GEORGE MACDONALD

A ROUGH SHAKING

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Содержание

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Chapter I. How I Came to know Clare Skymer

It was a day when everything around seemed almost perfect: everything does, now and then, come nearly right for a moment or two, preparatory to coming all right for good at the last. It was the third week in June. The great furnace was glowing and shining in full force, driving the ship of our life at her best speed through the ocean of space. For on deck, and between decks, and aloft, there is so much more going on at one time than at another, that I may well say she was then going at her best speed, for there is quality as well as rate in motion. The trees were all well clothed, most of them in their very best. Their garments were soaking up the light and the heat, and the wind was going about among them, telling now one and now another, that all was well, and getting through an immense amount of comfort-work in a single minute. It said a word or two to myself as often as it passed me, and made me happier than any boy I know just at present, for I was an old man, and ought to be more easily made happy than any mere beginner.

I was walking through the thin edge of a little wood of big trees, with a slope of green on my left stretching away into the sunny distance, and the shadows of the trees on my right lying below my feet. The earth and the grass and the trees and the air were together weaving a harmony, and the birds were leading the big orchestra—which was indeed on the largest scale. For the instruments were so different, that some of them only were meant for sound; the part of others was in odour, of others yet in shine, and of still others in motion; while the birds turned it all as nearly into words as they could. Presently, to complete the score, I heard the tones of a man's voice, both strong and sweet. It was talking to some one in a way I could not understand. I do not mean I could not understand the words: I was too far off even to hear them; but I could not understand how the voice came to be so modulated. It was deep, soft, and musical, with something like coaxing in it, and something of tenderness, and the intent of it puzzled me. For I could not conjecture from it the age, or sex, or relation, or kind of the person to whom the words were spoken. You can tell by the voice when a man is talking to himself; it ought to be evident when he is talking to a woman; and you can, surely, tell when he is talking to a child; you could tell if he were speaking to him who made him; and you would be pretty certain if he was holding communication with his dog: it made me feel strange that I could not tell the kind of ear open to the gentle manly voice saying things which the very sound of them made me long to hear. I confess to hurrying my pace a little, but I trust with

no improper curiosity, to see—I cannot say the interlocutors, for I had heard, and still heard, only one voice.

About a minute's walk brought me to the corner of the wood where it stopped abruptly, giving way to a field of beautiful grass; and then I saw something it does not need to be old to be delighted withal: the boy that would not have taken pleasure in it, I should count half-way to the gallows. Up to the edge of the wood came, I say, a large field—acres on acres of the sweetest grass; and dividing it from both wood and path stood a fence of three bars, which at the moment separated two as genuine lovers as ever wall of "stones with lime and hair knit up" could have sundered. On one side of the fence stood a man whose face I could not see, and on the other one of the loveliest horses I had ever set eyes upon. I am no better than a middling fair horseman, but, for this horse's sake, I may be allowed to mention that my friends will all have me look at any horse they think of buying. He was over sixteen hands, with well rounded barrel, clean limbs, small head, and broad muzzle; hollows above his eyes of hazy blue, and delicacy of feature, revealed him quite an old horse. His ears pointed forward and downward, as if they wanted on their own account to get a hold of the man the nose was so busily caressing. Neither, I presume, had heard my approach; for all true-love-endearments are shy, and the man had his arm round the horse's neck, and was caressing his face, talking to him much as Philip Sidney's lady, whose lips "seemed at once to kiss and speak," murmured to her pet sparrow, only here the voice was a

musical baritone. That there was something between them more than an ordinary person would be likely to understand appeared patent.

Whether or not I made an involuntary sound I cannot tell: I was so taken with the sight, bearing to me an aspect of something eternal, that I do not know how I carried myself; but the horse gave a little start, half lifted his head, saw me, threw it up, uttered a shrill neigh of warning, stepped hack a pace, and stood motionless, waiting apparently for an order from his master—if indeed I ought not rather to call them friends than master and servant.

The man looked round, saw me, turned toward me, and showing no sign that my appearance was unexpected, lifted his hat with a courtesy most Englishmen would reserve for a lady, and advanced a step, almost as if to welcome a guest. I may have owed something of this reception to the fact that he saw before him a man advanced in years, for my beard is very gray, and that by no means prematurely. I saw before me one nearly, if not quite as old as myself. His hair and beard, both rather long, were quite white. His face was wonderfully handsome, with the stillness of a summer sea upon it. Its features were very marked and regular and fine, for the habit of the man was rather spare. What with his white hair and beard, and a certain radiance in his pale complexion, which, I learned afterward, no sun had ever more than browned a little, he reminded me for a moment as he turned, of Cato on the shore of Dante's purgatorial island.

"I fear," I said, "I have intruded!" There was no path where I had come along.

The man laughed—and his laugh was more friendly than an invitation to dinner.

"The land is mine," he answered; "no one can say you intrude."

"Thank you heartily. I live not very far off, and know the country pretty well, but have got into a part of which I am ignorant."

"You are welcome to go where you will on my property," he answered. "I could not close a field without some sense of having thrown a fellow-being into a dungeon. Whatever be the rights of land, space can belong to the individual only '*as it were*,' to use a Shakspere-phrase. All the best things have to be shared. The house plainly was designed for a family."

While he spoke I scarce heeded his words for looking at the man, so much he interested me. His face was of the palest health, with a faint light from within. He looked about sixty years of age. His forehead was square, and his head rather small, but beautifully modelled; his eyes were of a light hazel, friendly as those of a celestial dog. Though slender in build, he looked strong, and every movement denoted activity.

I was not ready with an answer to what he said. He turned from me, and as if to introduce a companion and so render the interview easier, he called, in tone as gentle as if he spoke to a child, but with that peculiar intonation that had let me understand it was not to a child he was speaking, "Memnon! come;" and

turned again to me. His movement and words directed my attention again to the horse, who had stood motionless. At once, but without sign of haste, the animal walked up to the rails, rose gently on his hind legs, came over without touching, walked up to his master, and laid his head on his shoulder.

I bethought me now who the man was. He had been but a year or two in the neighbourhood, though the property on which we now stood had been his own for a good many years. Some said he had bought it; others knew he had inherited it. All agreed he was a very peculiar person, with ways so oddly unreasonable that it was evident he had, in his wanderings over the face of the earth, gradually lost hold of what sense he might at one time have possessed, and was in consequence a good deal cracked. There seemed nothing, however, in his behaviour or appearance to suggest such a conclusion: a man could hardly be counted beside himself because he was on terms of friendship with his horse. It took me but a moment to recall his name—Skymer —one odd enough to assist the memory. I caught it ere he had done mingling fresh caresses with those of his long-tailed friend. When I came to know him better, I knew that he had thus given me opportunity—such as he would to a horse—of thinking whether I should like to know him better: Mr. Skymer's way was not to offer himself, but to give easy opportunity to any who might wish to know him. I learned afterward that he knew my name and suspected my person: being rather prejudiced in my favour because of the kind of thing I wrote, he was now waiting

to see whether approximation would follow.

"Pardon my rude lingering," I said; "that lovely animal is enough to make one desire nearer acquaintance with his owner. I don't think I ever saw such a perfect creature!"

I remembered the next moment that I had heard said of Mr. Skymer that he liked beasts better than men, but I soon found this was only one of the foolish things constantly said of honest men by those who do not understand them.

There are women even who love dogs and dislike children; but, nauseous fact as this is, it is not so nauseous as the fact that there are men who believe in no animal rights, or in any God of the animals, and think we may do what we please with them, indulging at their cost an insane thirst after knowledge. Injustice may discover facts, but never truth.

"I grant him nearly a perfect creature," he answered, "But he is far more nearly perfect than you yet know him! Excuse me for speaking so confidently; but if we were half as far on for men, as Memnon is for a horse, the kingdom of heaven would be a good deal nearer!"

"He seems an old horse!"

"He is an old horse—much older than you can think after seeing him come over that paling as he did. He is forty."

"Is it possible!"

"I know and can prove his age as certainly as my own. He is the son of an Arab mare and an English thoroughbred.—Come here, Memnon!"

The horse, who had been standing behind like a servant in waiting, put his beautiful head over his master's shoulder.

"Memnon," said Mr. Skymer, "go home and tell Mrs. Waterhouse I hope to bring a gentleman with me to lunch."

The horse walked gently past us, then started at a quick trot, which almost immediately became a gallop.

"The dear fellow," said his master, "would not gallop like that if he were on the hard road; he knows I would not like it."

"But, excuse me, how can the animal convey your message?—how communicate what he knows, if he does understand what you say to him?"

"He will at least take care that the housekeeper look in his mane for the knot which perhaps you did not observe me tie in it."

"You have a code of signals by knots then?"

"Yes—comprising about half a dozen possibilities.—I hope you do not object to the message I sent! You will do me the honour of lunching with me?"

"You are most kind," I answered—with a little hesitation, I suppose, fearing to bore my new acquaintance.

"Don't make me false to horse and housekeeper, Mr. Gowrie," he resumed.—"I put the horse first, because I could more easily explain the thing to Mrs. Waterhouse than to Memnon."

"Could you explain it to Memnon?"

"I should have a try!" he answered, with a peculiar smile.

"You hold yourself bound then to keep faith with your horse?"

"Bound just as with a man—that is, as far as the horse can understand me. A word understood is binding, whether spoken to horse, or man, or pig. It makes it the more important that we can do so little, must work so slowly, for the education of the lower animals. It seems to me an absolute horror that a man should lie to an inferior creature. Just think—if an angel were to lie to us! What a shock to find we had been reposing faith in a devil."

"Excuse me—I thought you said *an angel*!"

"When he lied, would he not be a devil?—But let us follow Memnon, and as we walk I will tell you more about him."

He turned to the wood.

"The horse," I said, pointing, "went that way!"

"Yes," answered his master; "he knew it was nearer for him to take the long way round. If I had started him and one of the dogs together, the horse would have gone that way, and the dog taken the path we are now following."

We walked a score or two of yards in silence.

"You promised to tell me more about your wonderful horse!" I said.

"With pleasure. I delight in talking about my poor brothers and sisters! Most of them are only savages yet, but there would be far fewer such if we did not treat them as slaves instead of friends. One day, however, all will be well for them as for us—thank God."

"I hope so," I responded heartily. "But please tell me," I said, "something more about your Memnon."

Mr. Skymer thought for a moment.

"Perhaps, after all," he rejoined, "his best accomplishment is that he can fetch and carry like a dog. I will tell you one of his feats that way. But first you must know that, having travelled a good deal, and in some wild countries, I have picked up things it is well to know, even if not the best of their kind. A man may fail by not knowing the second best! I was once out on Memnon, five and twenty miles from home, when I came to a cottage where I found a woman lying ill. I saw what was wanted. The country was strange to me, and I could not have found a doctor. I wrote a little pencil-note, fastened it to the saddle, and told the horse to go home and bring me what the housekeeper gave him—and not to spare himself. He went off at a steady trot of ten or twelve miles an hour. I went into the cottage, and, awaiting his return, did what I could for the woman. I confess I felt anxious!"

"You well might," I said: "why should you say *confess*?"

"Because I had no business to be anxious."

"It was your business to do all for her you could."

"I was doing that! If I hadn't been, I should have had good cause to be anxious! But I knew that another was looking after her; and to be anxious was to meddle with his part!"

"I see now," I answered, and said nothing more for some time.

"What a lather poor Memnon came back in! You should have seen him! He had been gone nearly five hours, and neither time nor distance accounted for the state he was in. I did not let him do anything for a week. I should have had to sit up with him that

night, if I had not been sitting up at any rate. The poor fellow had been caught, and had made his escape. His bridle was broken, and there were several long skin wounds in his belly, as if he had scraped the top of a wall set with bits of glass. How far he had galloped, there was no telling."

"Not in vain, I hope! The poor woman?"

"She recovered. The medicine was all right in a pocket under the flap of the saddle. Before morning she was much better, and lived many years after. Memnon and I did not lose sight of her.—But you should have seen the huge creature lying on the floor of that cabin like a worn-out dog, abandoned and content! I rubbed him down carefully, as well as I could, and tied my poncho round him, before I let him go to sleep. Then as soon as my patient seemed quieted for the night, I made up a big fire of her peats, and they slept like two babies, only they both snored. —The woman beat," he added with a merry laugh. "It was the first, almost the only time I ever heard a horse snore.—As we walked home next day he kept steadily behind me. In general we walked side by side. Either he felt too tired to talk to me, or he was not satisfied with himself because of something that had happened the day before. Perhaps he had been careless, and so allowed himself to be taken. I do not think it likely."

"What a loss it will be to you when he dies!" I said.

He looked grave for an instant, then replied cheerfully—

"Of course I shall miss the dear fellow—but not more than he will miss me; and it will be good for us both."

"Then," said I,—a little startled, I confess, "you really think —" and there I stopped.

"Do *you* think, Mr. Gowrie," he rejoined, answering my unpropounded question, "that a God like Jesus Christ, would invent such a delight for his children as the society and love of animals, and then let death part them for ever? I don't."

"I am heartily willing to be your disciple in the matter," I replied.

"I know well," he resumed, "the vulgar laugh that serves the poor public for sufficient answer to anything, and the commonplace retort: 'You can't give a shadow of proof for your theory!'—to which I answer, 'I never was the fool to imagine I could; but as surely as you go to bed at night expecting to rise again in the morning, so surely do I expect to see my dear old Memnon again when I wake from what so many Christians call the sleep that knows no waking.'—Think, Mr. Gowrie, just think of all the children in heaven—what a superabounding joy the creatures would be to them!—There is one class, however," he went on, "which I should like to see wait a while before they got their creatures back;—I mean those foolish women who, for their own pleasure, so spoil their dogs that they make other people hate them, doing their best to keep them from rising in the scale of God's creation."

