GEORGE MACDONALD

THERE & BACK

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Содержание

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NOTE

Some of the readers of this tale will be glad to know that the passage with which it ends is a real dream; and that, with but three or four changes almost too slight to require acknowledging, I have given it word for word as the friend to whom it came set it down for me.

CHAPTER I. *FATHER, CHILD, AND NURSE*

It would be but stirring a muddy pool to inquire—not what motives induced, but what forces compelled sir Wilton Lestrange to marry a woman nobody knew. It is enough to say that these forces were mainly ignoble, as manifested by their intermittent character and final cessation. The *mésalliance* occasioned not a little surprise, and quite as much annoyance, among the county families,—failing, however, to remind any that certain of their own grandmothers had been no better known to the small world than lady Lestrange. It caused yet more surprise, though less annoyance, in the clubs to which sir Wilton had hitherto been indebted for help to forget his duties: they set him down as a greater idiot than his friends had hitherto imagined him. For had he not been dragged to the altar by a woman whose manners and breeding were hardly on the level of a villa in St. John's Wood? Did any one know whence she sprang, or even the name which sir Wilton had displaced with his own? But sir Wilton himself was not proud of his lady; and if the thing had been any business of theirs, it would have made no difference to him; he would none the less have let them pine in their ignorance. Did not his mother, a lady less dignified than eccentric, out of pure curiosity beg enlightenment concerning her origin, and receive for answer from the high-minded baronet, "Madam, the woman is my wife!"—after which the prudent dowager asked no more questions, but treated her daughter-in-law with neither better nor worse than civility. Sir Wilton, in fact, soon came to owe his wife a grudge that he had married her, and none the less that at the time he felt himself of a generosity more than human in bestowing upon her his name. Creation itself, had he ever thought of it, would have seemed to him a small thing beside such a gift!

That Robina Armour, after experience of his first advances, should have at last consented to marry sir Wilton Lestrange, was in no sense in her favour, although after a fashion she was in love with him—in love, that is, with the gentleman of her own imagining whom she saw in the baronet; while the baronet, on his part, was what he called in love with what he called *the woman*. As he was overcome by her beauty, so was she by his rank—an idol at whose clay feet is cast many a spiritual birthright—and as mean a deity as any of man's device. But the blacksmith's daughter was in many respects, notwithstanding, a woman of good sense, with much real refinement, and a genuine regard for rectitude. Although sir Wilton had never loved her with what was best in him, it was not in spite of what was best in him that he fell in love with her. Had his better nature been awake, it would have justified the bond, and been strengthened by it.

Lady Lestrange's father was a good blacksmith, occasionally drunk in his youth, but persistently sober now in his middle age; a long-headed fellow, with reach and quality in the prudence which had long ceased to appear to him the highest of virtues. At one period he had accounted it the prime duty of existence to take care of oneself; and so much of this belief had he communicated to his younger daughter, that she deported herself so that sir Wilton married her—with the result that, when Death knocked at her door, she welcomed him to her heart. The first cry of her child, it is true, made her recall the welcome, but she had to go with him, notwithstanding, when the child was but an hour old.

Not one of her husband's family was in the house when she died. Sir Wilton himself was in town, and had been for the last six months, preferring London and his club to Mortgrange and his wife. When a telegram informed him that she was in danger, he did go home, but when he arrived, she had been an hour gone, and he congratulated himself that he had taken the second train.

There had been betwixt them no approach to union. When what sir Wilton called love had evaporated, he returned to his mire, with a resentful feeling that the handsome woman—his superior in everything that belongs to humanity—had bewitched him to his undoing. The truth was, she had ceased to charm him. The fault was not in her; it lay in the dulled eye of the swiftly deteriorating man, which grew less and less capable of seeing things as they were, and transmitted falser and falser impressions of them. The light that was in him was darkness. The woman that might have made a

man of him, had there been the stuff, passed from him an unprized gift, a thing to which he made Hades welcome.

It was decent, however, not to parade his relief. He retired to the library, lit a cigar, and sat down to wish the unpleasant fuss of the funeral over, and the house rid of a disagreeable presence. Had the woman died of a disease to which he might himself one day have to succumb, her death might, as he sat there, have chanced to raise for an instant the watery ghost of an emotion; but, coming as it did, he had no sympathetic interest in her death any more than in herself. Lolling in the easiest of chairs, he revolved the turns of last night's play, until it occurred to him that he might soon by a second marriage take amends of his neighbours for their disapprobation of his first. So pleasant was the thought that, brooding upon it, he fell asleep.

