

Blackmore Richard Doddridge

**Cradock Nowell: A Tale of the
New Forest. Volume 1 of 3**



Richard Blackmore

**Cradock Nowell: A Tale of
the New Forest. Volume 1 of 3**

«Public Domain»

Blackmore R.

Cradock Nowell: A Tale of the New Forest. Volume 1 of 3 /
R. Blackmore — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	8
CHAPTER III	11
CHAPTER IV	14
CHAPTER V	19
CHAPTER VI	21
CHAPTER VII	24
CHAPTER VIII	28
CHAPTER IX	31
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	32

Richard Doddridge Blackmore

Cradock Nowell: A Tale of the New Forest. Vol. 1 (of 3)

CHAPTER I

Within the New Forest, and not far from its western boundary, as defined by the second perambulation of the good King Edward the First, stands the old mansion of the Nowells, the Hall of Nowelhurst. Not content with mere exemption from all feudal service, their estate claims privileges, both by grant and custom. The benefit of Morefall trees in six walks of the forest, the right of digging marl, and turbary illimitable, common of pannage, and license of drawing akermast, pastime even of hawking over some parts of the Crown land, – all these will be catalogued as claims quite indefeasible, if the old estates come to the hammer, through the events that form my story. With many of these privileges the Royal Commissioners will deal in a spirit of scant courtesy, when the Nowell influence is lost in the neighbouring boroughs; but as yet these claims have not been treated like those of some poor commoners.

“Pooh, pooh, my man, don’t be preposterous: you know, as well as I do, these gipsy freedoms were only allowed to balance the harm the deer did”.

And if the rights of that ancient family are ever called in question, some there are which will require a special Act to abolish them. For Charles the Second, of merry memory (saddened somewhat of late years), espied among the maids of honour an uncommonly pretty girl, whose name was Frances Nowell. He suddenly remembered, what had hitherto quite escaped him, how old Sir Cradock Nowell – beautiful Fanny’s father – had saved him from a pike-thrust during Cromwell’s “crowning mercy”. In gratitude, of course, for this, he began to pay most warm attentions to the Hampshire maiden. He propitiated that ancient knight with the only boon he craved – craved hitherto all in vain – a plenary grant of easements in the neighbourhood of his home. Soon as the charter had received the royal seal and signature, the old gentleman briskly thrust it away in the folds of his velvet mantle. Then taking the same view of gratitude which his liege and master took, home he went without delay to secure his privileges. When the king heard of his departure, without any kissing of hands, he was in no wise disconcerted; it was the very thing he had intended. But when he heard that lovely Fanny was gone in the same old rickety coach, even ere he began to whisper, and with no leave of the queen, His Majesty swore his utmost for nearly half an hour. Then having spent his fury, he laughed at the “sell”, as he would have called it if the slang had been invented, and turned his royal attention to another of his wife’s young maidens.

Nowelhurst Hall looks too respectable for any loose doings of any sort. It stands well away from the weeping of trees, like virtue shy of sentiment, and therefore has all the wealth of foliage shed, just where it pleases, around it. From a rising ground the house has sweet view of all the forest changes, and has seen three hundred springs wake in glory, and three hundred autumns waning. Spreading away from it wider, wider, slopes “the Chase”, as they call it, with great trees stretching paternal arms in the vain attempt to hold it. For two months of the twelve, when the heather is in blossom, all that chase is a glowing reach of amaranth and purple. Then it fades away to pale orange, dim olive, and a rusty brown when Christmas shudders over it; and so throughout young green and russet, till the July tint comes back again. Oftentimes in the fresh spring morning the blackcocks – “heathpoults” as they call them – lift their necks in the livening heather, swell their ruffling breasts, and crow for their rivals to come and spar with them. Below the chase the whiskers of the curling wood converge into a giant beard, tufted here and there with hues of a varying richness; but for the main of it, swelling

and waving, crisping, fronding, feathering, coying, and darkening here and there, until it reach the silver mirror of the spreading sea. And the seaman, looking upwards from the war-ship bound for India, looking back at his native land, for the last of all times it may be, over brushwood waves, and billows of trees, and the long heave of the gorseland: "Now, that's the sort of place", he says, as the distant gables glisten; "the right sort of berth for our jolly old admiral, and me for his butler, please God, when we've licked them Crappos as ought to be".

South-west of the house, half a mile away, and scattered along the warren, the simple village of Nowelhurst digests its own ideas. In and out the houses stand, endwise, crossways, skewified, anyhow except upside down, and some even tending that way. It looks like a game of dominoes, when the leaves of the table have opened and gape betwixt the players. Nevertheless, it is all good English; for none are bitterly poor there; in any case of illness, they have the great house to help them, not proudly, but with feeling; and, more than this, they have a parson who leads instead of driving them. There are two little shops exceedingly anxious to under-sell each other, and one mild alehouse conducted strictly upon philosophic principles. Philosophy under pressure, a caviller would call it, for the publican knows, and so do his customers, that if poachers were encouraged there, or any uproarious doings permitted (except in the week of the old and new year), down would come his license-board, like a flag hauled in at sunset.

Pleasant folk, who there do dwell, calling their existence "life", and on the whole enjoying it more than many of us do; forasmuch as they know their neighbours far better than themselves, and perceive each cousin's need of trial, and console him when he gets it. Not but what we ourselves partake the first and second advantages, only we miss the fruition of them, by turning our backs on the sufferer.

Nowelhurst village is not on the main road, but keeps a straggling companionship with a quiet parish highway which requires much encouragement. This little highway does its best to blink the many difficulties, or, if that may not be, to compromise them, and establish a pleasant footing upon its devious wandering course from the Lymington road to Ringwood. Here it goes zig to escape the frown of a heavy-browed crest of furzery, and then it comes zag when no soul expects it, because a little stream has babbled at it. It even seems to bob and dip, or jump, as the case may be, for fear of prying into an old oak's storey or dusting a piece of grass land. The hard-hearted traveller who lives express, and is bound for the train at Ringwood, curses, too often, up hill and down dale, the quiet lane's inconsistency. What right has any road to do anything but go straight on end to its purpose? What decent road stops for a gossip with flowers – flowers overhanging the steep ascent, or eavesdropping on the rabbit-holes? And as for the beauty of ferns – confound them, they shelter the horse-fly – that horrible forest-fly, whose tickling no civilized horse can endure. Even locusts he has heard of as abounding in the New Forest; and if a swarm of them comes this very hot weather, good-bye to him, horse and trap, newest patterns, sweet plaid, and chaste things.

And good-bye to thee, thou bustling "traveller" – whether technically so called or otherwise, – a very good fellow in thy way, but not of nature's pattern. So counter-sunk, so turned in a lathe, so pressed and rolled by steam-power, and then condensed hydraulically, that the extract of flowers upon thy shirt is but as the oil of machinery. But we who carry no chronometer, neither puff locomotively – now he is round the corner – let us saunter down this lane beyond the mark-oak and the blacksmith's, even to the sandy rise whence the Hall is seen. The rabbits are peeping forth again, for the dew is spreading quietude: the sun has just finished a good day's work and is off for the western waters. Over the rounded heads and bosses, and then the darker dimples of the many-coloured foliage – many-coloured even now with summer's glory fusing it – over heads and shoulders, and breasts of heaving green, floods the lucid amber, trembling at its own beauty – the first acknowledged leniency of the July sun. Now every moment has its difference. Having once acknowledged that he may have been too downright in his ride of triumph, the sun, like every generous nature, scatters broadcast his amends. Overholt, and knoll, and lea, and narrow dingle, scooped with shadow where the brook is wimpling,

and through the breaks of grass and gravel, where the heather purples, scarcely yet in prime flush, and down the tall wood overhanging, mossed and lichened, green and grey, as the grove of Druids – over, through, and under all flows pervading sunset. Then the birds begin discoursing of the thoughts within them – thoughts that are all happiness, and thrill and swell in utterance. Through the voice of the thicket–birds – the mavis, the whinchats, and the warblers – comes the tap of the yaffingale, the sharp, short cry of the honey–buzzard above the squirrel’s cage, and the plaining of the turtle–dove.

But from birds and flowers, winding roads and woods, and waters where the trout are leaping, come we back to the only thing that interests a man much – the life, the doings, and the death of his fellow–men. From this piece of yellow road, where the tree–roots twist and wrestle, we can see the great old house, winking out of countless windows, deep with sloping shadows, mantling back from the clasp of the forest, in a stately, sad reserve. It looks like a house that can endure and not talk about affliction, that could disclose some tales of passion were it not undignified, that remembers many a generation, and is mildly sorry for them. Oh! house of the Nowells, grey with shadow, wrapped in lonely grandeur, cold with the dews of evening and the tone of sylvan nightfall, never through twenty generations hast thou known a darker fortune than is gathering now around thee, growing through the summer months, deepening ere the leaves drop! All men, we know, are born for trial, to work, to bear, to purify; but some there are whom God has marked for sorrow from their cradle. And strange as it appears to us, whose image is inverted, almost always these are they who *seem* to lack no probation. The gentle and the large of heart, the meek and unpretending, yet gifted with a rank of mind that needs no self–assertion, trebly vexed in this wayfaring, we doubt not they are blest tenfold in the everlasting equipoise.

Perhaps it was the July evening that made me dream and moralise; but now let us gaze from that hill again, under the fringe of autumn’s gold, in the ripeness of October. The rabbits are gone to bed much earlier – comparatively, I mean, with the sun’s retirement – because the dew is getting cold, and so has lost its flavour; and a nest of young weasels is coming abroad, “and really makes it unsafe, my dear”, says Mrs. Bunny to her third family, “to keep our long–standing engagements”. “Send cards instead”, says the timid Miss Cony; “I can write them, mamma, on a polypod”.

Now though the rabbits shirk their duty, we can see the congregation returning down the village from the church, which is over the bridge, towards Lymington, and seems set aside to meditate. In straggling groups, as gossip lumps them, or the afternoon sermon disposes, home they straggle, wondering whether the girl has kept the fire up. Kept the fire “blissy” is the bodily form of the house–thought. But all the experienced matrons of the village have got together; and two, who have served as monthly nurses, are ready to pull side–hair out. There is nothing like science for setting people hard by the ears and the throat–strings. But we who are up in the forest here can catch no buzz of voices, nor even gather the point of dispute, while they hurry on to recount their arguments, and triumph over the virile mind, which, of course, knows nothing about it.

The question is, when Lady Nowell will give an heir to the name, the house, the village, the estates, worth fifty thousand a year – an heir long time expected, hoped for in vain through six long years, now reasonably looked for. All the matrons have settled that it must be on a Sunday; everybody knows that Sunday is the day for all grand ceremonies. Even Nanny Gammon’s pigs – But why pursue their arguments – the taste of the present age is so wonderfully nice and delicate. I can only say that the Gammers, who snubbed the Gaffers upon the subject, miscarried by a fortnight, though right enough hebdomadally. They all fixed it for that day fortnight, but it was done while they were predicting. And not even the monthly nurses anticipated, no one ever guessed at the contingency of – twins.

