autumn days ; the last harebell from the hill.

The stars rising, constellation by constellation, as the year went on ; those that had fulfilled their time of shining in the evening sky marching to the westwards, while others came up in the east. The visible path of the earth rolling onward in space, made visible by night to those who watch the stars—visible by day in the shortening shadows of summer noon, and the long shadows of winter.

The glowing planets—calm Jupiter, red Mars, silvery Venus—glowing over the trees in the evening.

Swallows building under the eaves — swallows building in the chimneys ; thrushes in the hawthorn-bushes ; great missel-thrushes in the apple-trees of the orchard ; the blue sparrow's egg in the hedge ; the chaffinch's moss and lichen nest against the elm ; the dove's nest up in the copse, fearlessly build-

ing because no rude hand disturbed them; the pheasant's eggs carelessly left on the ground by the bramble-bush, the corncrake's found by the mower; the moorhen's nest by the trout-pool.

She knew and loved them all—the colour and sound and light, the changing days, the creatures of the wood and of the field. With these she lived, and they became familiar to her, as the threads of the pattern are known to those who sit the livelong day embroidering—the woven embroidery of the earth; so beautiful, because without design.

Not so much the actual realities, the woods and hills, as the mystery that brooded among them. Yet 'mystery' does not convey what she felt, for there was nothing concealed; rather it was the openness, the pure frankness of nature which drew her. Perhaps 'glamour' would be better—the glamour of the woodland and the grassy solitude.

It was noticed that she gathered very few flowers, sometimes only bringing home some

fragment of spray ; it was what she felt among them that was so dear to her.

There were no women at Mr. Goring's to show her the delicate lines that divide decorum from impropriety. He dreaded at first lest she should insensibly contract the manners of the village girls, although she did not consort with them ; but he was soon set at rest on that point. Her manners remained as in the beginning ; all the freedom of the fields did not induce the slightest change. Except that she romped with the great spaniel now and then, there was nothing she did the most fastidious could find fault with. Relieved of this fear, he let her wander whither she listed. Once only she overstepped the unwritten law of the country ; she rode her pony into some young wheat, and galloped him to and fro.

It was Robert Godwin's wheat, and he watched her do it in the wild delight of her youth. She had no thought of injury ; she had found a broad open space, and she liked

to spurn the earth and the fresh green blades of wheat beneath the pony's hoofs.

He did not interfere ; he let her trample it as much as she pleased. She was the only human being he did not drive.

Felise was very contrite when it was explained to her at home that she had done wrong ; this happened in early days, not long after her arrival at Beechknoll.

Always out in the garden, or the field, or the copse with her uncle Goring, whom she called 'papa,' he taught her the names of the trees and plants, the ways of the birds, the signs of spring, the indications of autumn. Sometimes he was trimming the shrubs in the garden, sometimes mending a gate, sometimes chopping poles with an axe in the copse. She brought a book and sat near him, every now and then asking questions—called every now and then to observe something.

The birds were bolder in this copse than elsewhere, for no gun was ever fired ; even

the herons came to the pool and the stream unchecked. Nothing was interfered with; not even the weasels. Yet every wild creature abounded, despite the absence of trap, gin, and gun.

To Felise, this man who knew so much was an interpreter—translating for her the language of the trees, the words of the wind, the song of the sun at his rising and his setting, the still calm intent of the stars. His gardening and planting was in reality only a manner of self-employment, so that he might be ever under the sun by day, under the stars in the evening, that he might be out-of-doors face to face with the wonders of the earth and sky.

So that it was not only the physical joy of her strong limbs that led her to the hill to climb and run with the wind. It was the open secret of the day, the glamour of the light; it was her heart and soul as much and more than those strong limbs which gloried in the free air.

Felise grew and became beautiful.

There were books at Beechknoll such as are seldom read outside the circle of the learned, though they are books far more interesting than those of modern days. The reason the classics are not read is because there still lingers a tradition, handed down from the eighteenth century, that it is useless to read them unless in the original. A tone of sarcastic contempt is maintained towards the person who shall presume to peruse Xenophon not in the original Greek, or Virgil not in the original Latin.

In the view of these critics it is the Greek, it is the Latin, that is valuable, not the contents of the volume. Shakespeare, however, the greatest genius of England, thought otherwise. It is known that his ideas of Grecian and Roman history were derived from somewhat rude translations, yet it is acknowledged that the spirit of the ancient warriors and of the ancient luxury lives in his 'Antony and Cleopatra,' and nowhere

in all the ancient writers is there a poem breathing the idea of Aphrodite like his 'Venus and Adonis.' The example of so great a genius may shield us in an effort to free the modern mind from this eighteenth century incubus.

The truth is, the classics are much better understood in a good translation than in the original. To obtain a sufficient knowledge of Greek, for instance, to accurately translate is almost the work of a lifetime. Concentration upon this one pursuit gradually contracts the general perceptions, and it has often happened that an excellent scholar has been deficient in common knowledge, as shown by the singular character of his own notes. But his work of translation in itself is another matter.