He woke, looked, rubbed his eyes, stared, rubbed them again, and stared. A woman stood in front of him—one he had surely seen!—no, he had never seen her anywhere! What an odd, inquiring, searching expression in her two hideous black eyes! And what was that in her arms—something wrapt in a blanket?

The message in the telegram recurred to him: there must have been a child! The bundle must be the child! Confound the creature! What did it want?

"Go away," he said; "this is not the nursery!"

"I thought you might like to look at the baby, sir!" the woman replied.

Sir Wilton stared at the blanket.

"It might comfort you, I thought!" she went on, with a look he felt to be strange. Her eyes were hard and dry, red with recent tears, and glowing with suppressed fire.

Sir Wilton was courteous to most women, especially such as had no claim upon him, but cherished respect for none. It was odd therefore that he should now feel embarrassed. From some cause the machinery of his self-content had possibly got out of gear; anyhow no answer came ready. He had not the smallest wish to see the child, but was yet, perhaps, unwilling to appear brutal. In the meantime, the woman, with gentle, moth-like touch, was parting and turning back the folds of the blanket, until from behind it dawned a tiny human face, whose angel was suppliant, it may be, for the baptism of a father's first gaze.

The woman held out the child to sir Wilton, as if expecting him to take it. He started to his feet, driving the chair a yard behind him, stuck his hands in his pockets, and, with a face of disgust, cried—

"Great God! take the creature away."

But he could not lift his eyes from the face nested in the blanket. It seemed to fascinate him. The woman's eyes flared, but she did not speak.

"Uglier than sin!" he half hissed, half growled. "—I suppose the animal is mine, but you needn't bring it so close to me! Take it away—and keep it away. I will send for it when I want it—which won't be in a hurry! My God! How hideous a thing may be, and yet human!"

"He is as God made him!" remarked the nurse, quietly for very wrath.

"Or the devil!" suggested his father.

Then the woman looked like a tigress. She opened her mouth, but closed it again with a snap.

"I may say what I like of my own!" said the father. "Tell me the goblin is none of mine, and I will be as respectful to him as you please. Prove it, and I will give you fifty pounds. He's hideous! He's damnably ugly! Deny it if you can."

The woman held her peace. She could not, even to herself, call him a child pleasant to look at. She gazed on him for a moment with pitiful, protective eyes, then covered his face as if he were dead, but she did not move.

"Why don't you go?" said the baronet.

Instead of replying, she began, as by a suddenly confirmed resolve, to remove the coverings at the other end of the bundle, and presently disclosed the baby's feet. The baronet gazed wondering. To what might not assurance be about to subject him? She took one of the little feet in a hard but gentle

hand, and spreading out “the pink, five-beaded baby-toes,” displayed what even the inexperience of the baronet could not but recognize as remarkable: between every pair of toes was stretched a thin delicate membrane. She laid the foot down, took up the other, and showed the same peculiarity. The child was web-footed, as distinctly as any properly constituted duckling! Then she lifted, one after the other, the tiny hands, beautiful to any eye that understood, and showed between the middle and third finger of each, the same sort of membrane rising half-way to the points of them.

“I see!” said the baronet, with a laugh that was not nice, having in it no merriment, “the creature is a monster!—Well, if you think I am to blame, I can only protest you are mistaken. *I* am not web-footed! The duckness must come from the other side.”

“I hope you will remember, sir Wilton!”

“Remember? What do you mean? Take the monster away.”

The woman rearranged the coverings of the little crooked legs.

“Won’t you look at your lady before they put her in her coffin?” she said when she had done.

“What good would that do her? She’s past caring!—No, I won’t: why should I? Such sights are not pleasant.”

“The coffin’s a lonely chamber, sir Wilton; lonely to lie all day and all night in!”

“No lonelier for one than for another!” he replied, with an involuntary recoil from his own words. For the one thing a man must believe—yet hardly believes—is, that he shall one day die. “She’ll be better without me, anyhow!”

“You are heartless, sir Wilton!”

“Mind your own business. If I choose to be heartless, I may have my reasons. Take the child away.”