CHAPTER II

“Whishtrew, whishtrew, every bit of me! Whatever will I do, God knows. The blue ribbon there forenint me, and the blessed infants one to aich side”!

The good nurse fell against a chest of drawers, as she uttered this loud lament; the colour ebbed from her cherry cheeks, and her sturdy form shook with terror. She had scarcely turned her back, she could swear, upon her precious charges; and now only look at the murder of it! Two little cots stood side by side, not more than four feet asunder; and on each cot fast asleep lay a fine baby, some three or four days old. Upon the floor between them was a small rosette of blue ribbon. The infants were slumbering happily; and breathing as calmly as could be. Each queer little dump of a face was nestled into its pillow; and a small red podge, which was meant for an arm, lay crosswise upon the flannel. Nothing could look more delicious to the eyes of a fine young woman.

Nevertheless, that fine young woman, Mrs. Biddy O’Gaghan, stood gazing from one cot to the other, in hopeless and helpless dismay. Her comely round face was drawn out with horror, her mouth wide open, and large tears stealing into her broad blue Irish eyes.

“And the illigant spots upon them, as like as two Blemishing spannels; nor the blissed saints in heaven, if so be they was tuk to glory, afore they do be made hairyticks, cudn’t know one from the ither, no more nor the winds from the brazes. And there go the doctor’s bell again! Oh whurra–strew, whurra, whurra”!

Now Biddy O’Gaghan would scarcely have been head–nurse at Nowelhurst Hall, before she was thirty years old, but for her quick self–reliance. She was not the woman therefore to wring her hands long, and look foolish. Her Irish wit soon suggested so many modes of solution, all so easy, and all so delightfully free from reason, that the only question was how to listen to all at once. First she went and bolted carefully both the doors of the nursery. Then, with a look of triumph, she rushed to her yellow workbox, snatched up a roll of narrow tape, some pins, and a pair of scissors, and knelt upon the floor very gingerly, where the blue ribbon lay. Then, having pinned one end of the tape to the centre of the rosette, and the rosette itself to the carpet, she let the roll run with one hand, and drew the tape tight with the other, until it arrived at the nose of the babe ensconced in the right–hand cot. There she cut it off sharply, with a snip that awoke the child, who looked at her contemplatively from a pair of large grey eyes. Leaving him to his meditations, she turned the tape on the pin, and drew it towards the nasal apology of the other infant. The measure would not reach; it was short by an inch and a half. What clearer proof could be given of the title to knot and pendency?

But alas for Biddy’s triumph! The infant last geometrised awoke at that very moment, and lifting his soft fat legs, in order to cry with more comfort, disclosed the awkward fact that his left knee was nearer by three inches to the all–important rosette, than was any part of his brother. Biddy shook anew, as she drew the tape to the dimples. What is the legal centre of a human being? Upon my word, I think I should have measured from the *ὀμφαλός*.

Ere further measurement could be essayed, all the premises were gone utterly; for the baby upon the right contrived to turn in the flannels, as an unsettled silkworm pupa rolls in his cocoon. And he managed to revolve in the wrong direction; it was his fate through life. Instead of coming towards the rosette, as a selfish baby would have done, away he went, with his grey eyes blinking at the handle of the door. Then he put up his lips, like the ring of a limpet, and poked both his little fists into his mouth.

“Well, I never”, cried Bridget; “that settles it altogether. Plase the saints an’ he were a rogue, it’s this way he’d ha’ come over on his blessed little empty belly. My darlin’ dumplin’ dillikins, it’s you as it belongs to, and a fool I must be to doubt of it. Don’t I know the bend o’ your nose, and the way your purty lips dribbles, then? And to think I was near a robbing you! What with the sitting

up o' nights, and the worry of that carroty spalpeen, and the way as they sends my meals up, Paddy O'Gaghan, as is in glory, wud take me for another man's wife".

With great relief and strong conviction, Mrs. O'Gaghan began to stitch the truant rosette upon the cap of the last-mentioned baby, whence (or from that of the other) it had dropped through her own loose carelessness, before they were cuddled away. And with that ribbon she stitched upon him the heritage of the old family, the name of "Cradock Nowell", borne by the eight last baronets, and the largest estates and foremost rank in all the fair county of Hants.

"Sure an' it won't come off again", said Biddy to the baby, as she laid down her needle, for, like all genuine Irishwomen, she despised a thimble; "and it's meself as is to blame, for not taking a nick on your ear, dear. A big fool I must be only to plait it in afore, and only for thinkin' as it wud come crossways, when you wint to your blissed mammy, dear. And little more you be likely to get there, I'm afeared, me darlin'. An' skeared anybody would be to hoort so much as a hair o' your skull, until such time as you has any, you little jule of jewels, and I kisses every bit on you, and knows what you be thinking on in the dead hoor of the night. Bless your ticksy-wicksies, and the ground as you shall step on, and the childer as you shall have".

Unprepared as yet to contemplate the pleasures of paternity, Master Cradock Nowell elect opened great eyes and great mouth, in the untutored wrath of hunger; while from the other cot arose a lusty yell, as of one already visited by the injustice of the world. This bitter cry awoke the softness and the faint misgivings of the Irishwoman's heart.

"And the pity of the world it is ye can't both be the eldest. And bedad you should, if Biddy O'Gaghan had the making of the laws. There shan't be any one iver can say as ye haven't had justice, me honey".

Leaving both the unconscious claimants snugly wrapped and smiling, she called to her assistants, now calmly at tea in an inner room. "Miss Penny, run down now just, without thinking, and give my compliments, Mrs. O'Gaghan's kind compliments to the housekeeper's room, and would Mrs. Toaster oblige me with her big square scales? No weights you needn't bring, you know. Only the scales, and be quick with them".

"And please, ma'am, what shall I say as you wants them for"?

"Never you mind, Jane Penny. Wait you till your betters asks of you. And mayn't I weigh my grandfather's silver, without ask you, Jane Penny? And likely you'd rather not, and good reason for that same, I dessay, after the way as I leaves it open".

Overlooking this innuendo, as well as the slight difficulty of weighing, without weights, imaginary bullion, Miss Penny hurried away; for the wrath of the nurse was rising, and it was not a thing to be tampered with. When Jane returned with the beam of justice, and lingered fondly in the doorway to watch its application, the head-nurse sidled her grandly into the little room, and turned the key upon her.

"Go and finish your tea, Miss Penny. No draughts in this room, if you please, miss. Save their little sows, and divil a hair upon them. Now come here, my two chickabiddies".

Adjusting the scales on the bed, where at night she lay with the infants warm upon her, she took the two red lumps of innocence in her well-rounded arms, and laid one in either scale. As she did so, they both looked up and smiled: it reminded them, I suppose, of being laid in their cradles. Blessing them both, and without any nervousness – for to her it could make no difference – she raised by the handle the balance. It was a very nice question – which baby rose first from the counterpane. So very slight was the difference, that the rosette itself might almost have turned the scale. But there was a perceptible difference, of perhaps about half an ounce, and that in favour of the sweet-tempered babe who now possessed the ribbon; and who, as the other rose slowly before him, drew up his own little toes, and tried prematurely to crow at him. Prematurely, my boy, in many ways.

No further mistrust was left in the mind of Mrs. O'Gaghan. Henceforth that rosetted infant is like to outweigh and outmeasure his brother, a hundredfold, a thousandfold, in every balance, by every standard, save those of self, and of true love, and perhaps of the kingdom of Heaven.

CHAPTER III

The reason why Mrs. O'Gaghan, generally so prompt and careful, though never very lucid, had neglected better precautions in a matter so important, was simply and solely this – Lady Nowell, the delicate mother, was dying. It had been known, ever since the birth, that she had scarcely any chance of recovery. And Biddy loved her with all her warm heart, and so did every one in the house who owned a heart that could love. In the great anxiety, all things were upside down. None of the servants knew where to go for orders, and few could act without them; the housekeeper was all abroad; house-steward there was none; head-butler Hogstaff cried in his pantry, and wiped his eyes with the leathers; and, as for the master of them all, Sir Cradock Nowell himself, he rarely left the darkened room, and when he did he could not see well.

A sweet frail creature the young mother was, wedded too early, as happens here more often than we are aware of. Then disappointed, and grieving still more at her husband's disappointment, she had set her whole heart so long and so vainly upon prospective happiness, that now it was come she had not the strength to do anything more than smile at it. And smile she did, very sweetly, all the time she knew she was dying; she felt so proud of those two fine boys, and could not think how she had them. Ever so many times Sir Cradock, hanging fondly over her wan, sweet face, ordered the little wretches away, who would keep on coming to trouble her. But every time she looked up at him with such a feeble glory, and such a dash of humour, – “You've got them at last, and now you don't care a bit about them; but oh! please do for my sake”; every time her fading eyes followed them to the door, so that the loving husband, cold with the shadow of the coming void, had to whisper, “Bring them back, put them here between us”.

Although he knew that she was dying, he could not feel it yet; the mind admitted that fearful truth, but the heart repulsed it. Further as she sunk, and further yet, from his pleading gaze, the closer to her side he crept, the more he clasped her shadowy hands, and raised her drooping neck; the fonder grew the entreating words, the whispers of the love-time, faint smiles that hoped to win her smile, although they moved in tears. And smile she did once more on earth, through the ashy hue – the shadow of the soul's wings fluttering – when two fresh lives, bought by her death, were shown for the farewell to her.

“And if it's wrong, then, she'll make it right”, thought the conscientious Biddy. “I can take my oath on't she knowed the differ from the very first; though nobody else couldn't see it, barring the caps they was put in. Now, if only that gossoon will consent to her see them, once more, and it can't hurt, the poor darlin' – and the blessing as comes from the death's gaze – ”

Mrs. O'Gaghan's doubts were ended by the entrance of the doctor, a spare, short man, with a fiery face, red hair, and quick little eyes. He was not more than thirty years old, but knew his duties thoroughly; nevertheless, he would not have been there but for the sudden emergency. He was now come to fetch the nurse, having observed that the poor mother's eyes were gleaming feebly, once and again, towards the door that led to the nursery; and at last she had tried to raise her hand, and point in that direction. So in came Biddy, sobbing hard, with a babe on either arm; and she curtsied cleverly to Sir Cradock without disturbing the equipoise. But the mother's glance was not judicial, as poor Biddy had expected – her heart and soul were far beyond rosettes, and even titles. In one long, yearning look, she lingered on her new-born babes, then turned those hazy eyes in fondness to her kneeling husband's, then tried to pray or bless the three, and shivered twice, and died.