It is a treasure ; from it poets derive their illustrations ; dramatists their plots ; painters their pictures. A young mind full of intelligence, coming to such a translation, enters at once into the spirit of the ancient writer. A

good translation is thus better than the original.

Such books Mr. Goring had accumulated for his own study ; they were now opened to Felise by the same kindly hand and voice that had opened to her the knowledge of the fields and woods.

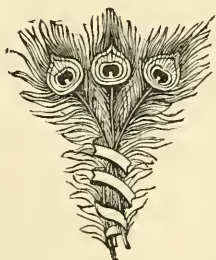
She read the beautiful memoirs of Socrates, some parts of Plato, most of the histories, and the higher and purer poets. Therein she found expressed in words and metre the very ideas, the very feelings which had come to her in the flowery meadows and woodland solitudes ; ideas and feelings that floated in her mind, but which she could not utter. Here they were—written down at the lips of the flowers that had faded two thousand years ago.

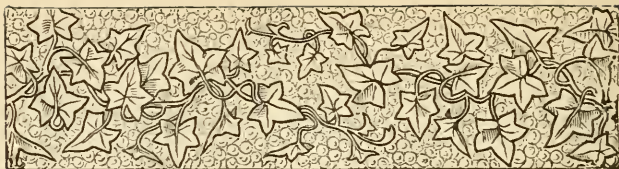
The soul of Greece—the pure soul of antique Greece—visited her as she read and dreamed.

Felise grew and became yet more beautiful.

Her heart, too, had grown within her—the heart of a woman as it is in its purest nature. She was unconvinced. No specious casuistry of the vain world or the false priest, no arguments of the tyrannic science of the nineteenth century, nothing could convince her that the emotion of her heart was wrong. She was unconvinced. All the sophistry and chicanery, all the philosophy and the sociology, all the statutes on the statute book, all the Acts of Parliament, would have utterly failed for one instant to shake that heart, would have failed to convince her that wrong was right, or that a lie was the truth.

Felise was unswervingly true to herself.





CHAPTER XXIII.



AND while her physical frame grew, and her moral being was strengthened, all these nine years from girlhood to womanhood, a colourless eye watched her—the eye of Robert Godwin. There is something grim—weird—almost terrible in the thought that even this pure and beautiful creature could not exist without so opposite a nature stealthily regarding it.

Not the faintest suspicion that Robert Godwin cared for Felise, or indeed for any woman, ever occurred to anyone. The man was so absolutely concentrated, it precluded the very idea of his thinking of a second person.

Had Godwin's concentration upon one fixed idea any influence in producing the hardness of his conduct towards those who happened to come under his sway? Rendering him more abstracted than he would otherwise have been, it closed his eyes to everything but his own will. Robert Godwin was hard enough; Robert Godwin riding and walking, and acting in bodily form while his mind was absent, became a mere figure of stone.

Imaginative persons are commonly reproached with gazing at the stars and overlooking the road at their feet. Here, by a singular reversal, was a man incapable of imagination, whose life was in the work of his hands, who saw nothing but mounds of chalk and pieces of timber where there were woods and hills, and yet he was more under the influence of a distant and unattainable object than the most veritable dreamer.

Each year as Felise grew, so grew his conviction that she was not for him. He held

this question up close to his mind (closer and closer as he became mentally shorter of sight) and observed with more vivid perception her perfection and beauty.

This concentration in time produced a reflex action. He could not have her—he was ready, like a tiger, to tear to pieces anything or anyone she preferred, to oppose her, to cross her, and almost injure her.

As a lover he should, in accordance with all precedent, have sought to gratify her and render himself pleasant. By simple courtesy towards Mr. Goring he could have seen her continually, and had every opportunity of influencing her mind in his favour. On the contrary, he never omitted an opportunity of annoying Mr. Goring; he quarrelled with him about fences, attempted to cut off the supply of water to the trout-pond, and made himself disagreeable in every petty way possible.

His notice to Abner's parents was intended as a sidelong thrust at Mr. Goring, who em-

ployed the young man as his assistant. He saw Felise fishing (or rather making a pretence of fishing) down the stream, and seized the opportunity of raking up an old dispute as to the right of taking trout, with the more eagerness because it afforded him a chance of personally abusing her uncle face to face.

There could scarcely have been a more remarkable instance of the reversal of the normal condition of the mind caused by suppressed passion. A lover would at least have said nothing; if possible he would have contrived means to enable her to enjoy fishing in the best reaches of the stream. Robert Godwin, whose mind was wholly occupied by Felise, fell into a fury, and denounced and threatened Mr. Goring in unmeasured terms.