"They don't know better!" I said. For every time he stopped, I wanted to hear what he would say next.

"True," he answered; "but how much do they want to know

the right way of anything? They have good and lovely instincts —like their dogs, but do they care that there is a right way and a wrong way of following them?"

We walked in silence, and were now coming near the other side of the small wood.

"I hope I shall not interfere with your plans for the day!" I said.

"I seldom have any plans for the day," he answered. "Or if I have, they are made to break easily. In general I wait. The hour brings its plans with it—comes itself to tell me what is wanted of me. It has done so now. And see, there is Memnon again in attendance on us!"

There, sure enough, was the horse, on the other side of the paling that here fenced the wood from a well-kept country-road. His long neck was stretched over it toward his master.

"Memnon," said Mr. Skymer as we issued by the gate, "I want you to carry this gentleman home."

I had often enough in my youth ridden without a saddle, but seldom indeed without some sort of bridle, however inadequate: I did not, at the first thought of the thing, relish mounting without one a horse of which all I knew was that he and his master were on better terms than I had ever seen man and horse upon before. But even while the thought was passing through my head, Memnon was lying at my feet, flat as his equine rotundity would permit. Ashamed of my doubt, I lost not a moment in placing myself in the position suggested by Sir John Falstaff to Prince Hal for the defence of his own bulky carcase—astride the body

of the animal, namely. At once he rose and lifted me into the natural relation of man and horse. Then he looked round at his master, and they set off at a leisurely pace.

"You have me captive!" I said.

"Memnon and I," answered Mr. Skymer, "will do what we can to make your captivity pleasant."

A silence followed my thanks. In this procession of horse and foot, we went about half a mile ere anything more was said worth setting down. Then began evidence that we were drawing nigh to a house: the grassy lane between hedges in which we had been moving, was gradually changing its character. First came trees in the hedge-rows. Then the hedges gave way to trees—a grand avenue of splendid elms and beeches alternated. The ground under our feet was the loveliest sward, and between us and the sun came the sweetest shadow. A glad heave but instant subsidence of the live power under me, let me know Memnon's delight at feeling the soft elastic turf under his feet: he had said to himself, "Now we shall have a gallop!" but immediately checked the thought with the reflection that he was no longer a colt ignorant of manners.

"What a lovely road the turf makes!" I said. "It is a lower sky—solidified for feet that are not yet angelic."

My host looked up with a brighter smile than he had shown before.

"It is the only kind of road I really like," he said, "—though turf has its disadvantages! I have as much of it about the place

as it will bear. Such roads won't do for carriages!"

"You ride a good deal, I suppose?"

"I do. I was at one time so accustomed to horseback that, without thinking, I was not aware whether I was on my horse's feet or my own."

"Where, may I ask, does my friend who is now doing me the favour to carry 'this weight and size,' come from?"

"He was born in England, but his mother was a Syrian—of one of the oldest breeds there known. He was born into my arms, and for a week never touched the ground. Next month, as I think I mentioned, he will be forty years old!"

"It is a great age for a horse!" I said.

"The more the shame as well as the pity!" he answered.

"Then you think horses might live longer?"

"Much longer than they are allowed to live in this country," he answered. "And a part of our punishment is that we do not know them. We treat them so selfishly that they do not live long enough to become our friends. At present there are but few men worthy of their friendship. What else is a man's admiration, when it is without love or respect or justice, but a bitter form of despite! It is small wonder there should be so many stupid horses, when they receive so little education, have such bad associates, and die so much too young to have gained any ripe experience to transmit to their posterity. Where would humanity be now, if we all went before five-and-twenty?"

"I think you must be right. I have myself in my possession at

this moment, given me by one who loved her, an ink-stand made from the hoof of a pony that died at the age of at least forty-two, and did her part of the work of a pair till within a year or two of her death.—Poor little Zephyr!"

"Why, Mr. Gowrie, you talk of her as if she were a Christian!" exclaimed Mr. Skymer.

"That's how you talked of Memnon a moment ago! Where is the difference? Not in the size, though Memnon would make three of Zephyr!"

"I didn't say *poor Memnon*, did I? You said *poor Zephyr*! That is the way Christians talk about their friends gone home to the grand old family mansion! Why they do, they would hardly like one to tell them!"

"It is true," I responded. "I understand you now! I don't think I ever heard a widow speak of her departed husband without putting *poor*, or *poor dear*, before his name.—By the way, when you hear a woman speak of her *late* husband, can you help thinking her ready to marry again?"

"It does sound as if she had done with him! But here we are at the gate!—Call, Memnon."

The horse gave a clear whinny, gentle, but loud enough to be heard at some distance. It was a tall gate of wrought iron, but Memnon's summons was answered by one who could clear it—though not open it any more than he: a little bird, which I was not ornithologist enough to recognize—mainly because of my short-sightedness, I hope—came fluttering from the long avenue

within, perched on the top of the gate, looked down at our party for a moment as if debating the prudent, dropped suddenly on Memnon's left ear, and thence to his master's shoulder, where he sat till the gate was opened. The little one went half-way up the inner avenue with us, making several flights and returns before he left us.

The boy that opened the gate, a chubby little fellow of seven, looked up in Mr. Skymer's face as if he had been his father and king in one, and stood gazing after him as long as he was in sight. I noticed also—who could have failed to notice?—that every now and then a bird would drop from the tree we were passing under, and alight for a minute on my host's head. Once when he happened to uncover it, seven or eight perched together upon it. One tiny bird got caught in his beard by the claws.

"You cannot surely have tamed *all* the birds in your grounds!" I said.

"If I have," he answered, "it has been by permitting them to be themselves."

"You mean it is the nature of birds to be friendly with man?"

"I do. Through long ages men have been their enemies, and so have alienated them—they too not being themselves."

"You mean that unfriendliness is not natural to men?"

"It cannot be human to be cruel!"

"How is it, then, that so many boys are careless what suffering they inflict?"

"Because they have in them the blood of men who loved

cruelty, and never repented of it."

"But how do you account for those men loving cruelty—for their being what you say is contrary to their nature?"

"Ah, if I could account for that, I should be at the secret of most things! All I meant to half-explain was, how it came that so many who have no wish to inflict suffering, yet are careless of inflicting it."

I saw that we must know each other better before he would quite open his mind to me. I saw that though, hospitable of heart, he threw his best rooms open to all, there were others in his house into which he did not invite every acquaintance.

The avenue led to a wide gravelled space before a plain, low, long building in whitish stone, with pillared portico. In the middle of the space was a fountain, and close to it a few chairs. Mr. Skymer begged me to be seated. Memnon walked up to the fountain, and lay down, that I might get off his back as easily as I had got on it. Once down, he turned on his side, and lay still.

"The air is so mild," said my host, "I fancy you will prefer this to the house."

"Mild!" I rejoined; "I should call it hot!"

"I have been so much in real heat!" he returned. "Notwithstanding my love of turf, I keep this much in gravel for the sake of the desert."

I took the seat he offered me, wondering whether Memnon was comfortable where he lay; and, absorbed in the horse, did not see my host go to the other side of the basin. Suddenly we

were "clothed upon" with a house which, though it came indeed from the earth, might well have come direct from heaven: a great uprush of water spread above us a tent-like dome, through which the sun came with a cool, broken, almost frosty glitter. We seemed in the heart of a huge soap-bubble. I exclaimed with delight.

"I thought you would enjoy my sun-shade!" said Mr. Skymer. "Memnon and I often come here of a hot morning, when nobody wants us. Don't we, Memnon?"

The horse lifted his nose a little, and made a low soft noise, a chord of mingled obedience and delight—a moan of pleasure mixed with a half-born whinny.

We had not been seated many moments, and had scarcely pushed off the shore of silence into a new sea of talk, when we were interrupted by the invasion of half a dozen dogs. They were of all sorts down to no sort. Mr. Skymer called one of them Tadpole—I suppose because he had the hugest tail, while his legs were not visible without being looked for.

"That animal," said his master, "—he looks like a dog, but who would be positive what he was!—is the cleverest in the pack. He seems to me a rare individuality. His ancestors must have been of all sorts, and he has gathered from them every good quality possessed by each. Think what a man might be—made up that way!"

"Why is there no such man?" I said.

"There may be some such men. There must be many one day,"

he answered, "—but not for a while yet. Men must first be made willing to be noble."

"And you don't think men willing to be made noble?"

"Oh yes! willing enough, some of them, to be *made* noble!"

"I do not understand. I thought you said they were not!"

"They are willing enough *to be made* noble; but that is very different from being willing *to be* noble: that takes trouble. How can any one become noble who desires it so little as not to fight for it!"

The man drew me more and more. He had a way of talking about things seldom mentioned except in dull fashion in the pulpit, as if he cared about them. He spoke as of familiar things, but made you feel he was looking out of a high window. There are many who never speak of real things except in a false tone; this man spoke of such without an atom of assumed solemnity—in his ordinary voice: they came into his mind as to their home—not as dreams of the night, but as facts of the day.

I sat for a while, gazing up through the thin veil of water at the blue sky so far beyond. I thought how like that veil was to our little life here, overdomed by that boundless foreshortening of space. The lines in Shelley's *Adonais* came to me:

> "Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
> Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
> Until Death tramples it to fragments."

Then I thought of what my host had said concerning the too

short lives of horses, and wondered what he would say about those of dogs.

"Dogs are more intelligent than horses," I said: "why do they live a yet shorter time?"

"I doubt if you would say so in an Arab's tent," he returned. "If you had said, 'still more affectionate,' I should have known better how to answer you."

"Then I do say so," I replied.

"And I return, that is just why they live no longer. They do not find the world good enough for them, die, and leave it."

"They have a much happier life than horses!"

"Many dogs than some horses, I grant."

That instant arose what I fancied must be an unusual sound in the place: two of the dogs were fighting. The master got up. I thought with myself, "Now we shall see his notions of discipline!" nor had I long to wait. In his hand was a small riding-whip, which I afterward found he always carried in avoidance of having to inflict a heavier punishment from inability to inflict a lighter; for he held that in all wrong-doing man can deal with, the kindest thing is not only to punish, but, with animals especially, to punish at once. He ran to the conflicting parties. They separated the moment they heard the sound of his coming. One came cringing and crawling to his feet; the other—it was the nondescript Tadpole—stood a little way off, wagging his tail, and cocking his head up in his master's face. He gave the one at his feet several pretty severe cuts with the whip, and sent him

off. The other drew nearer. His master turned away and took no notice of him.

"May I ask," I said, when he returned to his seat, "why you did not punish both the animals for their breach of the peace?"

"They did not both deserve it."

"How could you tell that? You were not looking when the quarrel began!"

"Ah, but you see I know the dogs! One of them—I saw at a glance how it was—had found a bone, and dog-rule about finding is, that what you find is yours. The other, notwithstanding, wanted a share. It was Tadpole who found the bone, and he—partly from his sense of justice—cannot endure to have his claims infringed upon. Every dog of them knows that Tadpole must be in the right."

"He looked as if he expected you to approve of his conduct!"

"Yes, that is the worst of Tadpole! he is so self-righteous as to imagine he deserves praise for standing on his rights! He is but a dog, you see, and knows no better!"

"I noticed you disregarded his appeal."

"I was not going to praise him for nothing!"

"You expect them to understand your treatment?"

"No one can tell how infinitesimally small the beginnings of understanding, as of life, may be. The only way to make animals reasonable—more reasonable, I mean—is to treat them as reasonable. Until you can go down into the abysses of creation, you cannot know when a nature begins to see a difference in

quality of action."

"I confess," I said, "Mr. Tadpole did seem a little ashamed as he went away."

"And you see Blanco White at my feet, taking care not to touch them. He is giving time, he thinks, for my anger to pass."

He laughed the merriest laugh. The dog looked up eagerly, but dropped his head again.

If I go on like this, however, I shall have to take another book to tell the story for which I began the present! In short, I was drawn to the man as never to another since the friend of my youth went where I shall go to seek and find him one day—or, more likely, one solemn night. I was greatly his inferior, but love is a quick divider of shares: he that gathers much has nothing over, and he that gathers little has no lack. I soon ceased to think of him as my *new* friend, for I seemed to have known him before I was born.

I am going to tell the early part of his history. If only I could tell it as it deserves to be told! The most interesting story may be so narrated as that only the eyes of a Shakspere could spy the shine underneath its dull surface.

He never told me any great portion of the tale of his life continuously. One thing would suggest another—generally with no connection in time. I have pieced the parts together myself. He did indeed set out more than once or twice to give me his history, but always we got discussing something, and so it was interrupted.

I will not write what I have set in order as if he were himself narrating: the most modest man in the world would that way be put at a disadvantage. The constant recurrence of the capital *I*, is apt to rouse in the mind of the reader, especially if he be himself egotistic, more or less of irritation at the egotism of the narrator —while in reality the freedom of a man's personal utterance *may* be owing to his lack of the egotistic. Partly for my friend's sake, therefore, I shall tell the story as—what indeed it is—a narrative of my own concerning him.