For days and weeks Sir Cradock Nowell bore his life, but did not live. All his clear intellect and strong will, noble plans, and useful labours, all his sense of truth and greatness, lay benumbed and frozen in the cold track of death. He could not bear to see his children, he would not even hear of them; “they had robbed him of his loved one, and what good were they? Little red things; perhaps he would love them when they grew like their mother”. Those were not his expressions, for he was

proud and shy; but that was the form his thoughts would take, if they could take any. No wonder that he, for a time, was lost beyond the verge of reason; because that blow, which most of all stuns and defeats the upright man, had descended on him – the blow to the sense of justice. This a man of large mind feels often from his fellow-men, never from his Maker. But Sir Cradock was a man of intellect, rather than of mind. To me a large mind seems to be strong intellect quickened with warm heart. Sir Cradock Nowell had plenty of intellect, and plenty of heart as well, but he kept the two asunder. So much the better for getting on in the world; so much the worse for dealing with God. A man so constituted rarely wins, till overborne by trouble, that only knowledge which falls (like genius) where our Father listeth. So the bereaved man measured justice by the ells and inches of this world.

And it did seem very hard, that he who had lived for twenty years, from light youth up to the balance age of forty, not only without harming any fellow-mortal, but, upon fair average, to do good in the world – it seemed, I say – it was, thought he – most unjust that such a man could not set his serious heart upon one little treasure without losing it the moment he had learned its value. Now, with pride to spur sad memory – bronze spurs to a marble horse – he remembered how his lovely Violet chose him from all others. Gallant suitors crowded round her, for she was rich as well as beautiful; but she quietly came from out them all for him, a man of twice her age. And he who had cared for none till then, and had begun to look on woman as a stubby-bearded man looks back at the romance of his first lather, he first admired her grace and beauty, then her warmth of heart and wit, then, scorning all analysis, her own sweet self; and loved her.

A few days after the funeral he was walking sadly up and down in his lonely library, caring no whit for his once-loved books, for the news of the day, or his business, and listless to look at anything, even the autumn sunset; when the door was opened quietly, and shyly through the shadows stole his schoolfellow of yore, his truest friend, John Rosedew. With this gentleman I take a very serious liberty; but he never yet was known to resent a liberty taken honestly. That, however, does not justify me. “John Rosedew” I intend to call him, because he likes it best; and so he would though ten times a Bachelor of Divinity, a late Vice-Principal of his college, and the present Rector of Nowelhurst. Formerly I did my best, loving well the character, to describe that simple-minded, tender-hearted yeoman, John Huxtable, of Tossil’s Barton, in the county of Devon. Like his, as like any two of Nature’s ever-varied works, were the native grain and staple of the Rev. John Rosedew. Beside those little inborn and indying variations which Nature still insists on, that she may know her sons apart, those two genial Britons differed both in mental and bodily endowments, and through education. In spite of that, they were, and are, as like to one another as any two men can be who have no smallness in them. Small men run pretty much of a muchness; as the calibre increases, so the divergence multiplies.

Farmer Huxtable was no fool; but having once learned to sign his name, he had attained his maximum of literary development; John Rosedew, on the other hand, although a strong and well-built man, who had pulled a good oar in his day, was not, in bulk and stature, a match for Hercules or Milo. Unpretending, gentle, a lover of the truth, easily content with others, but never with himself, even now, at the age of forty, he had not overcome the bashfulness and diffidence of a fine and sensitive nature. And, first-rate scholar as he was, he would have lost his class at Oxford solely through that shyness, unless a kind examiner, who saw his blushing agony, had turned from some commonplace of Sophocles to a glorious passage of Pindar. Then, carried away by the noble poet, John Rosedew forgot the schools, the audience, even the row of examiners, and gave grand thoughts their grand expression, breathing free as the winds of heaven. Nor till his voice began to falter from the high emotion, and his heart beat fast, though not from shame, and the tears of genius touched by genius were difficult to check, not till then knew he, or guessed, that every eye was fixed upon him, that every heart was thrilling, that even the stiff examiners bent forward like eager children, and the young men in the gallery could scarcely keep from cheering. Then suddenly, in the full sweep of magnificence, he stopped, like an eagle shot.

Now the parson, ruddy cheeked, with a lock of light brown hair astray upon his forehead, and his pale, blue eyes looking much as if he had just awoke and rubbed them, came shyly and with deep embarrassment into the darkening room. For days and days he had thought and thought, but could not at all determine whether, and when, and how, he ought to visit his ancient friend. His own heart first suggested that he ought to go at once, if only to show the bereaved one that still there were some to love him. To this right impulse – and the impulse of a heart like this could seldom be a wrong one – rose counter-checks of worldly knowledge, such little as he had. And it seemed to many people strange and unaccountable, that if Mr. Rosedew piqued himself upon anything whatever, it was not on his learning, his purity, or benevolence, it was not on his gentle bearing, or the chivalry of his soul, but on a fine acquirement, whereof in all opinions (except, indeed, his own) he possessed no jot or tittle – a strictly-disciplined and astute experience of the world. Now this supposed experience told him that it might seem coarse and forward to offer the hard grasp of friendship ere the soft clasp of love was cold; that he, as the clergyman of the parish, would appear to presume upon his office; that no proud man could ever bear to have his anguish pryed into. These, and many other misgivings and objections, met his eager longings to help his dear old friend.

Suddenly and to his great relief – for he knew not how to begin, though he felt how and mistrusted it – the old friend turned upon him from his lonely pacing, and held out both his hands. Not a word was said by either; what they meant required no telling, or was told by silence. Long time they sat in the western window, John Rosedew keeping his eyes from sunset, which did not suit them then. At last he said, in a low voice, which it cost him much to find —

“What name, dear Cradock, for the younger babe? Your own, of course, for the elder”.

“No name, John, but his sweet mother’s; unless you like to add his uncle’s”.

John Rosedew was puzzled lamentably. He could not bear to worry his friend any more upon the subject; and yet it seemed to him sad, false concord, to christen a boy as “Violet”. But he argued that, in botanical fact, a violet is male as well as female, and at such a time he could not think of thwarting a widower’s yearnings. In spite of all his worldly knowledge, it never occurred to his simple mind that poor Sir Cradock meant the lady’s maiden surname, which I believe was “Inclledon”. And yet he had suggestive precedent brought even then before him, for Sir Cradock Nowell’s brother bore the name of “Clayton”; which name John Rosedew added now, and found relief in doing so.

Thus it came to pass, that the babe without rosette was baptized as “Violet Clayton”, while the owner of the bauble received the name of “Cradock” – Cradock Nowell, now the ninth in lineal succession. The father was still too broken down to care about being present; godfathers and godmothers made all their vows by proxy. Mrs. O’Gaghan held the infants, and one of them cried, and the other laughed. The rosette was there in all its glory, and received a tidy sprinkle; and the wearer of it was, as usual, the one who took things easily. As the common children said, who came to see the great ones “loustering”, the whole affair was rather like a white burying than a baptism. Nevertheless, the tenants and labourers moistened their semi-regenerate clay with many a fontful of good ale, to ensure the success of the ceremony.

CHAPTER IV

It is not pleasant to recur, to have a relapse of chronology, neither does it show good management on the part of a writer. Nevertheless, being free of time among these forest by-ways, I mean to let the pig now by the ear unfold his tail, or curl it up, as the weather suits him. And now he runs back for a month or two, trailing the rope from his left hind-leg.

Poor Lady Nowell had become a mother, as indeed we learned from the village gossip, nearly a fortnight before the expected time. Dr. Jellicorse Buller, a very skilful man, in whom the Hall had long confided, was suddenly called to London, the day before that on which we last climbed the hill towards Ringwood. With Sir Cradock's full consent, he obeyed the tempting summons. So in the hurry and flutter of that October Sunday, it seemed a most lucky thing to obtain, in a thinly-peopled district, the prompt attendance of any medical man. And but that a gallant regiment then happened to be on the march from Dorchester to Southampton, there to embark for India, no masculine aid would have been forthcoming till after the event. But the regimental surgeon, whose name was Rufus Hutton, did all that human skill could do, and saved the lives of both the infants, but could not save the young mother. Having earned Sir Cradock's lasting gratitude, and Biddy O'Gaghan's strong execrations, he was compelled to rejoin his regiment, then actually embarking.

The twins grew fast, and throve amain, under Mrs. O'Gaghan's motherly care, and shook the deep-rooted country faith, that children brought up by hand are sure to be puny weaklings. Nor was it long till nature reasserted her authority, and claimed her rights of compensation. The father began to think more and more, first of his duty towards the dead mother, and then of his duty towards his children; and ere long affection set to work, and drove duty away till called for, which happened as we shall see presently. By the time those two pretty babies were "busy about their teeth", Cradock Nowell the elder was so deep in odontology, that Biddy herself could not answer him, and was afraid to ask any questions. He watched each little white cropper, as a girl peers day by day into a starting hyacinth. Then, when they could walk, they followed daddy everywhere, and he never was happy without them. It was a pretty thing to see them toddling down the long passages, stopping by the walls to prattle, crawling at the slippery parts, where the newly-invented tiles shone. And the father would dance away backwards from them, forgetting all about the grand servants, clapping his hands to encourage them, and holding an orange as prize for a crawling-race – then whisk away round a corner, and lay his cheek flat to the wainscot, to peep at his sons, and learn which of them was the braver. And in those days, I think, he was proud to find that Cradock Nowell, the heir of the house, was by far the more gallant baby. Which of the two was the prettier, not even sharp Biddy could say; so strongly alike they were, that the palm of beauty belonged to the one who had taken least medicine lately.

Then, as they turned two years and a half, and could jump with both feet at once, without the spectator growing sad on the subject of biped deficiencies, their father would lie down on the carpet, and make them roll and jump over him. He would watch their little spotted legs with intense appreciation; and if he got an oral sprinkle from childhood's wild sense of humour, instead of depressing him, I declare it quite set him up for the day, sir. And he never bothered himself or them by attempts to forecast their destinies. There they were enjoying themselves, uproariously happy, as proud as Punch of their exploits, and the father a great deal prouder. All three as blest for the moment, as full of life and rapture, as God meant His creatures to be, so often as they are wise enough; and, in the name of God, let them be so!

But then there came a time of spoiling, a time of doing just what they liked, even after their eyes were opening to the light and shadow of right and wrong. If they smiled, or pouted, or even cried – though in that they were very moderate – in a fashion which descended to them from their darling mother, thereupon great right and law, and even toughest prejudice, fell flat as rolled dough before them. So they toddled about most gloriously, with a strong sense of owning the universe.