The latter regarded him with something like curiosity instead of turning him out of doors. Another reason Mr. Goring did not wish to break off amenities with the steward

was because he was the steward whom he had fought so often on public grounds. Now, if you personally quarrel with your enemy and order him off your premises, you lose half the value of your victory over him. He becomes distant—no longer a man, but a mere figure. Mr. Goring opposed Robert Godwin, yet his house was at any time open to him as a neighbour. Nor, indeed, did Mr. Goring feel any vindictiveness against him ; he looked upon him as a study.

While Robert Godwin was storming about Felise, in his heart he was abstracted from himself with hopeless love.

This reflex action of the mind led him to oppose the very creature who could have commanded his life. Such cases occasionally occur where parents who have doted upon their children destroy them in an hour of temporary distress lest those they loved so much should suffer. Something of this reflex action may be found in the suicide who sets a value upon the good things of the

world—upon money, power, place, credit—a value so high, as they are at the moment beyond his reach, that he determines to extinguish himself in order that he may never possess them. A backward, reflex action of the mind is often dangerous to mental equilibrium.

Never before had Robert Godwin stood so near the woman who had his whole existence in her hands as at the moment when she was stroking Ruy and inquiring how he became possessed of the horse. Her presence, the touch of her dress, the faint warmth of her breath—he felt her; it was almost an embrace. He had kept himself so much at a distance that the accidental touch of her dress was a caress. Having no imagination his love was not a sentiment; it was a reality of life, like the blood in his veins.

Ancient philosophers had a theory that the vital spirits were dispersed about the body, and flowed through it as the blood

flowed. Perhaps there really is a germ of truth in this old idea; possibly there is a circulation—a current of the electricity of life throughout the nerves. At that moment this current stopped in Robert Godwin—his life stood still; his concentration, his abstraction was so intense that he was in a manner dead. His nervous force was withdrawn from his limbs and frame, and concentrated upon her.

He was not conscious of hearing what she asked him, although he answered correctly. He had no idea how he left, or how he came to be riding along the road. His duties for the rest of the day were performed in a faultless manner—nothing omitted, nothing slurred; down to the last item everything was entered by the light of the candle on the cobwebbed washstand. But the dial of time had stood still for Robert Godwin. He did not know if it were day or night.

She had promised to come over to his house on the morrow.

Her dress had touched him ; her breath had reached his cheek.

She was coming to-morrow—after nine years she was coming to-morrow ! Only to see a horse ; but she was coming—she would stand by him again.

There was no sentiment in this feeling ; it was a matter of reality.

He might again feel her breath ; he might hear her dress rustle beside him. He would again meet the gaze of the deep, dreamy, grey eyes.

Yet it was not Felise ; it was Robert Godwin all the time. His feelings were of himself ; concentration became ten times more concentrated.

Robert Godwin did not inquire into the possibilities of the incident ; but, despite his self-depreciation and conviction that he could never be anything to her, hope sprang in his secret heart.

Great indeed is the commotion hope arouses when it has been absent many years. Nine

years had passed without hope—now hope returned.

The man could not rest. He worked with his hands the night through. He mended the gate; he arranged the ancient lumber in the attic; he was out to the carters at sunrise, relieved to have some one to drive.

Hope! This was why he could not rest—why he dug by the light of the lantern in the garden, as if searching for hidden treasure at midnight.

Felise, uneasy about Martial, had not ceased to think of Ruy; Martial must really be in difficulties to part with him. Her passion was completed by this thought. In real affection, if the loved one is in trouble, oil is poured upon the flame.

Mr. Goring could not tell her anything about Bernard's difficulties. He knew in a general way that he was not wealthy, and that was all. Abner, the gardener, brought in all the gossip of the village, but had not mentioned this.

Felise questioned Mary Shaw — these village girls are such terrible gossips ; but Shaw knew nothing, except that Mr. Barnard was very good-looking. The hussy did not add that once or twice lately she had had some conversation with that young gentleman. She omitted, too, to say that he had crossed her plump hand with a piece of silver, in gipsy style, for telling him secrets ; also that she had received a kiss with equanimity in the dusk of a summer evening.

Felise was still dwelling upon Martial's trouble, when in the morning she took half a dozen apples from the storeroom, and started over to see Ruy. Mr. Goring was choice in apples. His trees were famous ; he had all kinds, some that would keep till the autumn came twice.

As she went out Felise noticed several women of the hamlet standing in a group in the private roadway, each carrying a bucket. They were talking and gesticulating ; they

curtsied, but Felise did not stay to talk with them.

Farther along the path she met four or five more, also carrying buckets; one of these being Shaw's mother, presumed upon that connection to stand in front of Felise, and begin abusing Mr. Robert Godwin.

What was the matter now? asked Felise, full of her own thoughts and not in the mood to listen to grievances.

Matter enough—Godwin had railed in and padlocked the hamlet spring, and they could not get at it. True, the stream ran past the hamlet, but it was very shallow; and, till a dipping-place was constructed, it was not easy to get water from it unless they went half a mile to the first pool. Half a mile is a long way to stagger under a yoke in hot summer weather.