Chapter II. With his parents

The lingering, long-drawn-out *table d'hôte* dinner was just over in one of the inns on the *cornice* road. The gentlemen had gone into the garden, and some of the ladies to the *salotto*, where open windows admitted the odours of many a flower and blossoming tree, for it was toward the end of spring in that region. One had sat down to a tinkling piano, and was striking a few chords, more to her own pleasure than that of the company. Two or three were looking out into the garden, where the diaphanous veil of twilight had so speedily thickened to the crape of night, its darkness filled with thousands of small isolated splendours—fire-flies, those "golden boats" never seen "on a sunny sea," but haunting the eves of the young summer, pulsing, pulsing through the dusky air with seeming aimlessness, like sweet thoughts that have no faith to bind them in one. A tall, graceful woman stood in one of the windows alone. She had never been in Italy before, had never before seen fire-flies, and was absorbed in the beauty of their motion as much as in that of their golden flashes. Each roving star had a tide in its light that rose and ebbed as it moved, so that it seemed to push itself on by its own radiance, ever waxing and waning. In wide, complicated dance, they wove a huge, warpless tapestry with the weft of an ever vanishing aureate shine. The lady, an Englishwoman evidently, gave a little sigh and looked round, regretting, apparently, that her husband was

not by her side to look on the loveliness that woke a faint-hued fairy-tale in her heart. The same moment he entered the room and came to her. He was a man above the middle height, and from the slenderness of his figure, looked taller than he was. He had a vivacity of motion, a readiness to turn on his heel, a free swing of the shoulders, and an erect carriage of the head, which all marked him a man of action: one that speculated on his calling would immediately have had his sense of fitness satisfied when he heard that he was the commander of an English gun-boat, which he was now on his way to Genoa to join. He was young—within the twenties, though looking two or three and thirty, his face was so browned by sun and wind. His features were regular and attractive, his eyes so dark that the liveliness of their movement seemed hardly in accord with the weight of their colour. His wife was very fair, with large eyes of the deepest blue of eyes. She looked delicate, and was very lovely. They had been married about five years. A friend had brought them in his yacht as far as Nice, and they were now going on by land. From Genoa the lady must find her way home without her husband.

The lights in the room having been extinguished that the few present might better see the fire-flies, he put his arm round her waist.

"I'm so glad you're come, Henry!" she said, favoured by the piano. "I was uncomfortable at having the lovely sight all to myself!"

"It is lovely, darling!" he rejoined; then, after a moment's

pause, added, “I hope you will be able to sleep without the sea to rock you!”

“No fear of that!” she answered. “The stillness will be delightful. I was thoroughly reconciled to the motion of the yacht,” she went on, “but there is a satisfaction in feeling the solid earth under you, and knowing it will keep steady all night.”

“I am glad you like the change. I never sleep the first night on shore.—I cannot tell what it is, but somehow I keep wishing Fyvie could have taken us all the way.”

“Never mind, love. I will keep awake with you.”

“It’s not that! How could I mind lying awake with you beside me! Oh Grace, you don’t know, you cannot know, what you are to me! I don’t feel in the least that you’re my other half, as people say. You’re not like a part of myself at all; to think so would be sacrilege! You are quite another, else how could you be mine! You make me forget myself altogether. When I look at you, I stand before an enchanted mirror that cannot show what is in front of it.”

“No, Harry; I’m a true mirror, for I hold that inside me which remains outside me.”

“I fear you’ve got beyond me!” said her husband, laughing. “You always do!”

“Yes, at nonsense, Harry.”

“Then your speech was nonsense, was it?”

“No; it was full of sense. But think of something you would like me to say; I must fetch the boy to see the fire-flies; when I

come back I will say it."

She left the room. Her husband stood where he was, gazing out, with a tender look in his face that deepened to sadness—whether from the haunting thought of his wife's delicate health and his having to leave her, or from some strange foreboding, I cannot tell. When presently she returned with their one child in her arms, he made haste to take him from her.

"My darling," he said, "he is much too heavy for you! How stupid of me not to think of it! If you don't promise me never to do that at home, I will take him to sea with me!"

The child, a fair, bright boy, the sleep in whose eyes had turned to wonder, for they seemed to see everything, and be quite satisfied with nothing, went readily to his father, but looked back at his mother. The only sign he gave that he was delighted with the fire-flies was, that he looked now to the one, now to the other of his parents, speechless, with shining eyes. He knew they were feeling just like himself. Silent communion was enough.

The father turned to carry him back to bed. The mother turned to look after them. As she did so, her eyes fell upon two or three delicate, small-leaved plants—I do not know what they were—that stood in pots on the balcony in front of the open window: they were shivering. The night was perfectly still, but their leaves trembled as with an ague-fit.

"Look, Harry! What is that?" she cried, pointing to them.

He turned and looked, said it must be some loaded wagon passing, and went off with the child.

"I hope to-morrow will be just like to-day!" said his wife when he returned. "What shall we do with it?—our one real holiday, you know!"

"I have a notion in my head," he answered. "That little town Georgina spoke of, is not far from here—among the hills: shall we go and see it?"

Chapter III. Without his parents

The sun in England seems to shine because he cannot help it; the sun in Italy seems to shine because he means it, and wants to mean it. Thus he shone the next morning, including in his attentions a curious little couple, husband and wife, who, attended by a guide, and borne by animals which might be mules and might be donkeys, and were not lovely to look on except through sympathy with their ugliness, were slowly ascending a steep terraced and zigzagged road, with olive trees above and below them. They were on the south side of the hill, and the olives gave them none of the little shadow they have in their power, for the trees next the sun were always below the road. The man often wiped his red, innocent face, and looked not a little distressed; but the lady, although as stout as he, did not seem to suffer, perhaps because she was sheltered by a very large bonnet After a silence of a good many minutes, she was the first to speak.

"I can't say but I'm disappointed in the olives, Thomas," she remarked. "They ain't much to keep the sun off you!"

"They wouldn't look bad along a brookside in Essex!" returned her husband. "Here they do seem a bit out of place!"

"Well, but, poor things! how are they to help it—with only a trayful of earth under their feet! If you planted a priest on a terrace he would soon be as thin as they!"

They had just passed a very stout priest, in a low broad hat, and

cassock, and she laughed merrily at her small joke. They were an English country parson and his wife, abroad for the first time in their now middle-aged lives, and happy as children just out of school. Incapable of disliking anybody, there was no unkindness in Mrs. Porson's laughter.

"I don't see," she resumed, "how they ever can have a picnic in such a country!"

"Why not?"

"There's no place to sit down!"

"Here's a whole hill-side!"

"But so hard!" she answered. "There's not an inch of turf or grass in any direction!"

The pair—equally plump, and equally good-natured—laughed together.

I need not give more of their talk. It was better than most talk, yet not worth recording. Their guide, perceiving that they knew no more of Italian than he did of English, had withdrawn to the rear, and stumped along behind them all the way, holding much converse with his donkeys however, admonishing now this one, now that one, and seeming not a little hurt with their behaviour, to judge from the expostulations that accompanied his occasionally more potent arguments. Assuredly the speed they made was small; but it was a festa, and hot.

They were on the way to a small town some distance from the shore, on the crest of the hill they were now ascending. It would, from the number of its inhabitants, have been in England

a village, but there are no villages in the Riviera. However insignificant a place may be, it is none the less a town, possibly a walled town. Somebody had told Mr. and Mrs. Person they ought to visit Graffiacane, and to Graffiacane they were therefore bound: why they ought to visit it, and what was to be seen there, they took the readiest way to know.

The place was indeed a curious one, high among the hills, and on the top of its own hill, with approaches to it like the trenches of a siege. All the old towns in that region seem to have climbed up to look over the heads of other things. Graffiacane saw over hills and valleys and many another town—each with its church standing highest, the guardian of the flock of houses beneath it; saw over many a water-course, mostly dry, with lovely oleanders growing in the middle of it; saw over multitudinous oliveyards and vineyards; saw over mills with great wheels, and little ribbons of water to drive them—running sometimes along the tops of walls to get at their work; saw over rugged pines, and ugly, verdureless, raw hillsides—away to the sea, lying in the heat like a heavenly vat in which all the tails of all the peacocks God was making, lay steeped in their proper dye. Numerous were the sharp turns the donkeys made in their ascent; and at this corner and that, the sweetest life-giving wind would leap out upon the travellers, as if it had been lying there in wait to surprise them with the heavenliest the old earth, young for all her years, could give them. But they were getting too tired to enjoy anything, and were both indeed not far from asleep on the

backs of their humble beasts, when a sudden, more determined yet more cheerful assault of their guide upon his donkeys, roused both them and their riders; and looking sleepily up, with his loud *heeoop* ringing in their ears, and a sense of the insidious approach of two headaches, they saw before them the little town, its houses gathered close for protection, like a brood of chickens, and the white steeple of the church rising above them, like the neck of the love-valiant hen.

Passing through the narrow arch of the low-browed gateway, hot as was the hour, a sudden cold struck to their bones. For not a ray of light shone into the narrow street. The houses were lofty as those of a city, and parted so little by the width of the street that friends on opposite sides might almost from their windows have shaken hands. Narrow, rough, steep old stone-stairs ran up between and inside the houses, all the doors of which were open to the air—here, however, none of the sweetest. Everywhere was shadow; everywhere one or another evil odour; everywhere a look of abject and dirty poverty—to an English eye, that is. Everywhere were pretty children, young, slatternly mothers, withered-up grandmothers, the gleam of glowing reds and yellows, and the coolness of subdued greens and fine blues. Such at least was the composite first impression made on Mr. and Mrs. Porson. As it was a festa, more men than usual were looking out of cavern-like doorways or over hand-wrought iron balconies, were leaning their backs against door-posts, and smoking as if too lazy to stop. Many of the women were at prayers in the

church. All was orderly, and quieter than usual for a festa. None could have told the reason; the townsfolk were hardly aware that an undefinable oppression was upon them—an oppression that lay also upon their visitors, and the donkeys that had toiled with them up the hills and slow-climbing valleys.

It added to the gloom and consequent humidity of the town that the sides of the streets were connected, at the height of two or perhaps three stories, by thin arches—mere jets of stone from the one house to the other, with but in rare instance the smallest superstructure to keep down the key of the arch. Whatever the intention of them, they might seem to serve it, for the time they had straddled there undisturbed had sufficed for moss and even grass to grow upon those which Mr. Porson now regarded with curious speculation. A bit of an architect, and foiled, he summoned at last what Italian he could, supplemented it with Latin and a terminational *o* or *a* tacked to any French or English word that offered help, and succeeded, as he believed, in gathering from a by-stander, that the arches were there because of the earthquakes.

He had not language enough of any sort to pursue the matter, else he would have asked his informant how the arch they were looking at could be of any service, seeing it had no weight on the top, and but a slight endlong pressure must burst it up. Turning away to tell his wife what he had learned, he was checked by a low rumbling, like distant thunder, which he took for the firing of festa guns, having discovered that Italians were fond of all kinds

of noises. The next instant they felt the ground under their feet move up and down and from side to side with confused motion. A sudden great cry arose. One moment and down every stair, out of every door, like animals from their holes, came men, women, and children, with a rush. The earthquake was upon them.

But in such narrow streets, the danger could hardly be less than inside the houses, some of which, the older especially, were ill constructed—mostly with boulder-stones that had neither angles nor edges, hence little grasp on each other beyond what the friction of their weight, and the adhesion of their poor old friable cement, gave them; for the Italians, with a genius for building, are careless of certain constructive essentials. After about twenty seconds of shaking, the lonely pair began to hear, through the noise of the cries of the people, some such houses as these rumbling to the earth.

They were far more bewildered than frightened. They were both of good nerve, and did not know the degree of danger they were in, while the strangeness of the thing contributed to an excitement that helped their courage. I cannot say how they might have behaved in an hotel full of their countrymen and countrywomen, running and shrieking, and altogether comporting themselves as if they knew there was no God. The fear on all sides might there have infected them; but the terror of the inhabitants who knew better than they what the thing meant, did not much shake them. For one moment many of the people stood in the street motionless, pale, and staring; the next they

all began to run, some for the gateway, but the greater part up the street, staggering as they ran. The movement of the ground was indeed small—not more, perhaps, than half an inch in any direction—but fear and imagination weakened all their limbs. They had not run far, however, before the terrible unrest ceased as suddenly as it had begun.

The English pair drew a long breath where they stood—for they had not stirred a step, or indeed thought whither to run—and imagining it over for a hundred years, looked around them. Their guide had disappeared. The two donkeys stood perfectly still with their heads hanging down. They seemed in deep dejection, and incapable of movement. A few men only were yet to be seen. They were running up the street. In a moment more it would be empty. They were the last of those that had let the women go to church without them. They were hurrying to join them in the sanctuary, the one safe place: the rest of the town might be shaken in heaps on its foundations, but the church would stand! Guessing their goal, the Porsons followed them. But they were neither of a build nor in a condition to make haste, and the road was uphill. No one place, however, was far from another within the toy-town, and they came presently to an open *piazza*, on the upper side of which rose the great church. It had a square front, masking with its squareness the triangular gable of the building. Upon this screen, in the brightest of colours, magenta and sky-blue predominating, was represented the day of judgment—the mother seated on the right hand of the judge, and casting a pitiful

look upon the miserable assembly on her left. The square was a good deal on the slope, and as they went slowly up to the church, they kept looking at the picture. The last tatters of the skirt of the crowd had disappeared through the great door, and but for themselves the square was empty. All at once the picture at which they were gazing, the spread of wall on which it was painted, the whole bulk of the huge building began to shudder, and went on shuddering—"just," Mr. Porson used to say when describing the thing to a friend, "like the skin of a horse determined to get rid of a gad-fly." The same moment the tiles on the roof began to clatter like so many castanets in the hands of giants, and the ground to wriggle and heave. But they were too much absorbed in what was before their eyes to heed much what went on under their feet. The oscillatory displacement of the front of the church did not at most seem to cover more than a hand-breadth, but it was enough. Down came the plaster surface, with the judge and his mother, clashing on the pavement below, while the good and the bad yet stood trembling. A few of the people came running out, thinking the open square after all safer than the church, but there was no rush to the open air. The shaking had lasted about twenty seconds, or at most half a minute, when, without indication to the eyes watching the front, there came a roaring crash and a huge rumbling, through and far above which, rose a multitudinous shriek of terror, dismay, and agony, and a number of men and women issued as if shot from a catapult. Then a few came straggling out, and then—no more. The roof had fallen

upon the rest.