Next ensued a time of mighty retribution. Astræa, with her feelings hurt, came down for a slashing moment. Fond as he was, and far more weak than he ever had been before, Sir Cradock Nowell was not a fool. He saw it was time to check the license, ere mischief grew irretrievable. Something flagrant occurred one day; both the children were in for it; they knew as well as possible that they were jolly rogues together, and together in their childish counsel they resolved to stand it out. The rumour was that they had stolen into Mrs. Toaster's choicest cupboard, and hardly left enough to smell at in a two-pound pot of green-gage jam. Anyhow, there they stood, scarlet in face and bright of eye, back to back, with their broad white shoulders, their sturdy legs set wide apart, and their little heels stamping defiantly. Mrs. Toaster had not the heart to do anything but kiss them, with a number of "O fies"! and they accepted her kisses indignantly, and wiped their lips with their pinafores. They knew that they were in the wrong, but they had not tried to conceal it, and they meant to brazen it out. They looked such a fine pair of lords of the earth, and vindicated their felony with so grand an air; such high contempt of all justice, that Cookey and Hogstaff, empannelled as jury, said, "Drat the little darlings, let 'em have the other pot, mem"! But as their good star would have it, Mrs. O'Gaghan came after them. Upsetting the mere *nisi prius* verdict, she marched them off, one in either hand, to the great judge sitting *in banco*, Sir Cradock himself, in the library. With the sense of heavy wrong upon them, the little hearts began to fail, as they climbed with tugs instead of jumps, and no arithmetic of the steps, the narrow flight of stone stairs that led from regions culinary. But they would not shed a tear, not they, nor even say they were sorry, otherwise Biddy (who herself was crying) would have let them go with the tap of a battledore.

Poor little souls, they got their deserts with very scanty ceremony. When Biddy began to relate their crime, one glance at their father's face was enough; they hung behind, and dropped their eyes, and flushed all under their curling hair. Yet little did they guess the indignity impending. Hogstaff had followed all the way, and so had Mrs. Toaster, to plead for them. Sir Cradock sent them both away, and told Biddy to wait outside. Then he led his children to an inner room, and calmly explained his intentions. These were of such a nature that the young offenders gazed at each other in dumb amazement and horror, which very soon grew eloquent as the sentence was being executed. But the brave little fellows cried more, even then, at the indignity than the pain of it.

Then the stern father ordered them out of his sight for the day, and forbade every one to speak to them until the following morning; and away the twins went, hand in hand, down the cold cruel passage, their long flaxen hair all flowing together, and shaking to the sound of their contrite sobs and heart-pangs. At the corner, by the steward's room, they turned with one accord, and looked back wistfully at their father. Sir Cradock had been saying to himself, as he rubbed his hands after the exercise – "A capital day's work: what a deal of good it will do them; the self-willed little rascals"! but the look cast back upon him was so like their mother's when he had done anything to vex her, that away he rushed to his bedroom, and had to wash his face afterwards.

But, of course, he held to his stern resolve to see them no more that evening, otherwise the lesson would be utterly thrown away. Holding to it as he did, the effect surpassed all calculation. It was the turning-point in their lives.

"My boy, you know it hurts me a great deal more than you", says the hypocritical usher, who rather enjoys the cane-swing. The boy knows it is hypocrisy, and is morally hurt more than physically. But wholly different is the result when the patient knows and feels the deep love of the agent, and cannot help believing that justice has flogged the judge. And hitherto their flesh had been intemperate and inviolable; the strictest orders had been issued that none should dare to slap them, and all were only too prone to coax and pet the beautiful angels. Little angels: treated so, they would soon have been little devils. As for the warning given last week, they thought it a bit of facetiousness: so now was the time, of all times, to strike temperately, but heavily.

That night they went to bed before dark, without having cared for tea or toast, and Biddy's soft heart ached by the pillow, as they lay in each other's arms, hugged one another, having now none else in the world to love, and sobbed their little troubles off into moaning slumber.

On the following morning, without any concert or debate, and scarcely asking why, the little things went hand in hand, united more than ever by the recent visitation, as far as the door of their father's bedroom. There they slunk behind a curtain; and when he came out, the rings above fluttered with fear and love and hope. Much as the father's heart was craving, he made believe to walk onward, till Craddy ran out, neck or nothing, and sprang into his arms.

After this great event, their lives flowed on very happily into boyhood, youth, and manhood. They heartily loved and respected their father; they could never be enough with John Rosedew; and although they quarrelled and fought sometimes, they languished and drooped immediately when parted from one another. As for Biddy O'Gaghan, now a high woman in the household, her only difficulty was that she never could tell of her two boys which to quote as the more astounding.

"If you plase, ma'am", she always concluded, "there'll not be so much as the lean of a priest for anybody iver to choose atwane the bootiful two on them. No more than there was on the day when my blissed self – murder now! – any more, I manes, nor the differ a peg can find 'twane a murphy and a purratie. And a Murphy I must be, to tark, so free as I does, of the things as is above me. Says Patrick O'Geoghegan to meself one day – glory be to his sowl, and a gintleman every bit of him, lave out where he had the small–pux – 'Biddy', he says, 'hould your pratie–trap, or I'll shove these here bellises down it'. And for my good it would have been, as I am thankful to acknowledge that same, though I didn't see it that day, thank the Lord. Ah musha, musha, a true gintleman he were, and lave me out his fellow, ma'am, if iver you comes across him".

But, in spite of Biddy's assertion, there were many points of difference, outward and inward too, between Cradock and Clayton Nowell. By this time the "Violet" was obsolete, except with Sir Cradock, who rather liked it, and with young Crad, who had corrupted it into the endearing "Viley". John Rosedew had done his utmost to extinguish the misnomer, being sensitive on the subject, from his horror of false concord, as attributed to himself. Although the twins were so much alike in stature, form, and feature that it required care to discern them after the sun was down, no clear-sighted person would miscall them when they both were present, and the light was good. Clayton Nowell's eyes were brown, Cradock's a dark grey; Cradock's hair was one shade darker, and grew more away from his forehead, and the expression of his gaze came from a longer distance. Clayton always seemed up for bantering; Cradock anxious to inquire, and to joke about it afterwards, if occasion offered. Then Cradock's head inclined, as he walked, a little towards the left shoulder; Clayton's hung, almost imperceptibly, somewhat to the right; and Cradock's hands were hard and dry, Clayton's soft as good French kid.

And, as regards the inward man, they differed far more widely. Every year their modes of thought, fancies, tastes, and habits, were diverging more decidedly. Clayton sought command and power, and to be admired; Cradock's chief ambition was to be loved by every one. And so with intellectual matters; Clayton showed more dash and brilliance, Cradock more true sympathy, and thence more grasp and insight. Clayton loved the thoughts which strike us, Cradock those which move us subtly. But, as they lived not long together, it is waste of time to *finesse* between them. Whatever they were, they loved one another, and could not bear to be parted.

Meanwhile, their "Uncle John" as they always called Mr. Rosedew – their uncle only in the spirit – was nursing and making much of a little daughter of his own. Long before Lady Nowell's death, indeed for ten long years before he obtained the living of Nowelhurst, with the little adjunct of Rushford, he had been engaged to a lady–love much younger than himself, whose name was Amy Venn. Not positively engaged, I mean, for he was too shy to pop the question to any one but himself, for more than seven years of the ten. But all that time Amy Venn was loving him, and he was loving her, and each would have felt it a grievous blow, if the other had started sideways. Miss Venn was

poor, and had none except her widowed mother to look to, and hence the parson was trebly shy of pressing a poor man's suit. He, a very truthful mortal, had pure faith in his Amy, and she had the like in him. So for several years he shunned the common-room, and laid by all he could from his fellowship, college-appointments, and professorship. But when his old friend Sir Cradock Nowell presented him to the benefice – not a very gorgeous one, but enough for a quiet parson's family – he took a clean white tie at once, vainly strove to knot it grandly, actually got his scout to brush him, and after three glasses of common-room port, strode away to his Amy at Kidlington. There he found her training the apricot on the south wall of her mother's cottage, one of the three great apricot-trees that paid the rent so nicely. What a pity they were not peaches; they would have yielded so fit a simile. But peachbloom will not thrive at Kidlington, except upon ladies' faces.

Three months afterwards, just when all was arranged, and Mrs. Venn was at last persuaded that Hampshire is not all pigs and rheumatism, forests, and swamps, and charcoal, when John, with his voice rather shaky, and a patch of red where his whiskers should have been, had proclaimed his own banns three times – for he was a very odd fellow in some things, and scorned the “royal road” to wedlock – just at that time, I say, poor Lady Nowell's confinement upset all calculation, and her melancholy death flung a pall on wedding-favours. Not only through respect, but from real sympathy with the faithful friend, John Rosedew and Amy held counsel together, and deferred the long-pending bridal. “*Ὅσω μακρότερον, τόσω μακάριτερον*”, said John, who always thought in Greek, except when Latin hindered him; but few young ladies will admit – and now-a-days they all understand it – that the apophthegm is applied well.

However, it did come off at last; John Rosedew, when his banns had been rolling in his mind, in the form of Greek senarii, for six months after the first time of out-asking, set to and read them all over again in public; to revive their efficacy, and to surrebut all let and hindrance. He was accustomed now to so many stops, that he felt surprised when nobody rose to interpellate. And so the banns of John Rosedew, bachelor, and Amy Venn, spinster, &c., were read six times in Nowelhurst Church, and six times from the desk at Kidlington. And, sooth to say, it was not without significance.

“Tantæ molis erat to produce our beautiful Amy”

On the nuptial morning, Sir Cradock, whom they scarcely expected, gathered up his broken courage, sank his own hap in another's, and was present and tried to enjoy himself. How shy John Rosedew was, how sly to conceal his blushes, how spry when the bride glanced towards him, and nobody else looked that way – all this very few could help observing; but they liked him too well to talk of it. Enough that the friend of his youth, thoroughly understanding John, was blessed with so keen a perception of those simple little devices, that at last he did enjoy himself, which he deserved to do for trying.

When the twins were nearly three years old, Mrs. Rosedew presented John with the very thing he wished for most, an elegant little girl. And here the word “elegant” is used with forethought, and by prolepsis; though Mrs. O'Gaghan, lent for a time to the Rectory, employed that epithet at the first glance, even while announcing the gender.

“Muckstraw, then, and she's illigant intirely; an' it's hopin' I be as there'll only be two on her, one for each of me darlin' boys. And now cudn't you manage it, doctor dear”?

But alas! the supply was limited, and no duplicate ever issued. Lucina saw John Rosedew's pride, and was afraid of changing his character. To all his Oxford friends he announced the fact of his paternity in letters commencing – “Now what do you think, my dear fellow, what do you think of this – the most astounding thing has happened”, &c. &c. He thought of it himself so much, that his intellect grew dreamy, and he forgot all about next Sunday's sermon, until he was in the pulpit. And four weeks after that he made another great mistake, which horrified him desperately, though it gratified the parish.