The railings round the spring had been in process of erection for a fortnight; they were high, and not to be climbed. But the carpenters were either in ignorance them-

selves, or had been bribed to conceal the truth, for it had been given out that these railings were only erected to prevent cattle from soiling the pure water. There would be a wicket-gate for the folk.

At the last moment, instead of a gate the opening was nailed up, and the spring completely enclosed. A placard was posted announcing that the spring was private, and warning all whom it might concern that damage to the fencing would be visited with the utmost rigour of the law—Mr. Robert Godwin's latest movement in the interest of his employer. If usage was established, the property might suffer at some future time.

Like a flock of sheep who cannot get through a gateway, the village women crowded round outside the high railings through which they could see the spring, set down their buckets, and fell to abuse.

By-and-by a man came along ; and, after deliberately inspecting the railings, shaking them to see if they were sound, and spelling

through the placard, he advised them to go to Mr. Goring—the general refuge in difficulty.

Away they all went accordingly to Mr. Goring, who at once threw open his gates, and told all to help themselves from the pump, which was supplied with good water from the same source as the spring.

He then put on his coat, being usually in his snowy shirt-sleeves in summer, had the pony harnessed, and drove away into the town to consult with his lawyer as to the legality of this encroachment.

Robert Godwin's real object in enclosing the spring was known only to himself—it was to spite and annoy Felise's nearest friend. The path to the spring was so short it could scarcely be said to trespass on the Squire's property—that was only the pretence. Well he knew that nothing would so excite Mr. Goring's indignation as so wanton a piece of tyranny. That Goring would at once take an axe and proceed to hew down

the railings was what he fully hoped and expected. Such an act would involve Felise's friend in endless litigation—such was the trap he had set.

But Mr. Goring did not fall into it. A man of a reflective mind, he had heard of these posts and railings, and soon began to question the motive alleged for their erection. Measures for the convenience and good of others, like protecting water from contamination, were not in accordance with the recent history of the Cornleigh estate. He suspected what afterwards happened. His indignation was none the less ; but he was cool, and he did not seize his axe and rush to destroy the obstruction. It was best to go about the work calmly and legally ; even with a good cause, and right on our side, violence often recoils upon the striker.

Martial—Martial—the thought of Martial compelled Felise to shut her eyes to these things. If Robert Godwin had been the cruellest tyrant since the world began, she

must have gone that morning to see Martial's horse, and if possible to learn more about his former owner.

'I want to see your horse again,' said Felise, almost immediately she arrived.

Robert led Ruy out for her inspection down to the garden, where his hoofs trampled the sward of the path.





CHAPTER XXIV.



ELISE gave Ruy an apple, and then another till the six were gone. He thrust his nostrils into her hand, and pushed her with his face for more. As he moved it brought Robert, who held him, close to Felise. Once again he felt the caress of her dress, even the touch of her arm.

The contrast between them was very marked. Her clear complexion, her golden hair; her form so beautifully shaped that even the loveliness of her face was overlooked. You must forget her form before you could see her features.

His black countenance—black like a piece

of wood that has lain for years in the rain ; his colourless eye ; his round stout frame expressive of ungraceful strength.

But Ruy, greedy for more apples, would not stand still. Robert lost the touch of her arm, and the caress of her dress.

‘ He is a fine horse,’ said Felise ; ‘ I cannot understand why his owner sold him. Did you not say he wanted money ?’

‘ His rent was overdue,’ said Robert. At ordinary times he would not have let this out ; at the moment he was abstracted from himself to such a degree that his lips answered without the consent of his mind. ‘ His Lady Day rent was overdue—and—and I bought the horse.’

‘ That he might have the money to pay.’

‘ Yes.’

‘ And the price was ?’

‘ Sixty pounds.’

‘ I thought you said seventy yesterday.’

‘ No—did I ?’

The horse-dealer’s instinct had for the

time deserted him. He forgot to add ten pounds to the sum he had really given.

‘Is he very much in difficulty?’ asked Felise, growing bolder.

‘I am not sure’ (this was the truth); ‘I should like to know.’

Felise was obliged to move, as Ruy worked his face too forcibly against her. She walked with Robert towards the stables, thinking if there was any other leading question she could put. She could not think of another.

‘Now may I ask you a favour?’ said Felise, as Robert, having handed Ruy over to the charge of a carter, was returning with her towards the house.

‘Certainly.’

‘Will you not let old Abner Brown stay in his cottage? He cannot live very much longer.’

Robert’s mental condition stiffened instantly. The request brought him back from the glamour into which he had been thrown.

‘He has already been there much longer than he ought,’ he said. ‘I believe it is a year since he ceased to work.’

‘Yes—think; he worked up to within one year of eighty-four—surely that should plead for him.’

‘I have to consider the estate,’ said Robert. ‘You know the circumstances—he cannot do any work, nor can his wife; we want the cottage for those who can.’

‘But has he not earned a little repose, Mr. Godwin?’

‘He can have it in the workhouse.’

‘Do not say so—do not mention that dreadful place. It would kill the old man to leave his garden.’