Still she did not move. The baby, young as he was, had thrown the blanket from his face, and the father’s eyes were fixed on it: while he gazed the nurse would not stir. He seemed fascinated by its ugliness. Without absolute deformity, the child was indeed as unsightly as infant well could be.

“My God!” he said again—for he had a trick of crying out as if he had a God—“the little brute hates me! Take it away, woman. Take it away before I strangle it! I can’t answer for myself if it keeps on looking at me!”

With a glance whose mingled anger and scorn the father did not see, the nurse turned and went.

He kept staring after her till the door shut, then fell back into his chair, exclaiming once more, “My God!”—What or whom he meant by the word, it were hard to say.

“Is it possible,” he said to himself, “that the fine woman I married—for she *was* a fine woman, a deuced fine woman!—should have died to present the world with such a travesty! It’s like nothing human! It’s an affront to the family! Ah! the strain *will* show! They say your sins will find you out! It was a sin to marry the woman! Damned fool I was! But she bewitched me! I *was* bewitched!—Curse the little monster! I shan’t breathe again till I’m out of the house! Where was the doctor? He ought to have seen to it! Hang it all, I’ll go abroad!”

Ugly as the child was, however, to many an eye the first thing evident in him would have been his strong likeness to his father—whose features were perfect, though at the moment, and at many a moment, their expression was other than attractive. Sir Wilton disliked children, and the dislike was mutual. Never did child run to him; never was child unwilling to leave him. Escaping from his grasp, he would turn and look back, like Christian emerging from the Valley of the Shadow, as if to weigh the peril he had been in.

As tenderly as if he had been the loveliest of God’s children, the woman bore her charge up staircases, and through corridors and passages, to the remote nursery, where, in a cradle whose gay furniture contrasted sadly with the countenance of the child and the fierceness of her own eyes, she gently laid him down. But long after he was asleep, she continued to bend over him, as if with difficulty restraining herself from clasping him again to her bosom.

Jane Tuke had been married four or five years, but had no children, and the lack seemed to have intensified her maternity. Elder sister to lady Lestrange, she had gone gladly to receive her child in her arms, and had watched and waited for it with an expectation far stronger than that of the mother; for so thorough was lady Lestrange's disappointment in her husband, that she regarded the advent of his child almost with indifference. Jane had an absolute passion for children. She had married a quarter for faith, a quarter for love, and a whole half for hope. This divinely inexplicable child-passion is as unintelligible to those devoid of it, as its absence is marvellous to those possessed by it. Its presence is its justification, its being its sole explanation, itself its highest reason. Surely on those who cherish it, the shadow of the love-creative God must rest more than on some other women! Unpleasing as was the infant, to know him her own would have made the world a paradise to Jane. Her heart burned with divine indignation at the wrongs already heaped upon him. Hardly born, he was persecuted! Ugly! he was *not* ugly! Was he not come straight from the fountain of life, from the Father of children? That such a father as she had left in the library should repudiate him was well! She loved to think of his rejection. She brooded with delight, in the midst of her wrath, on every word of disgust that had fallen from his unfatherly lips. The more her baby was rejected, the more he was hers! He belonged to her, and her only, for she only loved him! She could say with *France* in *King Lear*, "Be it lawful I take up what's cast away!" To her the despised one was the essence of all riches. The joy of a miser is less than the joy of a mother, as gold is less than a live soul, as greed is less than love. No vision of jewels ever gave such a longing as this woman longed with after the child of her dead sister.

The body that bore was laid in the earth, the thing born was left upon it. The mother had but come, exposed her infant on the rough shore of time, and forsaken him in his nakedness. There he lay, not knowing whence he came, or whither he was going, urged to live by a hunger and thirst he had not invented, and did not understand. His mother had helplessly forsaken him, but the God in another woman had taken him up: there was a soul to love him, two arms to carry him, and a strong heart to shelter him.

Sir Wilton returned to London, and there enjoyed himself—not much, but a little the more that no woman sat at Mortgrange with a right to complain that he took his pleasure without her. He lived the life of the human animals frequenting the society of their kind from a gregarious instinct, and for common yet opposing self-ends. He had begun to assume the staidness, if not dullness, of the animal whose first youth has departed, but he was only less frolicsome, not more human. He was settling down to what he had made himself; no virtue could claim a share in the diminished rampancy of his vices. What a society is that which will regard as reformed the man whom assuaging fires have left an exhausted slag—a thing for which as yet no use is known, who suggests no promise of change or growth, gives no poorest hint of hope concerning his fate!