It had been arranged between his Amy and himself, that if she felt quite strong enough, she should appear in church on the Sunday afternoon, to offer the due thanksgiving. In the grey old church at Nowelhurst, a certain pew had been set apart, by custom immemorial, for the use of goodwives who felt grateful for their safe deliverance. Here Mrs. Rosedew was to present herself at the proper period, with the aid of Biddy's vigorous arm down the hill from the Rectory. As yet she was too delicate to bear the entire service. The August afternoon was sultry, and the church doors stood wide open, while the bees among the churchyard thyme drowsed a sleepy sermon. As luck would have it, a recruiting sergeant, toling for the sons of Ytene, finding the road so dusty, and the alehouse barred against him, came sauntering into the church during the second lesson, for a little mild change of air. Espying around him some likely rustics, he stationed himself in the vacant "churching pew", because the door was open, and the position prominent. "All right", thought the rector, who was very short-sighted, "how good of my darling Amy to come! But I wonder she wears her scarlet cloak to come to church with, and in such weather! But perhaps Dr. Buller ordered it, for fear of her catching cold". So at the proper moment he drew his surplice round him, looked full at the sergeant standing there by the pillar, and commenced majestically, though with a trembling voice —

"Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of His goodness to give you safe deliverance, and hath preserved you in the great danger of childbirth, you shall therefore give hearty thanks unto God and say —"

The sergeant looked on very primly, with his padded arms tightly folded, and his head thrown back, calling war and victory into his gaze, for the credit of the British army. Then he wondered angrily what the — those chawbacons could see in him to be grinning at.

"I am well pleased", &c., continued John Rosedew, sonorously; for he had a magnificent voice, and still regarding the sergeant with a look of tender interest. Even Sir Cradock Nowell could scarcely keep his countenance; but the parson went through the whole of it handsomely and to the purpose, thinking only, throughout it, of God's great mercies to him. So beloved he was already, and so much respected, that none of the congregation had the heart to tell him of his mistake, as he talked with them in the churchyard; though he thought even then that he must have his bands, as he often had, at the back of his neck.

But on his way home he overtook an old hobbler, who enjoyed a joke more than a scruple.

"How are you, Simon Tapscott? How do you do to-day? Glad to see you at church, Simon", said the parson, holding his hand out, as he always did to his parishioners, unless they had disgraced themselves.

"Purty vair, measter; purty vair I be, vor a woald galley baggar as ave bin in the Low Countries, and dwoant know sin from righteousness". This last was a gross perversion of a passage in the sermon which had ruffled ancient Simon. "Can't goo much, howiver, by rason of the rhymatics. Now cud 'e do it to I, measter? cud 'e do it to I, and I'll thraw down bath my critches? Good vor one sojer, good vor anoother".

"Do what for you, Simon? Fill your old canteen, or send you a pound of baccy"? asked the parson, mildly chaffing.

"Noo, noo; none o' that. There baint noo innard parts grace of the Lord in that. Choorch I handsomely, zame as 'e dwoed that strapping soger now jist".

"What, Simon! Why, Simon, do you know what you are saying —" But I cannot bear to tell of John Rosedew humiliated; he was humble enough by nature. So fearful was the parson of renewing that recollection within the sacred walls, that no thanks were offered there for the birth of sweet Amy Rosedew, save by, or on behalf of, that recruiting sergeant.

CHAPTER V

When Cradock and Clayton were ten years old, they witnessed a scene which puzzled them, and dwelt long in their boyish memories. Job Hogstaff was going to Ringwood, and they followed him down the passage towards the entrance–hall, emphatically repeating the commissions with which they had charged him. Old Job loved them as if they were his grandsons, and would do his utmost to please them, but they could not trust his memory, or even his capacity.

“Now, Job”, cried little Cradock, pulling at his coat–lappet, “it’s no good pretending that you know all, when you won’t even stop to listen. I’m sure you’ll go and make some great mistake, as you did last Tuesday. Mind you tell Mr. Stride it’s for Master Cradock Nowell, and they must be sure to give you a good one, or I shall send it back. Now just tell me what I have told you. I ought to have written it down, but I wasn’t sure how to spell ‘groove’”.

“Why, Master Crad, I’m to say a long spill, very sharp at the end”.

“Sharp at the *point*, Job, not blunt at the end like a new black–lead pencil”.

“And whatever you do, Job, don’t forget the catgut for my cross–bow, one size larger than last time”.

“Hold your jaw, Viley, till I’ve quite finished; or he’ll ask for a top made of catgut”.

Both the boys laughed at this; you could hear them all down the long passage. Any small folly makes a boy laugh.

“Well, Master Crad, you *must* think me a ‘muff’, as you call it. And the groove is to go quite up to the spill; there must be two rings below the crown of it”.

“Below the crown, indeed! On the fat part, I said three times. Now, Viley, you know you heard me”.

“Well, well”, cried Job in despair, “two rings on the fat part, and no knot at all in the wood, and at least six inches round, and, and, well – I think that’s all of it, thank the Lord”.

“All of it, indeed! Well, you *are* a nice fellow! Didn’t I tell you so, Viley? Why, you’ve left out altogether the most important point of all, Job. The wood must be a clear bright yellow, or else a very rich gold colour, and I’m to pay for it next Tuesday, because I spent my week’s money yesterday, as soon as ever I got it, and – oh, Viley! can’t you lend a fellow sixpence”?

“No, not to save my life, sir. Why, Craddy, you know I wouldn’t let you go tick if I could”.

The boys rushed at one another, half in fun and half in affection, and, seizing each other by the belt of the light–plaid tunic, away they went dancing down the hall, while Hogstaff whistled a polka gently, with his old eyes glistening after them. A prettier pair, or better matched, never set young locks afloat. Each put his healthy, clear, bright face on the shoulder of the other, each flung out his short–socked legs, and pointed his dainty feet. You could see their shapely calves jerked up as they went with double action, and the hollow of the back curved in, as they threw asunder recklessly, then clasped one another again, and you thought they must both reel over. Sir Cradock Nowell hated trousers, and would not have their hair cropped, because it was like their mother’s; otherwise they would not have looked one quarter so picturesque.

Before the match was fairly finished – for they were used to this sort of thing, and the object always was to see which would give in first – it was cut short most unexpectedly. While they were taking a sharp pirouette down at the end of the hall – and as they whirled round I defy their father to have known the one from the other – the door of the steward’s room opened suddenly, and a tall dark woman came out. The twins in full merriment dashed up against her, and must have fallen if she had not collared them with strong and bony arms. Like little gentlemen, as they were, every atom of them, they turned in a moment to apologise, and their cheeks were burning red. They saw a gaunt old woman, wide–shouldered, stern, and forcible.

“Oo, ah! a bonnie pair ye’ve gat, as I see in all my life lang. But ye’ll get no luck o’ them. Tak’ the word o’ threescore year, ye’ll never get no luck o’ them, you that calls yoursel’ Craydock Nowell”.

She was speaking to Sir Cradock, who had followed her from the steward’s room, and who seemed as much put out as a proud man of fifty ever cares to show himself. He made no answer, and the two poor children fell back against a side-bench.

“I’ll no talk o’ matters noo. You’ve a gi’en me my refoosal, and I tak’ it once for all. But ye’ll be sorry for the day ye did it, Craydock Nowell”.

To the great amazement of Hogstaff, who was more taken aback than any one else, Sir Cradock Nowell, without a word, walked to the wide front door with ceremony, as if he were leading a peeress out. He did not offer his arm to the woman, but neither did he shrink from her; she gathered her dark face up again from its softening glance at the children, and without another word or look, but sweeping her skirt around her, away she walked down the broad front road, as stiff and as stern as the oak-trees.

CHAPTER VI

The lapse of years made little difference with the Reverend John Rosedew, except to mellow and enfranchise the heart so free and rich by nature, and to pile fresh stores of knowledge in the mind so stored already. Of course the parson had his faults. In many a little matter his friends could come down upon him sharply, if minded so to do. But any one so minded would not have been fit to be called John Rosedew's friend.

His greatest fault was one which sprang from his own high chivalry. If once he detected a person, whether taught or untaught, in the attempt to deceive or truckle, that person was to him thenceforth a thing to be pitied and prayed for. Large and liberal as his heart was, charitable and even lenient to all other frailties, the presence of a lie in the air was to it as ozone to a test-paper. And then he was always sorry afterwards when he had shown his high disdain. For who could disprove that John Rosedew himself might have been a thorough liar, if trained and taught to consider truth a policeman with his staff drawn?

Another fault John Rosedew had – and I do not tell his foibles (as our friends do) to enjoy them – he gave to his books and their bygone ages much of the time which he ought to have spent abroad in his own little parish. But this could not be attributed to any form of self-indulgence. Much as he liked his books, he liked his flock still better, but never could overcome the idea that they would rather not be bothered. If any one were ailing, if any one were needy, he would throw aside his Theophrastus, and be where he was wanted, with a mild sweet voice and gentle eyes that crannied not, like a crane's bill, into the family crocks and dustbin. It was a part, and no unpleasant one, of his natural diffidence, that he required a poor man's invitation quite as much as a rich one's, ere ever he crossed the threshold; unless trouble overflowed the impluvium. In all the parish of Nowelhurst there was scarcely a man or a woman who did not rejoice to see the rector pacing his leisurely rounds, carrying his elbows a little out, as men with large deltoid muscles do, wearing his old hat far back on his head, so that it seemed to slope away from him, and smiling quietly to himself at the children who tugged his coat-tails for an orange or a halfpenny. He never could come out but what the urchins of the village were down upon him as promptly as if he were apple-pie; and many of them had the impudence to call him "Uncle John" before his hair was grey.

Instead of going to school, the boys were apprenticed to him in the classics; and still more pleasantly he taught them to swim, and fish, and row. Of riding he knew but little, except from the treatise of Xenophon, and a paper on the Pelethronian Lapiths; so they learned it as all other boys do, by dint of crown and hard bumpage. Moreover, Mark Stote, head gamekeeper, took them in hand very early as his pupils in woodcraft and gunnery. To tell the truth, Uncle John objected to this accomplishment; he thought that the wholesome excitement and exercise of shooting afforded scarcely a valid reason for the destruction of innocent life. However, he recollected that he had not always thought so – his conversion having been wrought by the shrieks of a wounded hare – neither did he expect to bind all the world with his own girdle. Sir Cradock insisted that the young idea should be taught to shoot, and both the young ideas took to it very kindly.