With the first rush from the church, the shaking ceased utterly, and the still earth seemed again the immovable thing the English spectators had conceived her. Of what had taken place there was little sign on the earth, no sign in the blue sun-glorious heaven; only in the air there was a cloud of dust so thick as to look almost solid, and from the cloud, as it seemed, came a ghastly cry, mingled of shrieks and groans and articulate appeals for help. The cry kept on issuing, while the calm front of the church, dominated by that frightful canopy, went on displaying the assembled nations delivered from their awful judge. While the multitude groaned within, it spread itself out to the sun in silent composure, welcoming and cherishing his rays in what was left of its gorgeous hues.

The Porsons stood for a moment stunned, came to their senses, and made haste to enter the building. With white faces and trembling hands, they drew aside the heavy leather curtain that hung within the great door, but could for a moment see nothing; the air inside seemed filled with a solid yellow dust As their eyes recovered from the sudden change of sunlight for gloom, however, they began to distinguish the larger outlines, and perceived that the floor was one confused heap of rafters and bricks and tiles and stones and lime. The centre of the roof had been a great dome; now there was nothing between their eyes and the clear heaven but the slowly vanishing cloud of ruin. In the mound below they could at first distinguish nothing human—

could not have told, in the dim chaos, limbs from broken rafters. Eager to help, they dared not set their feet upon the mass—not that they feared the walls which another shock might bring upon their heads, but that they shuddered lest their own added weight should crush some live human creature they could not descry. Three or four who had received little or no hurt, were moving about the edges of the heap, vaguely trying to lift now this, now that, but yielding each attempt in despair, either from its evident uselessness, or for lack of energy. They would give a pull at a beam that lay across some writhing figure, find it immovable, and turn with a groan to some farther cry. How or where were they to help? Others began to come in with white faces and terror-stricken eyes; and before long the sepulchral ruin had little groups all over it, endeavouring in shiftless fashion to bring rescue to the prisoned souls.

The Porsons saw nothing they could do. Great beams and rafters which it was beyond their power to move an inch, lay crossed in all directions; and they could hold little communication with those who were in a fashion at work. Alas, they were little better than vainly busy, while the louder moans accompanying their attempts revealed that they added to the tortures of those they sought to deliver! The two saw more plainly now, and could distinguish contorted limbs, and here and there a countenance. The silence, more and more seldom broken, was growing itself terrible. Had they known how many were buried there, they would have wondered so few were left able to cry out.

At moments there was absolute stillness in the dreadful place. The heart of Mrs. Porson began to sink.

"Do come out," she whispered, afraid of her own voice. "I feel so sick and faint, I fear I shall drop."

As she spoke something touched her leg. She gave a cry and started aside. It was a hand, but of the body to which it belonged nothing could be seen. It must have been its last movement; now it stuck there motionless. Then they spied amid sad sights a sadder still. Upon the heap, a little way from its edge, sat a child of about three, dressed like a sailor, gazing down at something —they could not see what. Going a little nearer, they saw it— the face of a fair woman, evidently English, who lay dead, with a great beam across her heart. The child showed no trace of tears; his white face seemed frozen. The stillness upon it was not despair, but suggested a world in which hope had never yet been born. Pity drove Mrs. Porson's sickness away.

"My dear!" she said; but the child took no heed. Her voice, however, seemed to wake something in him. He started to his feet, and rushing at the beam, began to tug at it with his tiny hands. Mrs. Porson burst into tears.

"It's no use, darling!" she cried.

"Wake mamma!" he said, turning, and looking up at her.

"She will not wake," sobbed Mrs. Porson.

Her husband stood by speechless, choking back the tears of which, being an Englishman, he was ashamed.

"She *will* wake," returned the boy. "She always wakes when

I kiss her."

He knelt beside her, to prove upon her white face the efficacy of the measure he had never until now known to fail. That he had already tried it was plain, for he had kissed away much of the dust, though none of the death. When once more he found that she did not even close her lips to return his passionate salute, he desisted. With that saddest of things, a child's sigh, and a look that seemed to Mrs. Porson to embody the riddle of humanity, he reseated himself on the beam, with his little feet on his mother's bosom, where so often she had made them warm. He did not weep; he did not fix his eyes on his mother; his look was level and moveless and set upon nothing. He seemed to have before him an utter blank—as if the outer wall of creation had risen frowning in front, and he knew there was nothing behind it but chaos.

"Where is your papa?" asked Mr. Porson.

The boy looked round bewildered.

"Gone," he answered; nor could they get anything more from him.

"Was your papa with you here?" asked Mrs. Porson.

He answered only with the word *Gone*, uttered in a dazed fashion.

By this time all the men left in the town were doing their best, under the direction of an intelligent man, the priest of a neighbouring parish. They had already got one or two out alive, and their own priest dead. They worked well, their terror of the lurking earthquake forgotten in their eagerness to rescue. From

their ignorance of the language, however, Mr. Porson saw they could be of little use; and in dread of doing more harm than good, he judged it better to go.

They stood one moment and looked at each other in silence. The child had dropped from the beam, and lay fast asleep across his mother's bosom, with his head on a lump of mortar. Without a word spoken, Mrs. Person, picking her way carefully to the spot, knelt down by the dead mother, tenderly kissed her cheek, lifted the sleeping child, and with all the awe, and nearly all the tremulous joy of first motherhood, bore him to her husband. The throes of the earthquake had slain the parents, and given the child into their arms. Without look of consultation, mark of difference, or sign of agreement, they turned in silence and left the terrible church, with the clear summer sky looking in upon its dead.

As they passed the door, the sun met them shining with all his might. The sea, far away across the tops of hills and the clefts of valleys, lay basking in his glory. The hot air quivered all over the wide landscape. From the flight of steps in front of the church they looked down on the streets of the town, and beyond them into space. It looked the best of all possible worlds —as neither plague, famine, pestilence, earthquakes, nor human wrongs, persuade me it is not, judged by the high intent of its existence. When a man knows that intent, as I dare to think I do, *then* let him say, and not till then, whether it be a good world or not. That in the midst of the splendour of the sunny day, in the midst of olives and oranges, grapes and figs, ripening

swiftly by the fervour of the circumambient air, should lie that charnel-church, is a terrible fact, neither to be ignored, nor to be explained by the paltry theory of the greatest good to the greatest number; but the end of the maker's dream is not this.

When they turned into the street that led to the gate, they found the donkeys standing where they had left them. Their owner was not with them. He had gone into the church with the rest, and was killed. When they caught sight of the patient, dejected animals, unheeded and unheeding, then first they spoke, whispering in the awful stillness of the world: they must take the creatures, and make the best of their way back without a guide! They judged that, as the road was chiefly down hill, and the donkeys would be going home, they would not have much difficulty with them. At the worst, short and stout as they were, they were not bad walkers, and felt more than equal to carrying the child between them. Not a person was in the street when they mounted; almost all were in the church, at its strange, terrible service. Mrs. Porson mounted the strongest of the animals, her husband placed the sleeping child in her arms, and they started, he on foot by the side of his wife, and his donkey following. No one saw them pass through the gate of the town.

They were not sure of the way, for they had been partly asleep as they came, but so long as they went downward, and did not leave the road, they could hardly go wrong! The child slept all the way.

Chapter IV. The new family

How shall a man describe what passed in the mind of a childless wife, with a motherless boy in her arms! It is the loveliest provision, doubtless, that every child should have a mother of his own; but there is a mother-love—which I had almost called more divine—the love, namely, that a woman bears to a child because he is a child, regardless of whether he be her own or another's. It is that they may learn to love thus, that women have children. Some women love so without having any. No conceivable treasure of the world could have once entered into comparison with the burden of richness Mrs. Porson bore. She told afterward, with voice hushed by fear of irreverence, how, as they went down one of the hills, she slept for a moment, and dreamed that she was Mary with the holy thing in her arms, fleeing to Egypt on the ass, with Joseph, her husband, walking by her side. For years and years they had been longing for a child —and here lay the divinest little one, with every mark of the kingdom upon him! His father and mother lying crushed under the fallen dome of that fearful church, was it strange he should seem to belong to her?

But there might be some one somewhere in the world with a better claim; possibly—horrible thought!—with more need of him than she! Up started a hideous cupidity, a fierce temptation to dishonesty, such as she had never imagined. We do not know

what is in us until the temptation comes. Then there is the devil to fight. And Mrs. Porson fought him.

Mr. Porson was, in a milder degree, affected much as his wife. He could not help wishing, nor was he wrong in wishing, that, since the child's father and mother were gone, they might take their place, and love their orphan. They were far from rich, but what was one child! They might surely manage to give him a good education, and set him doing for himself! But, alas, there might be others—others with love-property in the child! The same thoughts were working in each, but neither dared utter them in the presence of the sleeping treasure.

As they descended the last slope above the town, with the wide sea-horizon before them, they beheld such a glory of after-sunset as, even on that coast, was unusual. A chord of colour that might have been the prostrate fragment of a gigantic rainbow, lay along a large arc of the horizon. The farther portion of the sea was an indigo blue, save for a grayish line that parted it from the dusky red of the sky. This red faded up through orange and dingy yellow to a pale green and pale blue, above which came the depth of the blue night, in which rayed resplendent the evening star. Below the star and nearer to the west, lay, very thin and very long, the sickle of the new moon. If death be what it looks to the unthinking soul, and if the heavens declare the glory of God, as they do indeed to the heart that knows him, then is there discord between heaven and earth such as no argument can harmonize. But death is not what men think it, for "Blessed are they that mourn for the dead."

The sight enhanced the wonder and hope of the two honest good souls in the treasure they carried. Out of the bosom of the skeleton Death himself, had been given them—into their very arms—a germ of life, a jewel of heaven! At the thought of what lay up the hill behind them, they felt their joy in the child almost wicked; but if God had taken the child's father and mother, might they not be glad in the hope that he had chosen them to replace them? That he had for the moment at least, they were bound to believe!

They travelled slowly on, through the dying sunset, and an hour or two of the star-bright night that followed, adorned rather than lighted by the quaint boat of the crescent moon. Weary, but lapt in a voiceless triumph, they came at last, guided by the donkeys, to their hotel.

All were talking of the earthquake. A great part of the English had fled in a panic terror, like sheep that had no shepherd—hunted by their own fears, and betrayed by their imagined faith. The steadiest church-goer fled like the infidel he reviled. The fool said in his heart, "There is no God," and fled. The Christian said with his mouth, "Verily there is a God that ruleth in the earth!" and fled—far as he could from the place which, as he fancied, had shown signs of a special presence of the father of Jesus Christ.

After the Persons were in the house, there came two or three small shocks. Every time, out with a cry rushed the inhabitants into the streets; every time, out into the garden of the hotel

swarmed such as were left in it of Germans and English. But our little couple, who had that day seen so much more of its terrors than any one else in the place, and whose chamber was at the top of the house where the swaying was worst, were too much absorbed in watching and tending their lovely boy to heed the earthquake. Perhaps their hearts whispered, "Can that which has given us such a gift be unfriendly?"

"If his father and mother," said Mrs. Person, as they stood regarding him, "are permitted to see their child, they shall see how we love him, and be willing he should love us!"

As they went up the stairs with him, the boy woke When he looked and saw a face that was not his mother's, a cloud swept across the heaven of his eyes. He closed them again, and did not speak. The first of the shocks came as they were putting him to bed: he turned very white and looked up fixedly, as if waiting another fall from above, but sat motionless on his new mother's lap. The instant the vibration and rocking ceased, he drank from the cup of milk she offered him, as quietly as if but a distant thunder had rolled away. When she put him in the bed, he looked at her with such an indescribable expression of bewildered loss, that she burst into tears. The child did not cry. He had not cried since they took him. The woman's heart was like to break for him, but she managed to say,

"God has taken her, my darling. He is keeping her for you, and I am going to keep you for her;" and with that she kissed him.

The same moment came the second shock.

Need wakes prophecy: the need of the child made of the parson a prophet.

"It is God that does the shaking," he said. "It's all right. Nobody will be the worse—not much, at least!"

"Not at all," rejoined the boy, and turned his face away.

From the lips of such a tiny child, the words seemed almost awful.

He fell fast asleep, and never woke till the morning. Mrs. Porson lay beside him, yielding him, stout as she was, a good half of the little Italian bed. She scarcely slept for excitement and fear of smothering him.

The Persons were honest people, and for all their desire to possess the child, made no secret of how and where they had found him, or of as much of his name as he could tell them, which was only *Clare*. But they never heard of inquiry after him. On the gunboat at Genoa they knew nothing of their commander's purposes, or where to seek him. Days passed before they began to be uneasy about him, and when they did make what search for him they could, it was fruitless.