‘They will let him sweep up the leaves and weed the paths at the workhouse.’

‘He is very, very old, Mr. Godwin; he has lived in that cottage more than forty years, and all the trees in the garden are his own planting—there are apples, and a cherry——’

‘We want the cottage—we must have it; I know several who will be glad of it.’

‘They are no expense,’ continued Felise, ‘because their son keeps them; let them stay.’

‘It is impossible! as for young Abner, he ought not to live in our cottage and work off the estate.’

‘He works for Mr. Goring,’ said Felise, beginning to grow angry; but she checked it for the sake of the aged couple. ‘Mr. Godwin, I will pay you—what is the rent of the cottage?’

‘Two shillings a week.’

‘I will pay it, then you will lose nothing.’

‘The rent is paid now,’ said Godwin. ‘You misunderstand; we lose the man’s work who should live there.’

‘Oh, but they are so old!’

‘There is the workhouse.’

‘They will never go there.’

‘They must; the parish will not allow outdoor relief.’

‘ Mr. Godwin, do let them stay ; I have set my heart upon it.’

Who else could have resisted her ? The argument and the trace of anger which had begun to rise had brightened her colour and warmed her whole appearance. Robert refused her point-blank. The stored-up passion of so many years, causing an irresistible reflex action, forced him to oppose her. After this appeal from her, now he knew she wished it, had a sign shone in the heavens still he would not have yielded.

Felise, recognising his stubborn mood, forbore to press further ; she spoke for a few minutes with Miss Godwin, and left.

In the afternoon Mr. Goring came home, having consulted his solicitor, who thought that probably there was a right to enclose the spring, as it was on private property, though within a few yards of the highway. The question would be an awkward one ; it might cost hundreds of pounds to decide it ; he

advised his client to have nothing to do with it.

‘This is indeed a right!’ said Mr. Goring ‘Time it is that such “rights” should be abolished—the word itself is reversed in alluding to them. Has any man a “right,” then, to enclose the air, the light? Doubtless, if it could be done, there are those who would enclose the ocean and claim it as private property.’

He set out that very evening with Abner to construct a dipping-place in a part of the stream that passed through his little property, intending also to open a footpath to it for the use of the inhabitants.

Felise inquired if he had heard anything in Maasbury about Mr. Barnard’s alleged pecuniary difficulties.

‘No,’ said Goring. ‘Why do you wish to know?’

‘There seems so much trouble about us,’ replied Felise discreetly. ‘So many farmers failing—that is all.’

Nor had Mary Shaw discovered anything.

Felise turned over Miss Barnard's Dante scrap-book, wishing the owner would come for it.

Next morning she went over again to Godwin's, fed Ruy with apples, petted him and praised him, talked a little while with Robert, and begged for old Abner's cottage. In vain.

Four times in succession she visited Ruy, fed him, petted him, stroked him, and seemed more and more loth to leave him.

The fifth morning she did not come; Robert waited and worked with his hands, but she did not come. This was the Saturday; Sunday he did not think it at all likely she would come. He never slept, nor even attempted to do so on the Saturday or Sunday night. How he passed them it is difficult to tell, but he constantly moved something or other about with his hands. Two nights without sleep did not leave much trace on his bronze face; but his heart's bitterness

was worn deeper within him, as a storm wears gullies in the rock.

Already, so swift is gossip, the hamlet had begun to talk of Miss Goring and Mr. Godwin. Though Felise had helped them in so many ways, though her uncle was actually at that moment working for them, they could not say a good word, they could not credit her with any motive but greed of money.

‘She be a-looking after old Godwin’s gold.’ ‘Selling herself to the old miser.’ ‘Hope his money will choke her.’ ‘Never thought there was much in her, did you?’

Such was the tone of their comments.

Felise was disappointed; Miss Barnard had not called for the Dante scrap-book; after her bold effort she seemed no nearer her object. But an idea had been gradually forming itself in her mind, and on Monday she started, always impetuous, to put it into practice.

She went over and fed Ruy once more with apples, Ruy was as greedy of them as

a miser of coin ; she talked with Robert, and presently asked him for how much he would sell the horse ?

‘ Seventy pounds,’ said Robert.

‘ But you only gave sixty for him.’

‘ I have to make my turn—my profit,’ said Robert.

‘ Will you sell him to me ?’

‘ Of course.’

‘ I will buy him,’ said Felise.

‘ You shall have him—seventy pounds.’

‘ Sixty.’

‘ No—no.’

‘ Sixty-five.’

‘ Impossible.’

‘ Sixty-seven.’

‘ I couldn’t.’

‘ Sixty-seven—that is seven pounds profit, and all in a few days,’ said Felise.

‘ Seventy pounds,’ said Robert decidedly, and Felise saw that it was no use to bargain.

‘ Very well, seventy—I will bring you the

money this evening ; you will not part with him to anyone else in the meantime ?'

' Why, no—certainly not.'