Perhaps on the whole they were none the worse for the want of public-school training. What they lost thereby in quickness, suspicion, and effrontery, was more than balanced by the gain in purity, simplicity, love of home, and kindness. For nature had not gifted them with that vulgar arrogance, for which the best prescription is "calcitration nine times a day, and clean the boots for kicking you". Every year their father took them for a month or two to London, to garnish with some courtly frilling the knuckles of his Hampshire hams. But they only hated it; thorough agriculturists they were, and well knew their own blessings: and sweet and gladsome was the morning after each return, though it might be blowing a gale of wind, or drizzling through the ash-leaves. And then the headlong rush to see beloved Uncle John. Nature they loved in any form, sylvan, agrarian, human, when that human form

was such as they could climb and nestle in. And there was not in the parish, nor in all the forest, any child so rough and dirty, so shock-headed, and such a scamp, that it could not climb into the arms of John Rosedew's fellow-feeling.

But I must not dwell on these pleasant days, the father's glory, the hopes of the sons, the love of all who came near them, and the blessings of Mrs. O'Gaghan.

They were now to go to Oxford, and astonish the natives there, by showing that a little *hic, hæc, hoc*, may come even out of Galilee; that a youth never drawn through the wire-gauge of Eton, Harrow, or Rugby, may carry still the electric spark, and be taper and well-rounded. Half their learning accrued *sub dio*, in the manner of the ancients. Uncle John would lead them between the trees and down to some forest dingle, the boy on his right hand construing aloud or parsing very slowly, the little spark at his left all glowing to explode at the first mistake. Δεξιύσειρος made the running, until he tripped and fell mentally, and even then he was set on his legs, unless the other was down upon him; but in the latter case the yoke-mate leaped into the harness. The stroke-oar on the river that evening was awarded to the one who paced the greatest number of stades in the active voice of expounding. The accuracy, the caution, born of this warm rivalry, became at last so vigilant, that the boy who won the toss for the right-hand place at starting, was almost sure of the stroke-oar.

So they passed the matriculation test with consummate ease, and delighted the college tutor by their clear bold writing. They had not read so much as some men have before entering the University, but all their knowledge was close and firm, and staunch enough for a spring-board. And they wrote most excellent Latin prose, and Greek verse easily flowing. However, Sir Cradock was very nervous on the eve of their departure for the first term of Oxford residence, and led John Rosedew, in whose classical powers he placed the highest confidence, into his private room, and there begged him, as a real friend, tested now for forty years, to tell him bluntly whether the boys were likely to do him credit.

"Don't spare me, John, and don't spare them: only let us have no disappointment about it".

"My dear fellow, my dear fellow"! cried John, tugging at his collar, as he always did when nonplussed, for fear of losing himself; "how on earth can I tell? Most likely the men know a great deal more in the University now than they did when I had lectures. Haven't I begged you fifty times to have down a young first-classman"?

"Yes, I know you have, John. But I am not quite such a fool, nor so shamelessly ungrateful. To upset the pile of your ten years' labour, and rebuild it upon its apex! And talk to me of young first-classmen! Why, you know as well as I do, John, that there is not one of them, however brilliant, with a tenth part of your knowledge. It could never be, any more than a young tree can carry the fruit of an old one. Why, when you took your own first-class, they could only find one man to put with you, and you have never ceased to read, read, read, ever since you left old Oriel, and chiefly in taste and philology. And such a memory as you have! John, I am ashamed of you. You want to impose upon me".

And Sir Cradock fixed the parson's eyes with that keen and point-blank gaze, which was especially odious to the shy John Rosedew.

"I am sure I don't. You cannot mean that", he replied, rather warmly, for, like all imaginative men, when of a diffident cast, he was desperately matter-of-fact the moment his honour was played with. His friend began to smile at him, drawing up his grey moustache, and saying, "Yes, John, you are a donkey".

"I know that I am", said John Rosedew, shutting his eyes, as he loved to do when he got on a favourite topic; "by the side of those mighty critics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – the Scaligers, the Casaubons, the Vossii, the Stephani, – what am I but a starving donkey, without a thistle left for him? But as regards our English critics – at least too many of them – I submit that we have been misled by the superiority of their Latin, and their more slashing style. I doubt whether any of them had a tenth part of the learning, or the sequacity of genius –"

“Come, John, I can’t stand this, you know; and the boys will be down here directly, they are so fond of brown sherry”.

“Well, to return to the subject – I own that I was surprised and hurt when a former Professor of Greek actually confounded the Æolic form of the *plusquam perfectum* of so common a verb as – ”

“Yes, John, I know all about that, and how it spoiled your breakfast. But about the boys, the boys, John”?

“And again, as to the delicate sub-significance, not the well-known tortuousness of *παρά* in composition, but – ”

“Confound it, John. They’ve got all their things packed. They’ll be here in a moment, pretending to rollick for our sakes; and you won’t tell me what you think of them”.

“Well, I think there never were two finer fellows to jump a gate since the days of Castor and Pollux. ‘*Hunc equis, illum superare pugnīs.*’ You remember how you took me down for construing ‘*pugnīs*’ wrongly, when we were at Sherborne”?

“Yes, and how proud I was, John! You had been at the head of the form for three months, and none of us could stir you; but you came back again next day in the fifth Æneid. But here come the villains – now it’s all over”.

And so the boys went away, and their father could not for his life ascertain what opinion his ancient friend had formed as to the chances of their doing something good at Oxford. Simple and straightforward as Mr. Rosedew was, no man ever lived from whom it was harder to force an opinion. He saw matters from so many aspects, everything took so many facets, shifting lights, and playing colours, from the versatility of his mind, that whoso could fix him at such times, and extort his real sentiments, might spin a diamond ring, and shave by it. He had golden hopes about his “nephews”, as he often called them, but he would not pronounce those hopes at present, lest the father should be disappointed. And so the boys went up to Oxford, half a moon before the woodcocks came.

CHAPTER VII

I do not mean to write at large upon University life, because the theme has been out-thrashed by men of higher powers. It is a brief Olympic, a Derby premature, wherein to lose or win depends – training, health, ability, and industry being granted – upon the early stoning or late kernelling of the brain. Without laying claim to much experience, any one may protest that our brains are worked a deal too hard at the time of adolescence. We lose thereby their vivific powers and their originality. The peach throws off at the critical period all the fruit it cannot ripen; the vine has no such abjective prudence, and cripples itself by enthusiasm.

The twins were entered at Merton, and had the luck to obtain adjoining garrets. Sir Cradock had begun to show a decided preference for Clayton, as he grew year by year more and more like his mother. But this was not the only reason why he would not listen to some fool's suggestion, that Cradock, the heir to the property, should be ranked as a "gentleman-commoner". That stupid distinction he left for men who require self-assertion, admiring as he did the sense and spirit of that Master, well known in his day, who, to some golden cad insisting that his son should be entered in that college as a gentleman-commoner, angrily replied, "Sir, *all* my commoners are gentlemen".

But the brothers were very soon parted. Clayton got sleeved in a scholar's gown, while Cradock still fluttered the leading-strings. "*Et tunicae manicas*– you effeminate Viley"! said Cradock, admiring hugely, when his twin ran up to show himself off, after winning a Corpus scholarship; "and the governor won't allow me a chance of a parasol for my elbows". Sir Cradock, a most determined man, and a very odd one to deal with, had forbidden his elder son to stand for any scholarship, except those few which are of the University corporate. "A youth of your expectations", he exclaimed, with a certain bitterness, for he often repined in secret that Clayton was not the heir, "a boy placed as you are, must not compete for a poor young lad's *viaticum*. You may go in for a University scholarship, though of course you will never get one; an examination does good, I have heard, to the unsuccessful candidates. But don't let me hear about it, not even if, by some accident, you should be the lucky one". Craddy was deeply hurt; he had long perceived his father's partiality for the son more dashing, yet more effeminate, more pretentious, and less persistent. So Cradock set his heart upon winning Craven, Hertford, or Ireland, and never even alluding to it in the presence of his father. Hence it will be evident that the youth was proud and sensitive.

"Amy *amata, peramata a me*", cried the parson to his daughter, now a lovely girl of sixteen, straight, slender, and well-poised; "how glad and proud we ought to be of Clayton's great success"!

"Pa, dear, he would never have got it, I am quite certain of that, if Cradock had been allowed to go in; and I think it is most unfair, shamefully unjust, that because he is the eldest son he is never to have any honour". And Amy coloured brilliantly at the warmth of her own championship; but her father could not see it.

"So I am inclined to think" – John Rosedew was never positive, except upon great occasions – "perhaps I should say perpend, if I were fond of hybrid English. I don't mean about the unfairness, Amy; for I think I should do the same if I were in Sir Cradock's place. I mean that our Crad would have got it, instead of Clayton, with health and fortune favouring. But it stands upon a razor's edge, ἐπὶ ξυροῦς ἴσταται ἀκμῆς. You can construe that, Amy"?

"Yes, pa, when you tell me the English. How the green is coming out on the fir-trees! So faint and yet so bright. Oh, papa, what Greek sub-significance, as you sometimes call it, is equal to that composition"?

"Well, my poppet, I am so short-sighted, I would much rather have a triply composite verb – "

"Than three good kisses from me, daddy? Well, there they are, at any rate, because I know you are disappointed". And the child, herself more bitterly disappointed, as becomes a hot partisan, ran

away to sit under a sprawling larch, just getting new nails on its fingers, for the spring was awaking early.

It was not more than a week after this, and not very far from All-Fools'-day, when Clayton, directly after chapel, rushed into Cradock's garret, hot, breathless, and unphilosophical. Cradock, calm and thoughtful, as he usually was, poked his head through the open slide of the dusthole called a scout's room, and brought out three willow-pattern plates, a little too retentive of the human impress, and an extra knife and fork, dark-browed at the tip of the handle. Then he turned up a corner of tablecloth, where it cherished sombre memories of a tearful teapot, and set the mustard-pot to control it. Nor long before he doubled the coffee in the strainer of the biggin, and shouted "Corker"! thrice, far as human voice would gravitate, down the well of the staircase. Meanwhile Master Clayton stood fidgeting, and doffed not his scholarly toga. Corker, the scout, a short fat man, came up the stairs with dignity and indignation contending. He was amazed that any freshman "should have the cheek to holler so". Mr. Nowell was such a quiet young man, that the scout looked for some apology. "Corker, a commons of bread and butter, and a cold fowl and some tongue. Be quick now, before the buttery closes. And, as I see I am putting you out in your morning work, get a quart of ale at your dinner-time". "Yes, sir, to be sure, sir; I wish all the gentlemen was as thoughtful".

"No, Craddy, never mind that", cried his brother, reddening richly, for Clayton was fair as a lady, "I only want to speak to you about – well, perhaps, you know what it is I have come for. Is that fellow gone from the door"?

"I am sure I don't know. Go and look yourself. But, dear Viley, what is the matter"?