Chapter V. His new home

The place to which the good people carried the gift of the earthquake—carried him with much anxiety and more exultation—had no very distinctive features. It had many fields in grass, many in crop, and some lying fallow—all softly undulating. It had some trees, and everywhere hedges dividing fields whose strange shapes witnessed to a complicated history, of which few could tell anything. Here and there in the hollows between the motionless earth-billows, flowed, but did not seem to flow, what they called a brook. But the brooks there were like deep soundless pools without beginning or end. There was no life, no gaiety, no song in them, only a sullen consent to exist. That at least is how they impress one accustomed to real brooks, lark-like, always on the quiver, always on the move, always babbling and gabbling and gamboling, always at their games, always tossing their pebbles about, and telling them to talk. A man that loved them might say there was more in the silence of these, than in the speech of those; but what silence can be better than a song of delight that we are, that we were, that we are to be! The stillness may be full of solemn fish, mysterious as itself, and deaf with secrets; but blessed is the brook that lets the light of its joy shine.

Dull as the place must seem in this my description, it was the very country for the boy. He would come into more contact

with its modest beauty in a day than some of us would in a year. Nobody quite knows the beauty of a country, especially of a quiet country, except one who has been born in it, or for whom at least childhood and boyhood and youth have opened door after door into the hidden phases of its life. There is no square yard on the face of the earth but some one can in part understand what God meant in making it; while the same changeful skies canopy the most picturesque and the dullest landscapes; the same winds wake and blow over desert and pasture land, making the bosoms of youth and age swell with the delight of their blowing. The winds are not all so full as are some of delicious odours gathered as they pass from gardens, fields, and hill-sides; but all have their burden of sweetness. Those that blew upon little Clare were oftener filled with the smell of farmyards, and burning weeds, and cottage-fires, than of flowers; but never would one of such odours revisit him without bringing fresh delight to his heart. Its mere memorial suggestion far out on the great sea would wake the old child in the man. The pollards along the brooks grew lovely to his heart, and were not the less lovely when he came to understand that they were not so lovely as God had meant them to be. He was one of those who, regarding what a thing *is*, and not comparing it with other things, descry the thought of God in it, and love it; for to love what is beautiful is as natural as to love our mothers.

The parsonage to which his new father and mother brought him was like the landscape—humble. It was humble even for

a parsonage—which has no occasion to be fine. For men and women whose business it is to teach their fellows to be true and fair, and not covet fine things, are but hypocrites, or at best intruders and humbugs, if they want fine things themselves. Jesus Christ did not care about fine things. He loved every lovely thing that ever his father made. If any one does not know the difference between fine things and lovely things, he does not know much, if he has all the science in the world at his finger-ends.

One good thing about the parsonage was, that it was aid, and the swallows had loved it for centuries. That way Clare learned to love the swallows—and they are worth loving. Then it had a very old garden, nearly as old-fashioned as it was old, and many flowers that have almost ceased to be seen grew in it, and did not enjoy their lives the less that they were out of fashion. All the furniture in the house was old, and mostly shabby; it was possible, therefore, to love it a little. Who on earth could be such a fool as to love a new piece of furniture! One might prize it; one might admire it; one might like it because it was pretty, or because it was comfortable; but only a silly woman whose soul went to bed on her new sideboard, could say she loved it. And then it would not be true. It is impossible that any but an *old* piece of furniture should be loved.

His father and mother had a charming little room made for him in the garret, right up among the swallows, who soon admitted him a member of their society—an honorary member, that is, who was not expected to fly with them to Africa except

he liked. His new parents did this because they saw that, when he could not be with them, he preferred being by himself; and that moods came upon him in which he would steal away even from them, seized with a longing for loneliness. In general, next to being with his mother anywhere, he liked to be with his father in the study. If both went out, and could not take him with them, he would either go to his own room, or sit in the study alone. It was a very untidy room, crowded with books, mostly old and dingy, and in torn bindings. Many of them their owner never opened, and they suffered in consequence; a few of them were constantly in his hands, and suffered in consequence. All smelt strong of stale tobacco, but that hardly accounts for the fact that Clare never took to smoking. Another thing perhaps does—that he was always too much of a man to want to look like a man by imitating men. That is unmanly. A boy who wants to look like a man is not a manly boy, and men do not care for his company. A true boy is always welcome to a true man, but a would-be man is better on the other side of the wall.

His mother oftenest sat in a tiny little drawing-room, which smelt of withered rose-leaves. I think it must smell of them still. I believe it smelt of them a hundred years before she saw the place. Clare loved the smell of the rose-leaves and disliked the smell of the tobacco; yet he preferred the study with its dingy books to the pretty drawing-room without his mother.

There was a village, a very small one, in the parish, and a good many farm-houses.

Such was the place in which Clare spent the next few years of his life, and there his new parents loved him heartily. The only thing about him that troubled them, besides the possibility of losing him, was, that they could not draw out the tiniest smile upon his sweet, moonlight-face.

Chapter VI. What did draw out his first smile

Mr. Porson was a man about five and forty; his wife was a few years younger. His theories of religion were neither large nor lofty; he accepted those that were handed down to him, and did not trouble himself as to whether they were correct. He did what was better: he tried constantly to obey the law of God, whether he found it in the Bible or in his own heart. Thus he was greater in the kingdom of heaven than thousands that knew more, had better theories about God, and could talk much more fluently concerning religion than he. By obeying God he let God teach him. So his heart was always growing; and where the heart grows, there is no fear of the intellect; there it also grows, and in the best fashion of growth. He was very good to his people, and not foolishly kind. He tried his best to help them to be what they ought to be, to make them bear their troubles, be true to one another, and govern themselves. He was like a father to them. For some, of course, he could do but little, because they were locked boxes with nothing in them; but for a few he did much. Perhaps it was because he was so good to his flock that God gave him little Clare to bring up. Perhaps it was because he and his wife were so good to Clare, that by and by a wonderful thing took place.

About three years after the earthquake, Mrs. Porson had a

baby-girl sent her for her very own. The father and mother thought themselves the happiest couple on the face of the earth —and who knows but they were! If they were not, so much the better! for then, happy as they were, there were happier yet than they; and who, in his greatest happiness, would not be happier still to know that the earth held happier than he!

When Clare first saw the baby, he looked down on her with solemn, unmoved countenance, and gazed changeless for a whole minute. He thought there had been another earthquake, that another church-dome had fallen, and another child been found and brought home from the ruin. Then light began to grow somewhere under his face. His mother, full as was her heart of her new child, watched his countenance anxiously. The light under his face grew and grew, till his face was radiant. Then out of the midst of the shining broke the heavenliest smile she had ever seen on human countenance—a smile that was a clearer revelation of God than ten thousand books about him. For what must not that God be, who had made the boy that smiled such a smile and never knew it! After this he smiled occasionally, though it was but seldom. He never laughed—that is, not until years after this time; but, on the other hand, he never looked sullen. A quiet peace, like the stillness of a long summer twilight in the north, dwelt upon his visage, and appeared to model his every motion. Part of his life seemed away, and he waiting for it to come back. Then he would be merry!

He was never in a hurry, yet always doing something—always,

that is, when he was not in his own room. There his mother would sometimes find him sitting absolutely still, with his hands on his knees. Nor was she sorry to surprise him thus, for then she was sure of one of his rare smiles. She thought he must then be dreaming of his own mother, and a pang would go through her at the thought that he would one day love her more than herself. "He will laugh then!" she said. She did not think how the gratitude of that mother would one day overwhelm her with gladness.

He never sought to be caressed, but always snuggled to one that drew him close. Never once did he push any one away. He learned what lessons were set him—not very fast, but with persistent endeavour to understand. He was greatly given to reading, but not particularly quick. He thus escaped much, fancying that he knew when he did not know—a quicksand into which fall so many clever boys and girls. Give me a slow, steady boy, who knows when he does not know a thing! To know that you do not know, is to be a small prophet. Such a boy has a glimmer of the something he does not know, or at least of the place where it is; while the boy who easily grasps the words that stand for a thing, is apt to think he knows the thing itself when he sees but the wrapper of it—thinks he knows the church when he has caught sight of the weather-cock. Mrs. Porson could see the understanding of a thing gradually burst into blossom on the boy's face. It did not smile, it only shone. Understanding is light; it needs love to change light into a smile.

There was something in the boy that his parents hardly hoped

to understand; something in his face that made them long to know what was going on in him, but made them doubt if ever in this life they should. He was not concealing anything from them. He did not know that he had anything to tell, or that they wanted to know anything. He never doubted that everybody saw him just as he felt himself; his soul seemed bare to all the world. But he knew little of what was passing in him: child or man never knows more than a small part of that.

When first he was allowed to take the little one in his arms, he sitting on a stool at his mother's feet, it was almost a new start in his existence. A new confidence was born in his spirit. Mrs. Person could read, as if reflected in his countenance, the pride and tenderness that composed so much of her own conscious motherhood. A certain staidness, almost sternness, took possession of his face as he bent over the helpless creature, half on his knees, half in his arms—the sternness of a protecting divinity that knew danger not afar. He had taken a step upward in being; he was aware in himself, without knowing it, of the dignity of fatherhood. Even now he knew what so many seem never to learn, that a man is the defender of the weak; that, if a man is his brother's keeper, still more is he his sister's. She belonged to him, therefore he was hers in the slavery of love, which alone is freedom. So reverential and so careful did he show himself, that soon his mother trusted him, to the extent of his power, more than any nurse.

By and by she made the delightful discovery that, when he

was alone with the baby, the silent boy could talk. Where was no need or hope of being understood, his words began to flow—with a rhythmical cadence that seemed ever on the verge of verse. When first his mother heard the sweet murmur of his voice, she listened; and then first she learned what a hold the terrible thing that had given him into her arms had upon him. For she heard him half singing, half saying—

"Baby, baby, do not grow. Keep small, and lie on my lap, and dream of walking, but never walk; for when you walk you will run, and when you run you will go away with father and mother—away to a big place where the ground goes up to the sky; and you will go up the ground that goes up to the sky, and you will come to a big church, and you will go into the church; and the ground and the church and the sky will go *hurr, hurr, hurr*; and the sky, full of angels, will come down with a great roar; and all the yards and sails will drop out of the sky, and tumble down father and mother, and hold them down that they cannot get up again; and then you will have nobody but me. I will do all I can, but I am only brother Clare, and you will want, want, want mother and father, mother and father, and they will be always coming, and never be come, not for ever so long! Don't grow a big girl, Maly!"

The mother could not think what to say. She went in, and, in the hope of turning his thoughts aside, took the baby, and made haste to consult her husband.

"We must leave it," said Mr. Person. "Experience will soon correct what mistake is in his notion. It is not so very far wrong.

You and I must go from them one day: what is it but that the sky will fall down on us, and our bodies will get up no more! He thinks the time nearer at hand than for their sakes I hope it is; but nobody can tell."

Clare never associated the church where the awful thing took place, with the church to which he went on Sundays. The time for it, he imagined, came to everybody. To Clare, nothing ever *happened*. The way out of the world was a church in a city set on a hill, and there an earthquake was always ready.

The heart of his adoptive mother grew yet more tender toward him after the coming of her own child. She was not quite sure that she did not love him even more than Mary. She could not help the feeling that he was a child of heaven sent out to nurse on the earth; and that it was in reward for her care of him that her own darling was sent her. That their love to the boy had something to do with the coming of the girl, I believe myself, though what that something was, I do not precisely understand.

She left him less often alone with the child. She would not have his thoughts drawn to the church of the earthquake; neither would she have the mournfulness of his sweet voice much in the ears of her baby. He never sang in a minor key when any one was by, but always and solely when the baby and he were alone together.

Chapter VII. Clare and his brothers

After a year or two, Mr. Person became anxious lest the boy should grow up too unlike other boys—lest he should not be manly, but of a too gently sad behaviour. He began, therefore, to take him with him about the parish, and was delighted to find him show extraordinary endurance. He would walk many miles, and come home less fatigued than his companion. To be sure, he had not much weight to carry; but it seemed to Mr. Porson that his utter freedom from thought about himself had a large share in his immunity from weariness. He continued slight and thin—which was natural, for he was growing fast; but the muscles of his little bird-like legs seemed of steel. The spindle-shanks went striding, striding without a check, along the roughest roads, the pale face shining atop of them like a sweet calm moon. To Mr. Person's eyes, the moon, stooping, as she sometimes seems to do, downward from the sky, always looked like him. The child woke something new in the heart and mind of every one that loved him, but was himself unconscious of his influence. His company was no check to his father when meditating, after his habit as he walked, what he should say to his people the next Sunday. For the good man never wrote or read a sermon, but talked to his people as one who would meet what was in them with what was in him. Hence they always believed "the parson meant it." He never said anything clever, and never said anything unwise; never

amused them, and never made them feel scornful, either of him or of any one else.

Instead of finding the presence of Clare distract his thoughts, he had at times a curious sense that the boy was teaching him—that his sermon was running before, or walking sedately on this side of him or that. For Clare could run like the wind; and did run after butterflies, dragon-flies, or anything that offered a chance of seeing it nearer; but he never killed, and seldom tried to catch anything, if but for a moment's examination. The swiftest run would scarcely heighten the colour of his pale cheeks.

He soon came to be known in the farm-houses of the parish. The farmer-families were a little shy of him at first, fancying him too fine a little gentleman for them; but as they got to know him, they grew fond of him. They called him "the parson's man," which pleased Clare. But one old woman called him "the parson's cherubim."

One day Mr. Porson was calling at the house of the largest farm in the parish, the nearest house to the parsonage. The farmer's wife was ill, and having to go to her room to see her, he said to the boy—

"Clare, you run into the yard. Give my compliments to any one you meet, and ask him to let you stay with him."