With the first unrecognized sense of approaching age, a certain habit of his race began to affect him, and the idea of a quieter life, with a woman whose possession would make him envied, grew mildly attractive. A brilliant marriage in another county would, besides, avenge him on the narrow-minded of his own, who had despised his first choice! With judicial family-eye he surveyed the eligible women of his acquaintance. It was, no doubt, to his disadvantage that already an heir lay "mewling and puking in the nurse's arms;" for a woman who might willingly be mother to the inheritor of such a property as his, might not find attractive the notion of her first being her husband's second son. But slips between cups and lips were not always on the wrong side! Such a moon-calf as Robina's son could not with justice represent the handsomest man and one of the handsomest women of their time. The heir that fate had palmed upon him might very well be doomed to go the way so many infants went!

He spread the report that the boy was sickly. A notion that he was not likely to live prevailed about Mortgrange, which, however originated, was nourished doubtless by the fact that he was so seldom seen. In reality, however, there was not a healthier child in all England than Richard Lestrange.

Sir Wilton's relations took as little interest in the heir as himself, and there was no inducement for any of them to visit Mortgrange; the aunt-mother, therefore, had her own way with him. She was not liked in the house. The servants said she cared only for the little toad of a baronet, and would do nothing for her comfort. They had, however, just a shadow of respect for her: if she encouraged no familiarity, she did not meddle, and was independent of their aid. Even the milking of the cow which had been, through her persistence, set apart for the child, she did herself. She sought no influence in the house, and was nothing loved and little heeded.

Sir Wilton had not again seen his heir, who was now almost a year old, when the rumour reached Mortgrange that the baronet was about to be married.

Naturally, the news was disquieting to Jane. The hope, however, was left her, that the stepmother might care as little for the child as did the father, and that so, for some years at least, he might be left to her. It was a terrible thought to the loving woman that they might be parted; a more terrible thought that her baby might become a man like his father. Of all horrors to a decent woman, a bad man must be the worst! If by her death she could have left the child her hatred of evil, Jane would have willingly died: she loved her husband, but her sister's boy was in danger!

CHAPTER II. *STEPMOTHER AND NURSE*

The rumour of sir Wilton's marriage was, as rumour seldom is, correct. Before the year was out, lady Ann Hardy, sister to the earl of Torpavy, representing an old family with a drop or two of very bad blood in it, became lady Ann Lestrange How much love there may have been in the affair, it is unnecessary to inquire, seeing the baronet was what he was, and the lady understood the *what* pretty well. She might have preferred a husband not so much what sir Wilton was, but she was nine-and-twenty, and her brother was poor. She said to herself, I suppose, that she might as well as another undertake his reform: some one must! and married him. She had not much of a trousseau, but was gorgeously attired for the wedding. It is true she had to return to the earl three-fourths of the jewels she wore; but they were family jewels, and why should she not have some good of them? She started with fifty pounds of her own in her pocket, and a demeanour in her person equal to fifty millions. When they arrived at Mortgrange, the moon was indeed still in the sky, but the honey-pot, to judge by the appearance of the twain, was empty: twain they were, and twain would be. The man wore a look of careless all-rightness, tinged with an expression of indifferent triumph: he had what he wanted; what his lady might think of her side of the bargain, he neither thought nor cared. As to the woman, let her reflections be what they might, not a soul would come to the knowledge of them. Whatever it was to others, her pale, handsome face was never false to herself, never betrayed what she was thinking, never broke the shallow surface of its frozen dignity. Will any man ever know how a woman of ordinary decency feels after selling herself? I find the thing hardly safe to ponder. No trace, no shadow of disappointment clouded the countenance of lady Ann that sultry summer afternoon as she drove up the treeless avenue. The education she had received—and education in the worst sense it was! for it had brought out the worst in her—had rendered her less than human. The form of her earthly presence had been trained to a fashionable perfection; her nature had not been left unaided in its reversion toward the vague animal type from which it was developed: in the curve of her thin lips as they prepared to smile, one could discern the veiled snarl and bite. Her eyes were grey, her eyebrows dark; her complexion was a clear fair, her nose perfect, except for a sharp pinch at the end of the bone; her nostrils were thin but motionless; her chin was defective, and her throat as slender as her horrible waist; her hands and feet were large even for "her tall personage."