' I will come then, this evening.'

She returned home, and asked Mr. Goring for the pony-carriage to drive into the town ; it was prepared, and she started alone.

So soon as she had left, Robert Godwin said to himself that he had been foolish to part with the horse so easily. She had so set her mind on the horse, he might have asked ninety safely. If he had kept him till the hunting-season some gentleman might have taken a fancy for him and gone still higher, perhaps a hundred and twenty. For the price of a horse is the price of a fancy, and goes up like stocks and shares when buyers are in the vein. Why, very likely she knew of some one who would give her ninety or a hundred for such a horse ; very likely that was the secret of her eagerness to secure him. Robert felt that he had been ' had ;' it hurt his semi-professional

pride as a horse-dealer now and then, generally heavily to his gain.

The miser and the lover—despair, hope, and anger—were they not strangely mingled in this man?

A passionate lover would have given his lady the horse in a moment, especially if as rich as Robert Godwin. With all his riches, and his secret passion, he had but once given her a present. One fair-day—eight years since—for a marvel he spent fourpence (the groat is still a unit in country places) at a stall on ‘fairings,’ a sort of sweet biscuit, thinking he might see her as he came home. He did see her, and gave her the groat’s worth of ‘fairings;’ the child took them silently, not without some awe of his black face.

He had cleared ten pounds profit, and he was torturing himself because he feared he had missed an opportunity to make twenty.

Yet his hands were never still because of his unmanageable passion—he must work

with them constantly ; his heart's bitterness was full to overflowing because he could not have her ; the hope her presence gave was like a sword splitting his very heart in two. She stood by him and his lips were dumb—commonplaces are dumbness—his lips were closed with iron-bolts ; he could not say one word to indicate his meaning, to seek her favour.

Are we cynical moderns right, after all, in our discredit of Fate ? Could there possibly be some fate here, some of that irresistible destiny which in Sophocles carries its tyrant will through generation after generation ? Petty circumstances unregarded lead men on, from step to step, from thought to thought, action to action ; is this Fate ?

The greed of the miser ; the agony of the lover who knows that he cannot be loved ; the pitiless animosity of the tyrant turning by reflex action against the creature of his love ; the sharp sword of a hope that only shows what might be *if*—these are terrible goads.



CHAPTER XXV.



FURRYING into the town as fast as her pony could take her, Felise was in deep anxiety, for she had bought the horse without the money to pay for him. She was so fearful lest Godwin should sell to some one else, lest Ruy should be sent away to some market at a distance and disappear, that she bid for him before she had made arrangements to obtain the money.

When she was brought a child to Mr. Goring, her fortune consisted of some fifty pounds and a set of pearls. Of the fifty pounds Goring had been obliged to spend

four from time to time on necessities for his charge. At sixteen, he placed the remainder in a private savings-bank for her, and gave her the pass-book. Since then she had drawn four more; there were consequently forty-two pounds remaining. The value of the pearls was one hundred and fifty, so they had been estimated; in fact, they had originally cost more. If only she could find some one to advance her twenty-eight pounds on these pearls, she could complete her purchase. She feared the difficulty arising from her sex, and from the fact that she was not yet of age.

She had no choice of persons, for there was but one to whom she could apply—a silversmith who was known to be wealthy. He hopped a little, or halted in some way in his gait; after advancing a step he paused, and drew his other foot up level in a sort of plaintive style, as much as to say, 'I should indeed be a man if it were not for this infirmity.' This deliberative motion, extending

into his ideas, had enabled him to accumulate a considerable fortune.

Now the silversmith had always shown a kind of friendship for Mr. Goring, inviting him into his private room if the latter brought his watch to be repaired, and now and then calling at Beechknoll as he drove past to regulate some one's clock. Secretly he gave Mr. Goring to understand that, although his business position forbade him to openly take any part, their views really coincided. He looked on the Cornleigh family as an incubus, and their ways as despotic.

At heart he owned he was a radical, though Mrs. Cornleigh herself sometimes called at the shop if she wanted a pin put in a brooch, or some similar trifle; for all their silver and electro 'the family' went to London, and never spent a pound in the town.

The fact was the silversmith, halting at every step and considering, had noticed that Mr. Goring's little property lay like a wedge between two sections of the Cornleigh estate.

The little property was so small he thought Goring could never live on it long without borrowing money, and who should he go to for a loan but his friend the silversmith?

Loans mount up; in time, Goring would have to part with the place at a low price—the silversmith's price; then, once in possession, the silversmith could re-sell to the Cornleighs at a great advance—perhaps double, for it was well known to him that the Squire, or the Squire's agent, Robert Godwin, had fixed his heart on this fragment of land to round off the estate.

The silversmith dwelt much in secret upon this idea, for it promised in one coup to give him more than he could make in ten years' sale of the goods in his shop-window. More than once he had hinted at an advance; but Goring either had not understood him, or purposely turned the subject. The years were rolling on; the silversmith's hair was as white now as the frosted silver in his cases, and his ingenious scheme had not visibly

progressed a jot. With increasing age he drew his lame foot forward with a slower and more pathetic limp, and waited. By-and-by it would happen. To this man Felise was hastening with her pearls.