When the time came for their departure, Mr. Porson went to find him. He did not call him; he wanted to see what he was about. Unable to discover him, and coming upon no one of whom he might inquire, for it was hay-time and everybody in the fields,

he was at last driven to use his voice.

He had not to call twice. Out of the covered part of the pigsty, not far from which the parson stood, the boy came creeping on all fours, followed by a litter of half-grown, grunting, gamboling pigs.

"Here I am, papa!" he cried.

"Clare," exclaimed his father, "what a mess you have made of yourself!"

"I gave them your compliments," answered the boy, as he scrambled over the fence with his father's assistance, "and asked them if I might stay with them till you were ready. They said yes, and invited me in. I went in; and we've been having such games! They were very kind to me."

His father turned involuntarily and looked into the sty. There stood all the pigs in a row, gazing after the boy, and looking as sorry as their thick skins and bony snouts would let them. Their mother rose in a ridge behind them, gazing too. Mr. Skymer always spoke of pigs as about the most intelligent animals in the world.

I do not know when or where or how his love of the animals began, for he could not tell me. If it began with the pigs, it was far from ending with them.

The next day he asked his father if he might go and call upon the pigs.

"Have you forgotten, Clare," said his mother, "what a job Susan and I had with your clothes? I wonder still how you could

have done such a thing! They were quite filthy. When I saw you, I had half a mind to put you in a bath, clothes and all. I doubt if they are sweet yet!"

"Oh, yes, they are, indeed, mamma!" returned Clare; "and you know I shall be careful after this! I shall not go into their house, but get the farmer to let them out. I've thought of a new game with them!"

His mother consented; the farmer did let the pigs out; and Clare and they had a right good game together among the ricks in the yard.

His growing nature showed itself in a swiftly widening friendship for live things. The spreading ripples of his affection took in the cows and the horses, the hens and the geese, and every creature about the place, till at length it had to pull up at the moles, because he could not get at them. I doubt if he would have liked them if he had seen one eat a frog! He called the pigs little brothers, and the horses and cows big brothers, and was perfectly at home with them before people knew he cared for their company. I think his absolute simplicity brought him near to the fountain of life, or rather, prevented him from straying from it; and this kept him so alive himself, that he was delicately sensitive to all life. He felt himself pledged to all other life as being one with it. Its forms were therefore so open to him as to seem familiar from the first. He knew instinctively what went on in regions of life differing from his own—knew, without knowing how, what the animals were thinking and feeling; so

was able to interpret their motions, even the sudden changes in their behaviour.

There was one dangerous animal on the place—a bull, of which the farmer had often said he must part with him, or he would be the death of somebody. One morning he was struck with terror to find Clare in the stall with Nimrod. The brute was chained up pretty short, but was free enough for terrible mischief: Clare was stroking his nose, and the beast was standing as still as a bull of bronze, with one curved and one sharp, forward-set, wicked-looking horn in alarming proximity to the angelic face. The farmer stood in dismay, still as the bull, afraid to move. Clare looked up and smiled, but his delicate little hand went on caressing the huge head. It was one of God's small high creatures visiting with good news of hope one of his big low creatures —a little brother of Jesus Christ bringing a taste of his father's kingdom to his great dull bull of a brother. The farmer called him. The boy came at once. Mr. Goodenough told him he must not go near the bull; he was fierce and dangerous. Clare informed him that he and the bull had been friends for a long time; and to prove it ran back, and before the farmer could lay hold of him, was perched on the animal's shoulders. The bull went on eating the grass in the manger before him, and took as little heed of the boy as if it were but a fly that had lighted on him, and neither tickled nor stung him.

By degrees he grew familiar with all the goings on at the farm, and drew nearer to a true relation with the earth that nourishes all.

Where the soil was not too heavy, the ploughman would set him on the back of the near horse, and there he would ride in triumph to the music of the ploughman's whistle behind. His was not the pomp of the destroyer who rides trampling, but the pomp of the saviour drawing forth life from the earth. In the summer the hayfield knew him, and in the autumn the harvest-field, where busily he gathered what the earth gave, and for himself strength, a sense of wide life and large relations. The very mould, not to say the grass-blades and the daisies, was dear to him. He was more sympathetic with the daisies ploughed down than was even Burns, for he had a strong feeling that they went somewhere, and were the better for going; that this was the way their sky fell upon them.

All the people on the farm, all the people of the village, every one in the parish knew the boy and his story. From his gentleness and lovingkindness to live things, there were who said he was half-witted; others said he saw ghosts. The boys of the village despised, and some hated him, because he was so unlike them. They called him a girl because where they tormented he caressed. At this he would smile, and they durst not lay hands on him.

The days are long in boyhood, and Clare could do a many things in one. There was the morning, the forenoon, and the long afternoon and evening! He could help on the farm; he could play with ever so many animals; he could learn his lessons, which happily were not heavy; he could read any book he pleased in his father's library, where *Paradise Lost* was his favourite; he could

nurse little Maly. He had the more time for all these that he had no companion of his own age, no one he wanted to go about with after school-hours. His father was still his chief human companion, and neither of them grew tired of the other.

The most remarkable thing in the child was the calm and gentle greatness of his heart. You often find children very fond of one or two people, who, perhaps, in evil return, want to keep them all to themselves, and reproach them for loving others. Many persons count it a sign of depth in a child that he loves only one or two. I doubt it greatly. I think that only the child who loves all life can love right well, can love deeply and strongly and tenderly the lives that come nearest him. Low nurses and small-hearted mothers dwarf and pervert their children, doing their worst to keep them from having big hearts like God. Clare had other teaching than this. He had lost his father and mother, but many were given him to love; and so he was helped to wait patiently till he found them again. God was keeping them for him somewhere, and keeping him for them here.

The good for which we are born into this world is, that we may learn to love. I think Clare the most enviable of boys, because he loved more than any one of his age I have heard of. There are people—oh, such silly people they are!—though they may sometimes be pleasing—who are always wanting people to love them. They think so much of themselves, that they want to think more; and to know that people love them makes them able to think more of themselves. They even think themselves loving

because they are fond of being loved! You might as soon say because a man loves money he is generous; because he loves to gather, therefore he knows how to scatter; because he likes to read a story, therefore he can write one. Such lovers are only selfish in a deeper way, and are more to blame than other selfish people; for, loving to be loved, they ought the better to know what an evil thing it is not to love; what a mean thing to accept what they are not willing to give. Even to love only those that love us, is, as the Lord has taught us, but a pinched and sneaking way of loving. Clare never thought about being loved. He was too busy loving, with so many about him to love, to think of himself. He was not the contemptible little wretch to say, "What a fine boy I am, to make everybody love me!" If he had been capable of that, not many would have loved him; and those that did would most of them have got tired of loving a thing that did not love again. Only great lovers like God are able to do that, and they help God to make love grow. But there is little truth in love where there is no wisdom in it. Clare's father and mother were wise, and did what they could to make Clare wise.

Also the animals, though they were not aware of it, did much to save him from being spoiled by the humans whom the boy loved more than them. For Clare's charity began at home. Those who love their own people will love other people. Those who do not love children will never love animals right.

Here I will set down a strange thing that befell Clare, and caused him a sore heart, making him feel like a traitor to the

whole animal race, and influencing his life for ever. I was at first puzzled to account for the thing without attributing more imagination to the animals—or some of them—than I had been prepared to do; but probably the main factor in it was heart-disease.

He had seen men go out shooting, but had never accompanied any killers. I do not quite understand how, as in my story, he came even to imitate using a gun. There was nothing in him that belonged to killing; and that is more than I could say for myself, or any other man I know except Clare Skymer.

He was at the bottom of the garden one afternoon, where nothing but a low hedge came between him and a field of long grass. He had in his hand the stick of a worn-out umbrella. Suddenly a half-grown rabbit rose in the grass before him, and bolted. From sheer unconscious imitation, I believe, he raised the stick to his shoulder, and said *Bang*. The rabbit gave a great bound into the air, fell, and lay motionless. With far other feelings than those of a sportsman, Clare ran, got through the hedge, and approached the rabbit trembling. He could think nothing but that the creature was playing him a trick. Yet he was frightened. Only how could he have hurt him!

"I dare say the little one knows me," he said to himself, "and wanted to give me a start! He couldn't tell what a start it would be, or he wouldn't have done it."

When he drew near, however, "the little one" did not, as he had hoped and expected, jump up and run again. With sinking

heart Clare went close up, and looked down on it. It lay stretched out, motionless. With death in his own bosom he stooped and tenderly lifted it. The rabbit was stone-dead! The poor boy gazed at it, pressed it tenderly to his heart, and went with it to find his mother. The tears kept pouring down his face, but he uttered no cry till he came to her. Then a low groaning howl burst from him; he laid the dead thing in her lap, and threw himself on the floor at her feet in an abandonment of self-accusation and despair.

It was long before he was able to give her an intelligible account of what had taken place. She asked him if he had found it dead. In answer he could only shake his head, but that head-shake had a whole tragedy in it. Then she examined "the little one," but could find no mark of any wound upon it. When at length she learned how the case was, she tried to comfort him, insisting he was not to blame, for he did not mean to kill the little one. He would not hearken to her loving sophistry.

"No, mother!" he said through his sobs; "I wouldn't have blamed myself, though I should have been very sorry, if I had killed him by accident—if I had stepped upon him, or anything of that kind; but I meant to frighten him! I looked bad at him! I made him think I was an enemy, and going to kill him! I shammed bad—and so was real bad."

He stopped with a most wailful howl.

"Perhaps he knew me," he resumed, "and couldn't understand it. It was much worse than if I had shot him. He wouldn't have known then till he was dead. But to die of terror was horrible.

Oh, why didn't I think what I was doing?"

"Nobody could have thought of such a thing happening."

"No; but I ought to have thought, mother, of what I was doing. I was trying to frighten him! I must have been in a cruel mood. Why didn't I think love to the little one when I saw him, instead of thinking death to him? I shall never look a rabbit in the face again! My heart must have grown black, mother!"

"I don't believe there is another rabbit in England would die from such a cause," persisted his mother thoughtfully.

"Then what a superior rabbit he must have been!" said Clare. "To think that I pulled down the roof of his church upon him!"

He burst into a torrent of tears, and ran to his own room. There his mother thought it better to leave him undisturbed. She wisely judged that a mind of such sensibility was alone capable of finding the comfort to fit its need.

Such comfort he doubtless did find, for by the time his mother called him to tea, calmness had taken the place of the agony on his countenance. His mother asked him no questions, for she as well as her husband feared any possible encouragement to self-consciousness. I imagine the boy had reflected that things could not go so wrong that nobody could set them right. I imagine he thought that, if he had done the rabbit a wrong, as he never for a moment to the end of his life doubted he had, he who is at the head of all heads and the heart of all hearts, would contrive to let him tell the rabbit he was sorry, and would give him something to do for the rabbit that would make up for his cruelty to him.

He did once say to his mother, and neither of them again alluded to the matter, that he was sure the rabbit had forgiven him.

"Little ones are *so* forgiving, you know, mother!" he added.

Is it any wonder that my friend Clare Skymer should have been no sportsman?

Chapter VIII. Clare and his human brothers

Another anecdote of him, that has no furtherance of the story in it, I must yet tell.

One cold day in a stormy March, the wind was wildly blowing broken clouds across the heavens, and now rain, now sleet, over the shivering blades of the young corn, whose tender green was just tinging the dark brown earth. The fields were now dark and wintry, heartless and cold; now shining all over as with repentant tears; one moment refusing to be comforted, and the next reviving with hope and a sense of new life. Clare was hovering about the plough. Suddenly he spied, from a mound in the field, a little procession passing along the highway. Those in front carried something on their shoulders which must be heavy, for it took six of them to carry it. He knew it was a coffin, for his home was by the churchyard, and a funeral was no unfamiliar sight. Behind it one man walked alone. For a moment Clare watched him, and saw his bowed head and heavy pace. His heart filled from its own perennial fount of pity, which was God himself in him. He ran down the hill and across the next field, making for a spot some distance ahead of the procession. As it passed him, he joined the chief mourner, who went plodding on with his arms hanging by his sides. Creeping close up to him, he

slid his little soft hand into the great horny hand of the peasant. Instinctively the big hand closed upon the small one, and the weather-beaten face of a man of fifty looked down on the boy. Not a word was said between them. They walked on, hand in hand.

Neither had ever seen the other. The man was following his wife and his one child to the grave. "Nothing almost sees miracles but misery," says Kent in *King Lear*. Because this man was miserable, he saw a miracle where was no miracle, only something very good. The thing was true and precious, yea, a message from heaven. Those deep, upturned, silent eyes; the profound, divine sympathy that shone in them; the grasp of the tiny hand upon his large fingers, made the heart of the man, who happened to be a catholic, imagine, and for a few moments believe, that he held the hand of the infant Saviour. The cloud lifted from his heart and brain, and did not return when he came to understand that this was not *the* lamb of God, only another lamb from the same fold.

When they had walked about two miles, the boy began to fear he might be intruding, and would have taken his hand from the other, but the man held it tight, and stooping whispered it was not far now. The child, who, without knowing it, had taken the man under the protection of his love, yielded at once, went with him to the grave, joined in the service, and saw the grave filled. They went again as they had come. Not a word was spoken. The man wept a little now and then, drew the back of his brown hand

across his eyes, and pressed a little closer the hand he held. At the gate of the parsonage the boy took his leave. He said they would be wondering what had become of him, or he would have gone farther. The man released him without a word.