"Oh, Cradock, you can so oblige me, and it can't matter much to you. But to me, with nothing to look to, it does make such a difference".

Cradock never could bear to hear this – that his own twin-brother should talk, as he often did, so much in the pauper strain. And all the while Clayton was sure of 50,000*l.* under their mother's settlement. But Crad was full of wild generosity, and had made up his mind to share Nowelhurst, if he could do so, with his brother. He began to pull Clayton's gown off; he would have blacked his shoes if requested. He always thought himself Viley's prime minister.

"Whatever it is, my boy, Viley, you know I will do it for you, if it is only fair and honourable".

"Oh, it is no great thing. I was sure you would do it for me. To do just a little bit under your best in this hot scrimmage for the Ireland. I am not much afraid of any man, Crad, except you, and Brown, of Balliol".

"Viley, I am very sorry that you have asked me such a thing. Even if it were in other ways straightforward, I could not do it, for the sake of the father, and Uncle John, and little Amy".

"Don't you know that the governor doesn't want *you* to get it? You are talking nonsense, Cradock, downright nonsense, to cover your own selfishness. And that frizzle-headed Amy, indeed"!

"I would rather talk nonsense than fraud, Clayton. And I can't help telling you that what you say about my father may be true, but is not brotherly; and your proposal does you very little honour; and I never could have thought it of you; and I will do my very utmost. And as for Amy, indeed, she is too good for you to speak of – and – and – " He was highly wroth at the sneer about Amy's hair, which he admired beyond all reason, as indeed he did every bit of her, but without letting any one know it. He leaned upon the table, with his thumb well into the mustard-pot. This was the first real quarrel with the brother he loved so much; and it felt like a skewer poked into his heart.

"Well, elder brother by about two seconds", cried Clayton, twitching his plaits up well upon his coat-collar. "I'll do all I can to beat you. And I hope Brown will have it, not you. There's the cash for my commons. I know you can't afford it, until you get a scholarship".

Clayton flung half-a-crown upon the table, and went down the stairs with a heavy tramp, knocking over a dish with the college arms on, wherein Corker was bringing the fowl and the tongue. Corker got all the benefit of the hospitable doings, and made a tidy dinner out of it, for Cradock could eat no breakfast. It was the first time bitter words had passed between the brothers since the

little ferments of childhood, which are nothing more than sweetword the moment they settle down. And he doubted himself; he doubted whether he had not been selfish about it.

It was the third day of the examination, and when he appeared at ten o'clock among the forty competitors, he was vexed anew to see that Clayton had removed to a table at the other end of the room, so as not to be even near him. The piece of Greek prose which he wrote that morning dissatisfied him entirely; and then again he rejoiced at the thought that Viley need not be afraid of him. He had never believed in his chance of success, and went in for the scholarship to please others and learn the nature of the examination. Next year he might have a fairer prospect; this year – as all the University knew – Brown, of Balliol, was sure of it.

Nevertheless, by the afternoon he was in good spirits again, and found a mixed paper which suited him as if Uncle John had set it. One of the examiners had been, some twenty years ago, a pupil of John Rosedew, and this, of course, was a great advantage to any successor alumnus; though neither of them knew the other. It is pleasant to see how the old ideas germinate and assimilate, as the olive and the baobab do, after the fires of many summers.

Clayton, a placable youth (even when he was quite in the wrong, as in the present instance), came to Craddy's rooms that evening, begged him not to apologise for his expressions of the morning, and compared notes with him upon the doings of the day.

"Bless you, Crad", he cried, after a glass of first-rate brown sherry – not the vile molassied stuff, thick as the sack of Falstaff, but the genuine thing, with the light and shade of brown olives in the sunset, and not to be procured, of course, from any Oxonian wine-dealer; – "oh, Crad, if we could only wallop that Brown, of Balliol, between us, I should not care much which it was. He has booked it for such a certainty, and does look so cocky about it. Did you see the style he walked off, before hall, arm in arm with a Master of Arts, and spouting his own iambics"?

"First-rate ones, I dare say, Viley. Have a pipe, old fellow. After all, it doesn't matter much. Folk who have never been in them think a deal the most of these things. The wine-merchant laughs at beeswing; and so, I suppose, it is with all trades". Cradock was not by any means prone to the discourse sententious; and the present lapse was due, no doubt, to the reaction ensuing upon his later scene with Viley, wherein each had promised heartily to hold fast by the brotherhood.

On the following Saturday morning, John Rosedew's face flushed puce-colour as he opened his letters at breakfast-time. "Hurrah! Amy, darling; hurrah, my child! *Terque quaterque, et novies evoe!* Eat all the breakfast, melimel; I won't tell you till I come back".

"Oh, won't you, indeed"? cried Amy, with her back against the door and her arms in mock grimness folded. "I rather think you will, papa; unless you have made up your mind to choke me. And you are half way towards it already".

John saw that peculiar swell of her throat which had frightened him so often – her dear mother had died of bronchitis, and he knew nothing of medical subjects – and so he allayed her excitement at once, gave her over to Miss Eudoxia, who was late in her bedroom as usual, and then set off at his utmost speed to tell his old friend, Sir Cradock. And a fine turn of speed he still could show, though the whiskers under his college-cap (stuck on anyhow in the hurry) were as white as the breast of a martin quivering under the eaves. Since he lost his wife he had never cared to walk fast, subsiding into three miles an hour, as thoughtful and placid men will do, when they begin to thumb their waistcoats. But now through the waking life of "the Chase", where the brown fern-stalks bent over the Ammon horn of the lifting frond, and the fescue grass was beading rough with dew already, here and among the rabbit-holes, nimbly dodging the undermine, ran as hard as a boy of twelve, the man of threescore, John Rosedew. Without stopping to knock as usual, he burst in upon Sir Cradock, now sitting all alone at his simple, old-fashioned breakfast. Classical and theological training are not locomotive, as we all know to our cost; and the rector stood gasping ever so long, with both hands pressed to his side.

"Why, John; quick, quick! You frighten me. Is your house on fire"?

“Old fellow – old fellow; such news! Shake hands – ever since the *charta forestæ*; shake hands again. Oh, I feel rather sick; pray excuse me; *ἄνω κατά στρέφεται*”.

“What is it, John? Do be quick. I must send for Mrs. O’Gaghan and the stomach–pump”. Biddy was now the licensed doctoress of the household, and did little harm with her simples, if she failed of doing good.

“*Times* there? Open it; look, University news! Crad and Clayton”.

Wondering, smiling, placidly anxious, Sir Cradock tore open the paper, and found, after turning a great many corners, the University news. Then he read out with a trembling voice, after glancing over it silently:

“The Ireland scholarship has been awarded to Cradock Nowell, of Merton College. Proxime accessit Clayton Nowell, scholar of Corpus Christi. Unless we are misinformed, these gentlemen are twin–brothers”.

“Grintie, grintie, grunt,
Oos be arl tew blunt;
Naw oose Hampshire hogs,
But to zhow the way in bogs”.

So John Rosedew quoted in the fulness of his glory from an old New Forest rhyme. John’s delight transcended everything, because he had never expected it. He had taken his own degree ere ever the Ireland was heard of; but three pupils of his had won it while he was still in residence. Of that he had not thought much. But now to win it by proxy in his extreme old age, as he began to consider it, and from all the crack public schoolmen, and with his own pet alumni, whom no one else had taught anything – such an Ossa upon Pelion, such an Olympus on Ossa – no wonder that the snow of his whiskers shook and the dew trembled under his eyelids.

Sir Cradock, on the other hand, had never a word to say, but turned his head like one who waits for a storm of dust to go by.

“Why, Cradock, old friend, what on earth is the matter? You don’t seem at all delighted”.

“Yes, I am, of course, John; as delighted as I ought to be. But I wish it had been Viley; he wants it so much more, and he is so like his mother”.

“So is Crad; every bit as much; an enlarged and grander portrait. Can’t you see the difference between a large heart and a mere good one? Will no one ever appreciate my noble and simple Craddy”?

John Rosedew spoke warmly, and was sorry before the breath from his lips was cold. Not that he had no right to say it, but because he felt that he had done far more harm than good.

CHAPTER VIII

Honours flash in the summer sun, as green corn does in the morning; then they gleam mature and mellow at the time of reaping; they are bagged, perhaps by a woman's arm, with a cut "below the knees"; set on their butt for a man to sit under while eating his bread and cheese; then they wither, and are tossed into chaff by a contumelious steam-engine with a leathern strap inflexible.

Cradock's "Ireland" has gone by, and another has succeeded it, and this has fallen, as most things fall, to the sap of perseverance, steel-tipped with hard self-confidence – this Ireland has fallen to the lot of Brown Balliolensis. Clayton would not go in for it; his pride, or rather vanity, would not allow him to do so. Was he going to take Cradock's leavings, and be a year behind him, when he was only two minutes younger? However, he went in for the Hertford, and, what was a great deal more, he got it; for Cradock would not stand; and, even if he had, perhaps the result would have been the same. Viley had made up his mind to win it, and worked very hard indeed; and so won it very easily. Cradock could usually beat him in Greek, but not so often in Latin. And Clayton wrote the prettiest, most tripping, coquettish, neat-ankled hendecasyllables that ever whisked roguishly round a corner, wondering where Catullus was.

Ah! light-hearted poet, sensitively sensuous, yet withal deep-hearted, with a vein of golden philosophy, and a pensive tenderness, now-a-days we overlook thee. Horace is more fashionable, more suited to a flippant age, because he has no passion.

Early on a sunripe evening in the month of June, "when the sun was shifting the shadows of the hills, and doffed the jaded oxen's yoke, distributing the love time from his waning chariot", a forest dell, soft, clear, and calm, was listening to its thrushes. And more than at the throstle's flute, or flageolet of the blackbird, oaks and chestnuts pricked their ears at the voice of a gliding maiden. Where the young fern was pluming itself, arching, lifting, ruffling in filigree, light perspective, and depth of Gothic tracery, freaked by the nip of fairy fingers, tremulous as a coral grove in a crystal under-current, the shyer fronds still nestling home, uncertain of the world as yet, and coiled like catherine-wheels of green; where the cranesbill pushed like Zedekiah, and the succory reared its sky-blue windmill (open for business till 8 P.M.); where the violet now was rolled up in the seed-pod, like a stylite millipede, and the great bindweed, in its crenate horn, piped and fluted spirally, had forgotten the noonday flaunt: here, and over the nibbled sward, where the crisp dew was not risen yet, here came wandering the lightest foot that ever passed, but shook not, the moss-bed of the glow-worm. Under the rigorous oaks (so corded, seamed, and wanned with humps of grey), the stately, sleek, mouse-coloured beech, the dappled, moss-burdened ash, and the birch-tree peeling silverly, beneath the murmuring congress of the sunproof leaves; and again in the open breaks and alleys, where light and shade went see-saw; by and through and under all, feeling for and with every one, glanced, and gleamed, and glistened, and listened the loveliest being where all was love, the pet in the nest of nature.