After his lady had had a cup of tea, sir Wilton, for something to do, proposed taking her over the house, which was old, and worthy of inspection. In their progress they came to a door at the end of a long and rather tortuous passage. Sir Wilton did not know how the room was occupied, or he would doubtless have passed it by; but as its windows gave a fine view of the park, he opened the door, and lady Ann entered. Sudden displeasure shortened her first step; pride or something worse lengthened the next, as she bore down on a woman too much occupied with a child on her knee to look up at the sound of her entrance. When, a moment after, she did look up, the dreaded stepmother was looking straight down on her baby. Their eyes encountered. Jane met an icy stare, and lady Ann a gaze of defiance—an expression by this time almost fixed on the face of the nurse, for in her spirit she heard every unspoken remark on her child. Not a word did the lady utter, but to Jane, her eyes, her very breath seemed to say with scorn, "Is *that* the heir?" Sir Wilton did not venture a single look: he was ashamed of his son, and already a little afraid of his wife, whom he had once seen close her rather large teeth in a notable way. As she turned toward the window, however, he stole a glance at his offspring: the creature was not quite so ugly as before—not quite so repulsive as he had pictured him! But, good heavens! he was on the lap of the same woman whose fierceness had upset him almost as much as his child's ugliness! He walked to the window after his wife. She gazed for a moment, turned with indifference, and left the room. Her husband followed her. A glance of fear, dislike, and defiance, went after them from Jane.

Stronger contrast than those two women it would be hard to find. Jane's countenance was almost coarse, but its rugged outline was almost grand. Her hair grew low down on her forehead, and she had deep-set eyes. Her complexion was rough, her nose large and thick. Her mouth was large also, but, when unaffected by her now almost habitual antagonism, the curve of her lip was sweet, and occasionally humorous. Her chin was strong, and the total of her face what we call masculine; but when she silently regarded her child, it grew beautiful with the radiant tenderness of protection.

Her visitors left the door open behind them; Jane rose and shut it, sat down again, and gazed motionless at the infant. Perhaps he vaguely understood the sorrow and dread of her countenance, for he pulled a long face of his own, and was about to cry. Jane clasped him to her bosom in an agony: she felt certain she would not long be permitted to hold him there. In the silent speech of my lady's mouth, her jealous love saw the doom of her darling. What precise doom she dared not ask herself; it was more than enough that she, indubitably his guardian as if sent from heaven to shield him, must abandon him to his natural enemy, one who looked upon him as the adversary of her own children. It was a thought not to be thought, an idea for which there should be no place in her bosom! Unfathomable as the love between man and woman is the love of woman to child.

She spent a wakeful night. From the decree of banishment sure to go forth against her, there was no appeal! Go she must! Yet her heart cried out that he was her own. In the same lap his mother had lain before him! She had carried her by day, and at night folded her in the same arms, herself but six years old—old enough to remember yet the richness unspeakable of her new possession. Never had come difference betwixt them until Robina began to give ear to sir Wilton, whom Jane could not endure. When she responded, as she did at once, to her sister's cry for her help, she made her promise that no one should understand who she was, but that she should in the house be taken for and treated as a hired nurse. Why Jane stipulated thus, it were hard to say, but so careful were they both, that no one at Mortgrange suspected the nurse as personally interested in the ugly heir left in her charge! No one dreamed that the child's aunt had forsaken her husband to nurse him, and was living *for* him day and night. She, in her turn, had promised her sister never to leave him, and this pledge strengthened the bond of her passion. The only question was *how* she was to be faithful to her pledge, *how* to carry matters when she was turned away. With those thin, close-pressed lips in her mind's eye, she could not count on remaining where she was beyond a few days.

She was not only a woman capable of making up her mind, but a woman of resource, with the advantage of having foreseen and often pondered the possibility of that which was now imminent. The same night, silent above the sleep of her darling, she sat at work with needle and scissors far into the morning, remodelling an old print dress. For nights after, she was similarly occupied, though not a scrap or sign of the labour was visible in the morning.