His mother had been uneasy about him, but when he told her how it was, she said he had done right.

"Yes," returned the boy; "I belong there myself."

The mother knew he was not thinking of the grave.

One more anecdote I will give, serving to introduce the narrative of the following chapter, and helping to show the character of the boy. He was so unlike most boys, that one must know all he may about him, if he would understand him.

Never yet, strange as the assertion must seem, had the boy shown any anger. His father was a little troubled at the fact, fearing such absence of resentment might indicate moral indifference, or, if not, might yet render him incapable of coping with the world. He had himself been brought up at a public school, and had not, with all his experience of life, come to see, any more than most of the readers of this story now see, or for a long time will see, that there lies no nobility, no dignity in evil retort of any kind; that evil is evil when returned as much as when given; that the only shining thing is good—and the most shining, good for evil.

One day a coarse boy in the village gave him a sharp blow on the face. It forced water from his eyes and blood from his nose. He was wiping away both at once with his handkerchief, when a

kindly girl stopped and said to him—

"Never mind; don't cry."

"Oh, no!" answered Clare; "it's only water, it's not crying. It would be cowardly to cry."

"That's a brave boy! You'll give it him back one of these days."

"No," he returned, "I shall not I couldn't."

"Why?"

"Because it hurts so. My nose feels as if it were broken. I know it's not broken, but it feels like it."

The girl, as well as the boys who stood around him, burst into laughter. They saw no logic in his reasoning. Clare's was the divine reasoning that comes of loving your neighbour; theirs was the earthly reasoning that came of loving themselves. They did not see that to Clare another boy was another of himself; that he was carrying out the design of the Father of men, that his creatures should come together into one, not push each other away.

The next time he met the boy who struck him, so far was he both from resentment and from the fear of being misunderstood, that he offered him a rosy-cheeked apple his mother had given him as he left for school. The boy was tyrant and sneak together —a combination to be seen sometimes in a working man set over his fellows, and in a rich man grown poor, and bent upon making money again. The boy took the apple, never doubted Clare gave it him to curry favour, ate it up grinning, and threw the core in his face. Clare turned away with a sigh, and betook himself to

his handkerchief again, The boy burst into a guffaw of hideous laughter.

Chapter IX. Clare the defender

This enemy was a trouble, more or less, to every decent person in the neighbourhood. It was well his mother was a widow, for where she was only powerless to restrain, the father would have encouraged. He was a big, idle, sneering, insolent lad—such that had there been two more of the sort, they would have made the village uninhabitable. It was all the peaceable vicar could do to keep his hands off him.

One day, little Mary being then about five years old, Clare had her out for a walk. They were alone in a narrow lane, not far from the farm where Clare was so much at home. To his consternation, for he had his sister in charge, down the lane, meeting them, came the village tyrant. He strolled up with his hands in his pockets, and barred their way. But while, his eye chiefly on Clare, he "straddled" like Apollyon, but not "quite over the whole breadth of the way," Mary slipped past him. The young brute darted after the child. Clare put down his head, as he had seen the rams do, and as Simpson, who ill deserved the name of the generous Jewish Hercules, was on the point of laying hold of her, caught him in the flank, butted him into the ditch, and fell on the top of him.

"Run, Maly!" he cried; "I'll be after you in a moment."

"Will you, you little devil!" cried the bully; and taking him by the throat, so that he could not utter even a gurgle, got up and

began to beat him unmercifully. But the sounds of their conflict had reached the ears of the bull Nimrod, who was feeding within the hedge. He recognized Clare's voice, perhaps knew from it that he was in trouble; but I am inclined to think pure bull-love of a row would alone have sent him tearing to the quarter whence the tyrant's brutal bellowing still came. There, looking over the hedge, he saw his friend in the clutches of an enemy of his own, for Simpson never lost a chance of teasing Nimrod when he could do so with safety. Over he came with a short roar and a crash. Looking up, the bully saw a bigger bully than himself, with his head down and horns level, retreating a step or two in preparation for running at him. Simpson shoved the helpless Clare toward the enemy and fled. Clare fell. Nimrod jumped over his prostrate friend and tore after Simpson. Clare got up and would at once have followed to protect his enemy, but that he must first see his sister safe. He ran with her to a cottage hard by, handed her to the woman at the door of it, and turning pursued Simpson and the bull.

Nimrod overtook his enemy in the act of scrambling over a five-barred gate. Simpson saw the head of the bull coming down upon him like the bows of a Dutchman upon a fishing-boat, and, paralyzed with terror, could not move an inch further. Crash against the gate came the horns of Nimrod, with all the weight and speed of his body behind them. Away went the gate into the field, and away went Simpson and the bull with it, the latter nearly breaking his neck, for his horns were entangled in the bars, one

of them by the diagonal bar. Simpson's right leg was jammed betwixt the gate and the head and horns of the bull. He roared, and his roars maddened Nimrod, furious already that he could not get his horns clear. Shake and pull as he might, the gate stuck to them; and Simpson fared little the better that the bull's quarrel was for the moment with the gate, and not with the leg between him and it.

Clare had not seen the catastrophe, and did not know what had become of pursuer or pursued, until he reached the gap where the gate had been. He saw then the odd struggle going on, and ran to the aid of his foe, in terror of what might already have befallen him. The moment he laid hold of one of the animal's horns, infuriated as Nimrod was with his helpless entanglement, he knew at once who it was, and was quiet; for Clare always took him by the horn when first he went up to him. Without a moment's demur he yielded to the small hands as they pushed and pulled his head this way and that until they got it clear of the gate. But then they did not let him go. Clare proceeded to take him home, and Nimrod made no objection. Simpson lay groaning.

When Clare returned, his enemy was there still. He had got clear of the gate, but seemed in much pain, for he lay tearing up the grass and sod in handfuls. When Clare stooped to ask what he should do for him, he struck him a backhanded blow on the face that knocked him over. Clare got up and ran.

"Coward!" cried Simpson; "to leave a man with a broken leg to get home by himself!"

"I'm going to find some one strong enough to help you," said Clare.

But Simpson, after his own evil nature, imagined he was going to let the bull into the field again, and fell to praying him not to leave him. Clare knew, however, that, if his leg was broken, he could not get him home, neither could he get home by himself; so he made haste to tell the people at the farm, and Simpson lay in terror of the bull till help came.

From that hour he hated Clare, attributing to him all the ill he had brought on himself. But he was out of mischief for a while. The trouble fell on his mother—who deserved it, for she would believe no ill of him, because he was *hers*. One good thing of the affair was, that the bully was crippled for life, and could do the less harm.

It was a great joy to Mr. Person to learn how Clare had defended his sister. Clergyman as he was, and knowing that Jesus Christ would never have returned a blow, and that this spirit of the Lord was what saved the world, he had been uneasy that his adopted child behaved just like Jesus. That a man should be so made as not to care to return a blow, never occurred to Mr. Porson as possible. It was therefore an immeasurable relief to his feelings as an Englishman, to find that the boy was so far from being destitute of pluck, that in defence of his sister he had attacked a fellow twice his size.

"Weren't you afraid of such a big rascal?" he said.

"No, papa," answered the boy. "Ought I to have been?"

He put his hand to his forehead, as if trying to understand. His father found he had himself something to think about.

There was a certain quiescence about Clare, ill to describe, impossible to explain, but not the less manifest. Like an infant, he never showed surprise at anything. Whatever came to him he received, questioning nothing, marvelling at nothing, disputing nothing. What he was told to do he went to do, never with even a momentary show of disinclination, leaving book or game with readiness but no eagerness. He would do deftly what was required of him, and return to his place, with a countenance calm and sweet as the moon in highest heaven. He seldom offered a caress except to little Mary; yet would choose, before anything else, a place by his mother's knee. The moment she, or his father in her absence, entered the room and sat down, he would rise, take his stool, and set it as near as he thought he might. When caressed he never turned away, or looked as if he would rather be let alone; at the same time he received the caress so quietly, and with so little response, that often, when his heavenly look had drawn the heart of some mother, or spinster with motherly heart, he left an ache in the spirit he would have gone to the world's end to comfort. He never sought love—otherwise than by getting near the loved. When anything was given him, he would look up and smile, but he seldom showed much pleasure, or went beyond the regulation thanks. But if at such a moment little Mary were by, he had a curious way of catching her up and presenting her to the giver. Whether this was a shape his thanks took, whether Mary was

to him an incorporate gratitude, or whether he meant to imply that she was the fitter on whom to shower favour, it were hard to say. His mother observed, and in her mind put the two things together, that he did not seem to prize much any mere possession. He looked pleased with a new suit of clothes, but if any one remarked on his care of them, he would answer, "I mustn't spoil what's papa and mamma's!" He made no hoard of any kind. He did once hoard marbles till he had about a hundred; then it was discovered that they were for a certain boy in the village who was counted half-witted—as indeed was Clare himself by many. When he learned that the boy had first been accused of stealing them—for no one would believe that another boy had given them to him—and after that robbed of them by the other boys, on the ground that he did not know how to play with them, Clare saw that it was as foolish to hoard for another as for himself.

He was a favourite with few beyond those that knew him well. Many who saw him only at church, or about the village, did not take to him. His still regard repelled them. In Naples they would have said he had the evil eye. I think people had a vague sense of rebuke in his presence. Even his mother, passionately loving her foundling, was aware of a film between them through which she could not quite see him, beyond which there was something she could not get at, Clare knew nothing of such a separation. He seemed to himself altogether close to his mother, was aware of nothing between to part them. The cause of the thing was, that Clare was not yet in flower. His soul was a white half-blown

bud, not knowing that it was but half-blown. It basked in the glory of the warm sun, but only with the underside of its flower-leaves; it had not opened its heart, the sun-side of its petals, to the love in which it was immerged. He received the love as a matter of course, and loved it as a matter of course. But for the cruel Simpson he would not have known there could be any other way of things. He did not yet know that one must not only love but mean to love, must not only bask in the warmth of love, but know it as love, and where it comes from—love again the fountain whence it flows.

Chapter X. The black aunt

Clare was yet in his tenth year when an unhealthy summer came. The sun was bright and warm as in other summers, and the flowers in field and garden appeared as usual when the hour arrived for them to wake and look abroad; but the children of men did not fare so well as the children of the earth. A peculiar form of fever showed itself in the village. It was not very fatal, yet many were so affected as to be long unable to work. There was consequently much distress beyond the suffering of the fever itself. The parson and his wife went about from morning to night among the cottagers, helping everybody that needed help. They had no private fortune, but the small blanket of the benefice they spread freely over as many as it could be stretched to cover, depriving themselves of a good part of the food to which they had been accustomed, and of several degrees of necessary warmth. When at last the strength of the parson gave way, and the fever laid hold of him, he had to do without many comforts his wife would gladly have got for him. They were both of rather humble origin, having but one relative well-to-do, a sister of Mrs. Porson, who had married a rich but very common man. From her they could not ask help. She had never sent them any little present, and had been fiercely indignant with them for adopting Clare.

Neither of them once complained, though Mrs. Person, whose strength was much spent, could not help weeping sometimes

when she was alone and free to weep. They knew their Lord did not live in luxury, and a secret gladness nestled in their hearts that they were allowed to suffer a little with him for the sake of the flock he had given into their charge.

The children of course had to share in the general gloom, but it did not trouble them much. For Clare, he was not easily troubled with anything. Always ready to help, he did not much realize what suffering was; and he had Mary to look after, which was labour and pleasure, work and play and pay all in one. His mother was at ease concerning her child when she knew her in Clare's charge, and was free to attend to her husband. She often said that if ever any were paid for being good to themselves, she and her husband were vastly overpaid for taking such a child from the shuddering arms of the earthquake.

But John Porson's hour was come. He must leave wife and children and parish, and go to him who had sent him. If any one think it hard he should so fare in doing his duty, let him be silent till he learn what the parson himself thought of the matter when he got home. People talk about death as the gosling might about life before it chips its egg. Take up their way of lamentation, and we shall find it an endless injustice to have to get up every morning and go to bed every night. Mrs. Porson wept, but never thought him or herself ill-used. And had she been low enough to indulge in self-pity, it would have been thrown away, for before she had time to wonder how she was to live and rear her children, she too was sent for. In this world she was not one of those

mothers of little faith who trust God for themselves but not for their children, and when again with her husband, she would not trust God less.

Clare was in the garden when Sarah told him she was dead. He stood still for a moment, then looked up, up into the blue. Why he looked up, he could not have told; but ever since that terrible morning of which the vague burning memory had never passed, when the great dome into which he was gazing, burst and fell, he had a way every now and then of standing still and looking up. His face was white. Two slow tears gathered, rolled over, and dried upon his face. He turned to Mary, lifted her in his arms, and, carrying her about the garden, once more told her his strange version of what had happened in his childhood. Then he told her that her papa and mamma had gone to look for his papa and mamma—"somewhere up in the dome," he said.

When they wanted to take Mary to see what was left of her mother, the boy contrived to prevent them. From morning till night he never lost sight of the child.

One cold noon in October, when the clouds were miles deep in front of the sun, when the rain was falling thick on the yellow leaves, and all the paths were miry, the two children sat by the kitchen fire. Sarah was cooking their mid-day meal, which had come from her own pocket. She was the only servant either of them had known in the house, and she would not leave it until some one should take charge of them. The neighbours, dreading infection, did not come near them. Clare sat on a little stool with

Mary on his knees, nestling in his bosom; but he felt dreary, for he saw no love-firmament over him; the cloud of death hid it.