Of all the beauty in that sweet dell, where the foot of man came scarcely once in a year; of all the largesse of earth and heaven; of all the grace which is Nature's gratitude to her heavenly Father: there was not one, from the lily-bell to the wild rose and the heather-sprig, fit for a man to put in his bosom, and look at Amy Rosedew.

It is told of a certain good man's child, whose lineage still is cherished, that when she was asked by her father (half-bantering, half in earnest) to tell him the reason why everybody loved her so, she cast down her eyes with a puzzled air, then opened them wide, as a child does to the sunrise of some great truth – "Father, perhaps it is because I love everybody so". Lucan has it in a neater form: "amorem quæris amando". And that was Amy Rosedew's secret, by herself undreamed of – lovely, because she could not help loving all our God has made. And of all the fair things He has made, and pronounced to be very good, since sunshine first began to gleam, to glow, and to fade

away, what home has beauty found so bright, so rich in varied elegance, so playfully receptive of the light shed through creation – the light of the Maker’s smile – as a young maiden, pure of heart, natural, true, and trusting?

She came to the brink of a forest pool, and looked at herself in the water. Not that she thought more than she could help of the outward thing called “Amy”, but that she wondered how her old favourites, Cradock and Clayton Nowell, would esteem her face and style of dress now she was turned seventeen. Most likely they had seen ever so many girls, both at Oxford and in London, compared with whom poor Amy was but a rustic Phidyle, just fit to pick sticks in the New Forest.

The crystal mirror gave her back even the shade on her own sweet face, which fell from the cloud of that simple thought; for she stood where the westering sunshine failed to touch the water, but flushed with rich relief of gold the purity of her figure. Every sapling, dappled hazel, sloughing birch, or glabrous maple, glistened with the plumes of light, and every leaf was twinkling. The columns of the larger trees stood like metal cylinders, whereon the level gleam rules a streak, and glints away round the rounding. Elbows, arms, and old embracings, backed with a body-ground of green, laced with sunset’s golden bodkin, ever shifting every eyelet, – branch, and bough, and trunk, and leaves, ruffling and twisting, or staunch and grand, they seemed but a colonnade and arch, for the sun to peep through at the maiden, and tell of her on the calm waters.

Floating, fleeting, shimmering there, in a frame of stately summer flags, vivid upon the crystal shade, and twinkling every now and then to the plash of a distant moorhen, or the dip of a swallow’s wing, lay her graceful image, wondering in soft reply to her play of wonder. She took off her light chip hat, and laughed; lo! the courteous picture did the same. She offered, with a mincing air, her little frail of wood-strawberries; and the shadowy Amy put them back with the prettiest grace ever dreamed of. Then she cast the sparkling night of her tresses down the white shoulders and over her breast; and the other Amy was looking at her through a ripple of cloudiness, with the lissom waist retiring. She smoothed her hair like a scarf around her, withdrew her chin on the curving neck, and bowed the shapely forehead, well pleased to see thus the foreshortening undone, and the pure, bright oval shown as in a glass. Then, frightened almost at the lustrous depth of her large grey eyes, deep-fringed with black, she thought of things all beyond herself, and woke, from Nature’s innocent joy in her own brief luck of beauty, to the bashful consciousness, the down of a maiden’s dreamings. Bridling next at her mirrored face, with a sudden sense of humour, all the time she watched the red lips, and the glimmer of pearls between them, “Amy”, she cried, “now, after this, don’t come to me for a character, unless you want one, you pretty dear, for conceit and self-admiration”.

So saying, she tossed her light head at herself, and looked round through her flickering cloudlets. What did she see? What made the dark water flame upon the instant with a richer glow than sunset? The delicate cheeks, the fair forehead and neck, even the pearly slope of the shoulders, were flooded with deepest carmine. Her pride fell flat, as the cistus stamen at a touch droops away on the petal. Then she shrank back into a flowering broom, and cowered among the spikelets, and dared not move to wipe away the tears she was so mad with. Oh! the wretched abasement earned by a sweet little bit of vanity!

How she hated herself, and the light, and the water, her senseless habit of thinking aloud, above all, her despicable fancy that she was growing – what nonsense! – such a pretty girl! Thenceforth and for ever, she felt quite sure, she never could look in a glass again, unless it were just for a moment, to put her hair to rights, when she got home.

“To think of my hair all down my neck, and the way I had turned in the gathers”! – the poor little thing had been making experiments how she would look in a low-necked dress – “Oh! that was the worst thing of all. I might have laughed at it but for that. And now I am sure I can never even peep at his face again. Whatever will he think of me, and what would my papa say”?

After crying until she began to laugh, she resolved to go straight home, and confess all her crime to Aunt Eudoxia, John Rosedew’s maiden sister, who had come to live with him when he lost

his wife, three dreary years ago. So Amy rolled up her long hair anyhow, without a bit of pride in it, shrank away and examined herself, to be sure that all was right, and, after one peep, came bravely forth, trying to look as much as possible like her good Aunt Doxy; then she walked at her stateliest, with the basket of strawberries, picked for papa, in one hand, and the other tightly clasped upon the bounding of her heart. But her eyes were glancing right or left, like a fawn's when a lion has roared; and even the youngest trees saw quite well that, however rigid with Miss Eudoxia the gliding form might be, it was poised for a dart and a hide behind them at every crossing shadow.

But fortune favours the brave. She won her own little sallyport without the rustle of a blackberry-leaf, and thereupon rushed to a hasty and ostrich-like conclusion. She felt quite sure that, after all, none but the waters and winds could tell the tale of her little coquetry. Beyond all doubt, Cradock Nowell was deep in the richest mental metallurgy, tracing the vein of Greek iambics, as he did before his beard grew; and she never, never would call them "stupid iambics" again.

Cradock, who had seen her, but turned away immediately (as became a gentleman), did not, for the moment, know his little Amy Rosedew. A year and a half had changed her from a stripling, jumping girl to a shy and graceful maiden, dreadfully afraid of sweethearts. She had not been away from Nowelhurst throughout that year and a half, for her father could not get on without her for more than a month at a time, and all that month he fretted. But the twins had spent the last summer in Germany, with a merry reading (or talking) party; and their Christmas and Easter vacations were dragged away in London, through a strange whim of Sir Cradock Nowell; at least, they thought it strange, but there was some reason for it.

Young Cradock Nowell was not such a muff as to be lost in Greek senarii; no trimeter acatalectics of truest balance and purest fall could be half so fair to scan; not "Harmony of the golden hair", and her nine Pierid daughters round the crystal spring, were worth a glance of the mental eye, when fortune granted bodily vision of our unconscious Amy. But he did not stand there watching mutely, as some youths would have done; for a moment, indeed, he forgot himself in the flush of admiration. The next moment he remembered that he was a gentleman; and he did what a gentleman must have done – whether marquis or labourer: he slipped away through the bushes, feeling as if he had done some injury. Then the maiden, glancing round, caught one startled glimpse, as Nyssia did of the stealthy Gyges, or Diana of Actæon. From that one glimpse she knew him, though he was so like his brother; but he had failed to recognise the Amy of his boyhood.

CHAPTER IX

Miss Eudoxia was now the queen of the little household, and the sceptre she bore was an iron one to all except her niece. John – that easy, good-natured parson, who, coming in from the garden or parish, any summer forenoon, would halt in the long low kitchen, if a nice crabbed question presented itself, take his seat outright upon the corner of the ancient dresser, and then and there discuss some moot point in the classics, or tie and untie over again some fluffy knot historical (which after all is but a pucker in the tatters of a scarecrow); and all the while he would appeal to the fat cook or the other maid – for the house only kept two servants; and all the while Miss Amy, *διαφυλάττουσα θέσιν* would poke in little pike-points of impudence and ignorance – John, I must confess at last, was threatened so with dishclouts, pepper, and even rolling-pins, that the cook began to forget the name of Plato (which had struck her), and the housemaid could not justly tell what Tibullus says of Pales.

“John, you are so lamentably deficient in moral dignity! And the mutton not put down yet, and the kidney-beans getting ropy! If you must sit there, you might as well begin to slice the cucumber. I dare say you’d do that even”.

“To be sure, Doxy; so I will. I sharpened my knife this morning”.

“Doxy, indeed! And before the servants! I am sure Johanna must have heard you, though she makes such a rattle in there with the rolling-pin, like a doctor’s pestle and mortar. She always does when I come out, to pretend she is so busy; and most likely she has been listening for half an hour, and laughing at your flummery. What do I care about Acharnius? – now don’t tell me any jokes, if you please, brother John; with butter on both your legs, too! Oh, if I could only put you in a passion! I might have some hopes of you then. But I should like to see the woman that could; you have so little self-respect”.

“Eudoxia, that is the very converse of Seneca’s proposition”.

“Then Seneca didn’t know how to converse, and I won’t be flouted with him. Seneca to me, indeed, or any other heathen! Let me tell you one thing, John Rosedew” – Miss Eudoxia now was wrathful, not nettlesome only, but spinous; perhaps it would be rude to hint that in this latter word may lurk the true etymon of “spinster” – “let me tell you one thing, and perhaps you’ll try to remember it; for, with all your wonderful memory, you never can tell to-morrow what I said to-day”.

“Surely not, dear Doxy, because you talk so much. It is related of that same Seneca that he could repeat – ”

“Fiddlesticks. Now you want to turn off the home-truth you feel to be coming. But you shall have it, John Rosedew, and briefly, it is this: Although you do sit on the dresser, your taste is too eclectic. You are a very learned man, but your learning gilds foul idols. You spend all your time in pagans’ company, while the epistles and gospels have too little style for *you*”.

“Oh, Aunt Eudoxia, how dare you talk to my papa like that, my own daddy, and me to hear you? And just now you flew into a pet because you fancied Johanna heard him call you ‘Doxy’. I am astonished at it, Aunt Doxy; and it is not true, not a word of it. Come with me, father, dearest, and we won’t say a word to her all the afternoon”.

Even young Amy saw that her father was hit very hard. There was so much truth in the accusation, so much spiteful truth – among thy beauties, *nuda veritas*, a smooth skin is not one – that poor John felt as if Aristophanes were sewn up henceforth in a pig-sack. He slunk away quietly to his room, and tried to suck some roots Hebraic, whence he got no satisfaction. He never could have become a great theological scholar. After all, a man must do what God has shaped his mind for. So in a week John Rosedew got back to his native element; but sister Doxy’s rough thrust made the dresser for many a month like the bottom of a pincushion, when the pins are long, and the bran has leaked out at the corner.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.