As she drove into the precincts of the town, she glanced at a fine display of flowers in the bow-window of a private residence. The flowers suggested unusual skill in selection, and unlimited care. Felise saw the blue, and yellow, and scarlet of the flowers, but did not observe the face behind them.

It was the face of Rosa Wood. The merchant's daughter, in her unhappiness, had taken to passing much of her time at this window, which commanded a view of the street, to enjoy the poor pleasure—if pleasure it was—of seeing Martial pass at rare intervals. Unless upon some necessary business he never entered the town, the very name of which was now distasteful to him.

But, as she had no other means of seeing him, Rosa kept a constant watch at the

window, or in the garden in front of it; and, lest people should notice her being there so much, and to while away the time, she occupied herself with flowers. It was not so sad as the story of the pot of basil, and yet there was a dead hope concealed under the coloured petals so sedulously tended. Flowers so often screen unhappiness.

For many days Rosa had endeavoured to discover for whom Martial had deserted her; a woman herself, she never doubted but that his conduct was due to some other woman. A woman always blames a woman.

Some one obtained a reputation for astuteness by remarking when he heard of mischief, 'Who is the woman?' Instead of which he thereby proved the inferiority of the masculine intellect, since it required great talent to point out a clue which has always been obvious to the feminine mind. Let a man be, in fact, never so innocent—let him be really at his club, or in Paris on business, or gone to see

a fellow about a dog—his wife, or his *fiancée*, is sure to suspect a woman.

Rosa could not find the woman. Though she no longer visited at the Manor House, the Misses Barnard called upon her just the same as during their brother's engagement; but these ladies, too, were at fault. Three of them together could not find out the other woman.

That afternoon however, at the sound of wheels, Rosa looked up, saw Felise, and said to herself instantly, 'There she is.'

It is impossible for me to explain how she arrived at this conclusion, for no one but a woman could experience such intuition.

Rosa turned pale, then she started up; her knees failed her, and she sat down again. But the next moment she recovered herself, and hastened, still trembling, into the garden; whence, behind the shrubs, she could see where the pony-carriage stopped. It stopped about midway up the street; she could not distinguish the shop. She called a man who

worked in the garden, and despatched him to find out to whom the pony-carriage belonged. He returned in a few minutes, having recognised it as Mr. Goring's.

Miss Goring, then, was the other woman.

Felise never attended the concerts, balls, or amusements which were given in Maasbury, nor did Mr. Goring ever enter the place except on business. Consequently Rosa had not remembered this family when she ran over, time after time, all the families of the neighbourhood, and checked them on her fingers.

Although the Manor House was no great distance from Maasbury, there was a range of downs between, and the people of the two places seemed to belong to different provinces, having so little intercourse. Everything is very local in the country. The Misses Barnard had scarcely heard of Felise, even by name, till that day when, overcome by fatigue, she walked up to the front-door.

But without doubt this was the woman.

Her face burning, her hands cold, her heart throbbing, Rosa returned to the window and waited to catch another view of her rival as she left the town.

Felise drove straight to the silversmith's door, and was received with beaming politeness. The old gentleman really possessed a certain air of fashion, an impressive, magnificent kind of courtesy—there was a style in the very way he placed a chair for his visitor. His frosted hair, his faultless dress, his exquisite limp and plaintive expression were far above the stage on which he played his part. Felise was shown into the private room behind the counter—a room elegantly furnished—before she could utter a word on business.

The silversmith's expectations were high.

'At last,' he thought, 'she has come to open negotiations—to prepare the way; just as I expected. Now for the loan!'

At this moment Felise produced a casket from her bag, and placed it on the table.

The silversmith's heart fell; it was not the loan then, only some trifling repairs.

But at the sight of the pearls which she drew forth and placed upon the table, the eye of the old usurer (for such, in fact, he was) glistened again. Felise went to the point at once, and asked him to advance upon them as much money as he could. Here by her inexperience she committed a mistake by leaving him to fix the amount; she should have fixed it herself, and as high as possible. Felise was happily ignorant of the craft and subtlety of the world.

Humming and hawing as he handled the pearls, the silversmith raised his eyebrows in his most plaintive and deprecatory manner, and regretted that it would not be possible to advance much upon them. Pearls had dropped, pearls were not nearly so valuable; another pearl-fishery had just been discovered; there were large stocks now that could not be sold, and so forth.

‘But they are worth a hundred and fifty

pounds,' said Felise, beginning to feel very miserable. 'Tell me now how much you can lend me.'

'Well,' said the silversmith, very, very deliberately, 'it is unpleasant—it is hard to refuse; but really, Miss Goring, as a matter of business I don't think I could advance anything.'

'Nothing!' said Felise, in blank despair.