With a sudden jingle and rattle, up drove a rickety post-chaise to the door of the parsonage. Out of it, and into the kitchen, came stalking a tall middle-aged woman, in a long black cloak, black bonnet, and black gloves, with a face at once stern and peevish.

"I am the late Mrs. Porson's sister," she said, and stood.

Sarah courtesied and waited. Clare rose, with Mary in his arms.

"This is little Maly, ma'am," he said, offering her the child.

"Set her down, and let me see her," she answered.

Clare obeyed. Mary put her finger in her mouth, and began to cry. She did not like the look of the black aunt, and was not used to a harsh voice.

"Tut! tut!" said the black aunt. "Crying already! That will never do! Show me her things."

Sarah felt stunned. This was worse than death! "If only the mistress had taken them with her!" she said to herself.

Mary's things—they were not many—were soon packed. Within an hour she was borne off, shrieking, struggling, and calling Clay. The black aunt, however,—as the black aunt Clare always thought of her—cared nothing for her resistance; and Clare, who at her first cry was rushing to the rescue, ready once more to do battle for her, was seized and held back by Farmer Goodenough. Sarah had sent for him, and he had come—just in time to frustrate Clare's valour.

The carriage was not yet out of sight, when Farmer Goodenough began to repent that he had come: his presence was an acknowledgment of responsibility! Something must be done with the foundling! There was nobody to claim him, and nobody wanted him! He had always liked the boy, but he did not want him! His wife was not fond of the boy, nor of any boy, and did not want him! He had said to her that Clare could not be left to starve, and she had answered, "Why not?"! What was to be done with him? Nobody knew—any more than Clare himself. But which of us knows what is going to be done with him?

Clare was nobody's business. English farmers no more than French are proverbial for generosity; and Farmer Goodenough, no bad type of his class, had a wife in whose thoughts not the pence but the farthings dominated. She was one who at once recoiled and repelled—one of those whose skin shrinks from the skin of their kind, and who are specially apt to take unaccountable dislikes—a pitiable human animal of the leprous sort. She "never took to the foundling," she said. To have neither father nor mother, she counted disreputable. But I believe the main source of her dislike to Clare was a feeling of undefined reproof in the very atmosphere of the boy's presence, his nature was so different from hers. What urged him toward his fellow-creatures, made her draw back from him. In truth she hated the boy. The very look of him made her sick, she said. It was only a certain respect for the parson, and a certain fear of her husband, who, seldom angry, was yet capable of fury, that had prevented

her from driving the child, "with his dish-clout face," off the premises, whenever she saw him from door or window. It was no wonder the farmer should he at his wits' end to know what, as churchwarden, guardian of the poor, and friend of the late vicar —as friendly also to the boy himself, he was bound to do.

"Where are *you* going?" he asked Sarah.

"Where the Lord wills," answered the old woman. Her ark had gone to pieces, and she hardly cared what became of her.

"We've got to look to ourselves!" said the farmer.

"Parson used to say there was One as took that off our hands!" replied Sarah.

"Yes, yes," assented Mr. Goodenough, fidgeting a little; "but the Almighty helps them as helps themselves, and that's sound doctrine. You really must do something, Sarah! We can't have you on the parish, you know!"

"I beg your pardon, sir, but until the child here is provided for, or until they turn us out of the parsonage, I will not leave the place."

"The furniture is advertised for sale. You'll have nothing but the bare walls!"

"We'll manage to keep each other warm!—Shan't we, Clare?"

"I will try to keep you warm, Sarah," responded the boy sadly.

"But the new parson will soon be here. Our souls must be cared for!"

"Is the Lord's child that came from heaven in an earthquake to be turned out into the cold for fear the souls of big men should

perish?"

"Something must be done about it!" said the farmer.

"What it's to be I can't tell! It's no business o' mine any way!"

"That's what the priest, and the Levite, and the farmer says!" returned Sarah.

"Won't you ask Mr. Goodenough to stay to dinner?" said Clare.

He went up to the farmer, who in his perplexity had seated himself, and laid his arm on his shoulder.

"No, I can't," answered Sarah. "He would eat all we have, and not have enough!"

"Now Maly is gone," returned Clare, "I would rather not have any dinner."

The farmer's old feeling for the boy, which the dread of having him left on his hands had for the time dulled, came back.

"Get him his dinner, Sarah," he said. "I've something to see to in the village. By the time I come back, he'll be ready to go with me, perhaps."

"God bless you, sir!" cried Sarah. "You meant it all the time, an' I been behavin' like a brute!"

The farmer did not like being taken up so sharply. He had promised nothing! But he had nearly made up his mind that, as the friend of the late parson, he could scarcely do less than give shelter to the child until he found another refuge. True, he was not the parson's child, but he had loved him as his own! He would make the boy useful, and so shut his wife's mouth! There were

many things Clare could do about the place!

Chapter XI. Clare on the farm

When Mr. Goodenough appeared at the house-door with the boy, his wife's face expressed what her tongue dared not utter without some heating of the furnace behind it. But Clare never saw that he was unwelcome. He had not begun to note outward and visible signs in regard to his own species; his observation was confined to the animals, to whose every motion and look he gave heed. But he was hardly aware of watching even them: his love made it so natural to watch, and so easy to understand them! He was not drawn to study Mrs. Goodenough, or to read her indications; he was content to hear what she said.

True to her nature, Mrs. Goodenough, seeing she could not at once get rid of the boy, did her endeavour to make him pay for his keep. Nominally he continued to attend the village school, where the old master was doing his best for him; but, oftener than not, she interposed to prevent his going, and turned him to use about the house, the dairy, and the poultry-yard.

His new mode of life occasioned him no sense of hardship. I do not mean because of his patient acceptance of everything that came; but because he had been so long accustomed to the ways of a farm, to all the phases of life and work in yard and field, that nothing there came strange to him—except having to stick to what he was put to, and having next to no time to read. Many boys who have found much amusement in doing this or that, find

it irksome the moment it is required of them: Clare was not of that mean sort; he was a gentleman. Happily he was put to no work beyond his strength.

At first, and for some time, he had to do only with the creatures more immediately under the care of "the mistress," whence his acquaintance with the poultry and the pigs, the pigeons and the calves—and specially with such as were delicate or had been hurt—with their ways of thinking and their carriage and conduct, rapidly increased.

By and by, however, having already almost ceased to attend school, the farmer, requiring some passing help a boy could give, took him from his wife—not without complaint on her part, neither without sense of relief, and would not part with him again. He was so quick in doing what was required, so intelligent to catch the meaning not always thoroughly expressed, so cheerful, and so willing, that he was a pleasure to Mr. Goodenough—and no less a pleasure to the farmer that dwelt in Mr. Goodenough, and seemed to most men all there was of him; for, instead of an expense, he found him a saving.

It was much more pleasant for Clare to be with his master than with his mistress, but he fared the worse for it in the house. The woman's dislike of the boy must find outlet; and as, instead of flowing all day long, it was now pent up the greater part of it, the stronger it issued when he came home to his meals. I will not defile my page with a record of the modes in which she vented her spite. It sought at times such minuteness of indulgence, that

it was next to impossible for any one to perceive its embodiments except the boy himself.

He now came more into contact with the larger animals about the place; and the comfort he derived from them was greater than most people would readily or perhaps willingly believe. He had kept up his relations with Nimrod, the bull, and there was never a breach of the friendship between them. The people about the farm not unfrequently sought his influence with the animal, for at times they dared hardly approach him. Clare even made him useful—got a little work out of him now and then. But his main interest lay in the horses. He had up to this time known rather less of them than of the other creatures on the place; now he had to give his chief attention to them, laying in love the foundation of that knowledge which afterward stood him in such stead when he came to dwell for a time among certain eastern tribes whose horses are their chief gladness and care. He used, when alone with them, to talk to this one or that about the friends he had lost—his father and mother and Maly and Sarah—and did not mind if they all listened. He would even tell them sometimes about his own father and mother—how the whole sky full of angels fell down upon them and took them away. But he said most about his sister. For her he mourned more than for any of the rest. Her screams as the black aunt carried her away, would sometimes come back to him with such verisimilitude of nearness, that, forgetting everything about him, he would start to run to her. He felt somehow that it was well with the others, but

Maly had always needed *him*, and more than ever in the last days of their companionship. He wept for nobody but Maly. In the night he would wake up suddenly, thinking he heard her crying out for him. Then he would get out of bed, creep to the stable, go to Jonathan, and to him pour out his low-voiced complaint. Jonathan was the biggest and oldest horse on the farm.

How much he thought they understood of what he told them, I cannot say. He was never silly; and where we cannot be sure, we may yet have reason to hope. He believed they knew when he was in trouble, and sympathized with him, and would gladly have relieved him of his pain. I suspect most animals know something of the significance of tears. More animals shed tears themselves than people think.

For dogs, bless them, they are everywhere, and the boy had known them from time immemorial.

In the village, some of Clare's old admirers began to remark that he no longer "looked the little gentleman." This was caused chiefly by the state of his clothes. They were not fit for the work to which he was put, and within a few weeks were very shabby. Besides, he was growing rapidly, so that he and his garments were in too evident process of parting company. Accustomed to a mother's attentions, he had never thought of his clothes except to take care of them for her sake; now he tried to mend them, but soon found his labour of little use. He had no wages to buy anything with. His clothes or his health or his education were nothing to Mrs. Goodenough. It was no concern of hers

whether he looked decent or not. What right had such as he to look decent? It was more than enough that she fed him! The shabbiness of the beggarly creature was a consolation to her.

But Clare's toil in the open air, and his constant and willing association with the animals, had begun to give him a bucolic appearance. He grew a trifle browner, and showed here and there a freckle. His health was splendid. Nothing seemed to hurt him. Hardship was wholesome to him. To the eyes that hated him, and grudged the hire of the mere food by which he grew, he seemed every day to enlarge visibly. Already he gave promise of becoming a man of more than ordinary strength and vigour. Possibly the animals gave him something.

What may have been his outlook and hope all this time, who shall tell! He never grumbled, never showed sign of pain or unwillingness, gave his mistress no reason for fault-finding. She found it hard even to discover a pretext. She seemed always ready to strike him, but was probably afraid to do so without provocation her husband would count sufficient. Clare never showed discomfort, never even sighed except he were alone. Chequered as his life had been, if ever he looked forward to a fresh change, it was but as a far possibility in the slow current of events. But he was constantly possessed with a large dim sense of something that lay beyond, waiting for him; something toward which the tide of things was with certainty drifting him, but with which he had nothing more to do than wait. He did not see that to do the things given him to do was the only preparation

for whatever, in the dim under-world of the future, might be preparing for him; but he did feel that he must do his work. He did not then think much about duty. He was actively inclined, had a strong feeling for doing a thing as it ought to be done; and was thoroughly loyal to any one that seemed to have a right over him. In this blind, enduring, vaguely hopeful way, he went on—sustained, and none the less certainly that he did not know it, from the fountain of his life. When the winter came, his sufferings, cared for as he had been, and accustomed to warmth and softness, must at times have been considerable. In the day his work was a protection, but at night the house was cold. He had, however, plenty to eat, had no ailment, and was not to be greatly pitied.

Chapter XII. Clare becomes a guardian of the poor

Simpson, the bully of Clare's childhood, went limping about on a crutch, permanently lame, and full of hatred toward the innocent occasion of the injury he had brought upon himself. Ever since his recovery, he had, loitering about in idleness, watched the boy, to waylay and catch him at unawares. Not until Clare went to the farm, however, did he once succeed; for it was not difficult to escape him, so long as he had not laid actual hold on his prey. But he grew more and more cunning, and contrived at last, by creeping along hedges and lying in ambush like a snake, to get his hands upon him. Then the poor boy fared ill.

He went home bleeding and torn. The righteous churchwarden rebuked him with severity for fighting. His mistress told him she was glad he had met with some one to give him what he deserved, for she could hardly keep her hands off him. He stared at her with wondering eyes, but said nothing. She turned from them: the devil in her could not look in the eyes of the angel in him. The next time he fell into the snare of his enemy, he managed to conceal what had befallen him. After that he was too wide awake to be caught.

There was in the village a child whom nobody heeded. He was far more destitute than Clare, but had too much liberty. He

lived with a wretched old woman who called him her grandson: whether he was or not nobody cared. She made her livelihood by letting beds, in a cottage or rather hovel which seemed to be her own, to wayfarers, mostly tramps, with or without trades. The child was thus thrown into the worst of company, and learned many sorts of wickedness. He was already a thief, and of no small proficiency in his art. Though village-bred, he could pick a pocket more sensitive than a clown's. Small and deft, he had never stood before a magistrate. He was a miserable creature, bare-footed and bare-legged; about eight years of age, but so stunted that to the first glance he looked less than six—with keen ferret eyes in red rims, red hair, pasty, freckled complexion, and a generally unhealthy look; from which marks all, Clare conceived a pitiful sympathy for him. Their acquaintance began thus:—

One day, during his father's last illness, he happened to pass the door of the grandmother's hovel while the crone was administering to Tommy a severe punishment with a piece of thick rope: she had been sharp enough to catch him stealing from herself. Clare heard his cries. The door being partly open, he ran in, and gave him such assistance that they managed to bolt together from the hut. A friendship, for long almost a silent one, was thus initiated between them. Tommy—Clare never knew his other name, nor did the boy himself—would off and on watch for a sight of him all day long, but had the instinct, or experience, never to approach him if any one was with him. He was careful not to compromise him. The instant the most momentary *tête-*

à-tête

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.