The crisis anticipated came within a fortnight. Lady Ann did not show herself a second time in the nursery, but sending for Jane, informed her that an experienced nurse was on her way from London to take charge of the child, and her services would not be required after the next morning.

"For, of course," concluded her ladyship, "I could not expect a woman of your years to take an under-nurse's place!"

"Please your ladyship, I will gladly," said Jane, eager to avoid or at least postpone the necessity forcing itself upon her.

"I intend you to go—and *at once*," replied her ladyship; "—that is, the moment Mrs. Thornycroft arrives. The housekeeper will take care that you have your month's wages in lieu of warning."

"Very well, my lady!—Please, your ladyship, when may I come and see the child?"

"Not at all. There is no necessity."

"Never, my lady?"

"Decidedly."

"Then at least I may ask why you send me away so suddenly!"

"I told you that I want a properly qualified nurse to take your place. My wish is to have the child more immediately under my own eye than would be agreeable if you kept your place. I hope I speak plainly!"

"Quite, my lady."

"And let me, for your own sake, recommend you to behave more respectfully when you find another place."

What she was doing lady Ann was incapable of knowing. A woman love-brooding over a child is at the gate of heaven; to take her child from her is to turn her away from more than paradise.

Jane went in silence, seeming to accept the inevitable, too proud to wipe away the tear whose rising she could not help—a tear not for herself, nor yet for the child, but for the dead mother in whose place she left such a woman. She walked slowly back to the nursery, where her charge was asleep, closed the door, sat down by the cot, and sat for a while without moving. Then her countenance began to change, and slowly went on changing, until at last, as through a mist of troubled emotion, out upon the strong, rugged face broke, with strange suggestion of a sunset, the glow of resolve and justified desire. A maid more friendly than the rest brought her some tea, but Jane said nothing of what had occurred. When the child awoke, she fed him, and played with him a long time—till he was thoroughly tired, when she undressed him, and laying him down, set about preparing his evening meal. No one could have perceived in her any difference, except indeed it were a subdued excitement in her glowing eyes. When it was ready, she went to her box, took from it a small bottle, and poured a few dark-coloured drops into the food.

"God forgive me! it's but this once!" she murmured.

The child seemed not quite to relish his supper, but did not refuse it, and was presently asleep in her arms. She laid him down, took a book, and began to read.

CHAPTER III. *THE FLIGHT*

She read until every sound had died in the house, every sound from garret to cellar, except the ticking of clock, and the tinkling cracks of sinking fires and cooling grates. In the regnant silence she rose, laid aside her book, softly opened the door, and stepped as softly into the narrow passage. A moment or two she listened, then stole on tiptoe to the main corridor, and again listened. She went next to the head of the great stair, and once more stood and listened. Then she crept down to the drawing-room, saw that there was no light in the library, billiard-room, or smoking-room, and with stealthy feet returned to the nursery. There she closed the door she had left open, and took the child. He lay in her arms like one dead. She removed everything he wore, and dressed him in the garments which for the last fortnight she had been making for him from clothes of her own. When she had done, he looked like any cottager's child; there was nothing in his face to contradict his attire. She regarded the result for a moment with a triumph of satisfaction, laid him down, and proceeded to put away the clothes he had worn.

Over the top of the door was a small cupboard in the wall, into which she had never looked until the day before, when she opened it and found it empty. She placed a table under it, and a chair on the table, climbed up, laid in it everything she had taken off the child, locked the door of it, put the key in her pocket, and got down. Then she took the cloak and hood he had hitherto worn out of doors, laid them down beside the wardrobe, and lifting the end of it with a strength worthy of the blacksmith's daughter, pushed them with her foot into the hollow between the bottom of the wardrobe and the floor of the room. This done, she looked at the timepiece on the mantelshelf, saw it was one o'clock, and sat down to recover her breath. But the next moment she was on her knees, sobbing. By and by she rose, wiped the hot tears from her eyes, and went carefully about the room, gathering up this and that, and putting it into her box. Then having locked it, she stuffed a number of small pieces of paper into the lock, using a crochet-needle to get them well among the wards. Lastly, she put on a dress she had never worn at Mortgrange, took up the child, who was still in a dead sleep, wrapped him in an old shawl, and stole with him from the room.