'Not in the way of business,' said the silversmith, in the most caressing tones of a naturally low voice. 'But still with a friend it is different.'

Felise began to sit very upright in her chair; she had a sense of insult, as if she was being put under an obligation.

'And for you or Mr. Goring's convenience,' he continued, 'of course I shall be most happy if you will permit me, as a favour to me, to advance a small sum upon them.'

Felise sank back again in her chair; he had put it the other way, as if he should be under an obligation to her.

‘I should be very glad,’ she said. ‘And how much?’

‘Would now, let me see—ten pounds——’

‘Oh dear no!’ cried Felise. ‘Not nearly enough.’

‘Fifteen pounds——’

‘I want twice as much,’ said Felise hastily, ‘I want thirty pounds—I mean I want twenty-eight pounds, if you please.’

This was another mistake; twenty-eight pounds, he saw at once, was the sum she would be satisfied with.

He paused and seemed to weigh the matter in his mind.

‘Does Mr. Goring—excuse me—does Mr. Goring know you are bringing me these pearls?’ he asked.

‘No—no—that is—but they are mine, quite mine. They were my mother’s; I can do as I like with them.’

‘And, pardon me again, are you of age?’

Felise’s heart fell as she faltered a negative.

‘I am obliged to make these inquiries,’

said the silversmith ; ‘ you must really pardon me. Under the circumstances, I think we had better let this be a purely friendly transaction, without any formal record. If I am willing to trust you with my money on your word that these are your pearls, will you trust them to me ?’

‘ Of course I will—of course I will trust them to you.’

‘ Then there need be no writing at all ; I will give you the twenty-eight pounds ; you shall yourself put the pearls in my safe, and there they will remain. In six months’ time you will repay me the twenty-eight pounds with five per cent. interest, and I will restore you the pearls. Will that do ?’

‘ Yes,’ said Felise, though at the same time it occurred to her that there was no prospect whatever of her possessing the money at that date.

The silversmith had considered within himself that this transaction was one of those which could not be made valid by any in-

genuity of terms. He looked for his profit in the influence he should possess with Miss Goring, who would forward his views if the little scheme alluded to came to be realised; he protected himself and would escape obloquy, if the transaction became known, by charging a merely nominal interest (for usurers); he further protected himself because there was not a scrap of writing to show that he had ever had the pearls. He felt certain they were worth fully two hundred pounds.

With her own hands Felise placed the casket in the safe, as if permission to personally deposit them was a guarantee of good faith on behalf of the receiver, and twenty-eight sovereigns were counted down on the table. The usurer in his most courtier-like manner took her to her pony-carriage, gave her the reins, and bowed in good style as she drove off.

Round the corner of the street Felise stopped at the private savings bank; she

was barely in time ; in fact, the hour for closing had struck, and to an ordinary customer it would have been too late. Felise's presence seemed to fill the dingy room with so unusual a light that the cashier, dumb and nervous, hurried to carry out her wishes. Forty pounds were paid to her in notes, two pounds in gold ; this made up the seventy pounds for Ruy. The pony-carriage went rattling down the street ; Felise was happy, she had succeeded. Had the pearls been worth a thousand pounds, she would have left them for the twenty-eight.

For the craft and subtlety of this world are too deep for most of us. For instance, who would suspect an oyster of deceit ? Yet the other afternoon, while looking at some red mullet in a fishmonger's shop—red mullet are very nice, if you can persuade the cook to split them and remove the bitter substance which generally spoils them ; you must have this done most carefully—while I was looking at the red mullet and feeling the

slenderness of my purse, and thinking of Lucullus and Trimalchio's banquet, and how red mullet really are very good—in short, while temptation trod on the heels of prudence, in steps an important old gentleman.

He had an air of wrath and ire; a rich, nervous, irritable, insist-upon-my-rights sort of personage; a gold-mounted eye-glass swung on his chest one moment, and was up at his eye the next; his Java cane came down thump on the sanded floor; a man no fishmonger dared baulk of his whim.

‘Oysters,’ he said.

The fishmonger bowed, rubbed his hands, quite shone with obsequiousness.

‘Natives,’ continued the old gentleman. ‘Two dozen, and mind, *they are to be opened at my door.*’

‘Certainly, sir; with pleasure, sir. Anything else, sir; fine turbot, sir—ah-hum!’

The old gentleman had gone down the street.

‘Don't see how it's to be done,’ said a shop-assistant.

‘Take a knife with you and open them on the area window-sill.’

But why should the old gentleman wish the oysters opened at his door? Could they possess the power of transforming themselves on the way from natives into blue-points? Or could it be possible that mistakes occasionally occur when quantities are opened at shops, and ‘natives’ and other varieties get mixed? The old gentleman wanted them to arrive at his house in the shell they had been dredged up in; he feared the craft and subtlety of the wicked oyster.

The lame silversmith was a sort of person with whom, if you had dealings, it was as well to have the oysters opened at your door.

END OF VOL. I.

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