Like those of a thief—or murderess rather, her scared eyes looked on this side and that, as she crept to a narrow stair that led to the kitchen. She knew every turn and every opening in this part of the house: for weeks she had been occupied, both intellect and imagination, with the daring idea she was now carrying into effect.

She reached the one door that might yield a safe exit, unlocked it noiselessly, and stood in a little paved yard with a pump, whence another door in an ivy-covered wall opened into the kitchen-garden. The moon shone large and clear, but the shadow of the house protected her. It was the month of August, warm and still. If only it had been dark! Outside the door she was still in the shadow. For the first time in her life she loved the darkness. Along the wall she stole as if clinging to it. Yet another door led into a shrubbery surrounding the cottage of the head-gardener, whence a back-road led to a gate, over which she could climb, so to reach the highway, along whose honest, unshadowed spaces she must walk miles and miles before she could even hope herself safe.

She stood at length in the broad moonlight, on the white, far-reaching road. Her heart beat so fast as almost to stifle her. She dared not look down at the child, lest some one should see her and look also! The moon herself had an aspect of suspicion! Why did she keep staring so? For an instant she wished herself back in the nursery. But she knew it would only be to do it all over again: it *had* to be done! Leave the child of her sister where he was counted in the way! with those who hated him! where his helpless life was in danger! She could not!

But, while she thought, she did not stand. Softly, with great strides she went stalking along the road. She knew the country: she was not many miles from her father's forge, whence at moments she seemed to hear the ring of his hammer through the still night.

She kept to the road for three or four miles, then turned aside on a great moor stretching far to the south: daybreak was coming fast; she must find some cottage or natural shelter, lest the light should betray her. When the sun had made his round, and yielded his place to the friendly night, she would start afresh! In her bundle she had enough for the baby; for herself, she could hold out many hours unfed. A few more miles from Mortgrange, and no one would know her, neither from any possible description could they be suspected in the garments they wore! Her object in hiding their usual attire had been, that it might be taken for granted they had gone away in it.

She did not slacken her pace till she had walked five miles more. Then she stood a moment, and gazed about her. The great heath was all around, solitary as the heaven out of which the solitary moon, with no child to comfort her, was enviously watching them. But she would not stop to rest, save for the briefest breathing space! On and on she went until moorland miles five more, as near as she could judge, were behind her. Then at length she sat down upon a stone, and a timid flutter of safety stirred in her bosom, followed by a gush of love victorious. Her treasure! her treasure! Not once on the long way had she looked at him. Now she folded back the shawl, and gazed as not even a lover could have gazed on the sleeping countenance of his rescued bride. The passion of no other possession could have equalled the intensity of her conscious *having*. Not one created being had a right to the child but herself!—yet any moment he might be taken from her by a cold-hearted, cruel stepmother, and given to a hired woman! She started to her feet, and hurried on. The boy was no light weight, and she had things to carry besides, which her love said he could not do without; yet before seven o'clock she had cleared some sixteen miles, in a line from Mortgrange as straight as she could keep.

She thought she must now be near a village whose name she knew; but she dared not show herself lest some advertisement might reach it after she was gone, and lead to the discovery of the route she had taken. She turned aside therefore into an old quarry, there to spend the day, unvisited of human soul. The child was now awake, but still drowsy. She gave him a little food, and ate the crust she had saved from her tea the night before. During the long hours she slept a good deal by fits, and when the evening came, was quite fit to resume her tramp. To her joy it came cloudy, giving her courage to enter a little shop she saw on the outskirts of the village, and buy some milk and some bread. From this point she kept the road: she might now avail herself of help from cart or wagon. She was not without money, but feared the railway.

It is needless to follow her wanderings, always toward London, where was her husband, and her home. A weary, but happy, and almost no longer an anxious woman, she reached at length a certain populous suburb, and was soon in the arms of her husband.

CHAPTER IV. *THE BOOKBINDER AND HIS PUPIL*

It was the middle of the day before they were missed. Their absence caused for a time no commotion; the servants said nurse must have taken the child for his usual walk. But when the nurse from London came, and, after renewed search and inquiry, nothing was heard of them, their disappearance could no longer be kept from lady Ann. She sent to inform her husband.

Sir Wilton asked a question or two of her messenger, said the thing must be seen to, finished his cigar, threw the stump in the fire, and went to his wife; when at once they began to discuss, not the steps to be taken for the recovery of the child, but the woman's motive for stealing him. The lady insisted it was revenge for having been turned away, and that she would, as soon as she reached a suitable place, put an end to his life: she had seen murder in her eyes! The father opined there was no such danger: he remembered, though he did not mention it, the peculiarity of the woman's behaviour when first he saw her. There was no limit, he said, to the unnatural fancies of women; some were disgustingly fond of children, even other women's children. Plain as the infant was, he did not doubt she had taken a fancy to him, and therefore declined to part with him. The element of revenge might, he allowed, have a share in the deed; but that would be satisfied with leaving them in doubt of his fate. For his part, he made her welcome to him! To this lady Ann gave no answer: she was not easily shocked, and could, without consternation, have regarded his disappearance as final. But something must at least appear to be done! Unpleasant things might be said, and uncertainty was full of annoyance!

"You must be careful, sir Wilton," she remarked. "Nobody thinks you believe the child your own."

Sir Wilton laughed.

"I never had a doubt on the subject. I wish I had: he's not to my credit. If we never hear of him again, the better for the next!"

"That is true!" rejoined lady Ann. "But what if, after we had forgotten all about him, he were to turn up again?"

"That would be unpleasant—and is indeed a reason why we should look for him. Better find him than live in doubt! Besides, the world would be uncharitable enough to hint that you had made away with him: it's what ought to have been done when first he appeared. I give you my word, Ann, he was a positive monster! The object was actually web-footed!—web-footed like any frog!"

"You must let the police know," said the lady.

"That the child is web-footed? No, I think not!" yawned sir Wilton.

He got up, went out, and ordered a groom to ride hard to the village—as hard as he could go—and let the police understand what had occurred. Within the hour a constable appeared, come to inquire when last the fugitives were seen, and what they wore—the answer to which latter question set the police looking for persons very different in appearance from Jane and her nursling. Nothing was heard of them, and the inquiry, never prosecuted with any vigour, was by degrees dropped entirely.

John Tuke had grumbled greatly at his wife's desertion of him for grandees who would never thank her; but he gave in to the prolongation of her absence with a better grace, when he learned how the motherless baby was regarded by his own people. The humanity of the man rose in defence of the injured. He felt also that, in espousing the cause of his wife's nephew, scorned by his baronet father, he was taking the part of his own down-trodden class. He was greatly perplexed, however, as to what end the thing was to have. Must he live without his wife till the boy was sent to school?

He was in bed and fast asleep, when suddenly opening his eyes, he saw beside him the wife he had not seen for twelve months, with the stolen child in her arms. When he heard how the stepmother had treated her, and how the babe was likely to fare among its gentle kin, he was filled with fresh indignation; but, while thoroughly appreciating and approving his wife's decision and energy, he saw

to what the deed exposed them, and augured frightful consequences to the discovery that seemed almost certain. But when he understood the precautions she had taken, and bethought himself how often the police fail, he had better hopes of escape. One thing he never dreamed of—and that was, restoring the child. Often at night he would lie wondering how far, in case of their being tried for kidnapping, the defence would reach, that his wife was the child's aunt; and whether the fact that she was none the less a poor woman standing up against the rich, would not render that or any plea unavailing. Jane was, and long remained, serenely hopeful.

When she left for Mortgrange, they had agreed that her husband should say she was gone to her father's; and as nobody where they lived knew who or where her father was, nobody had the end of any clue. For some time after her return she did not show herself, leaving it to her husband to say she had come back with her baby. Then she began to appear with the child, and so managed her references to her absence, that no one dreamed of his not being her own, or imagined that she had left her husband for other reason than to be tended at her old home in her confinement. After a few years, even the fact of his not having been born in that house was forgotten; and Richard Lestrange grew up as the son of John Tuke, the bookbinder. Not in any mind was there a doubt as to his parentage.

They lived on the very bank of the Thames, in a poor part of a populous, busy, thriving suburb, far from fashionable, yet not without inhabitants of refinement. Had not art and literature sent out a few suckers into it, there would have been no place in it for John Tuke. For, more than liking his trade, being indeed fond of it, he would not work for the booksellers, but used his talent to the satisfaction of known customers, of whom he had now not a few, for his reputation had spread beyond the near neighbourhood. But while he worked cheaper, quality considered, than many binders, even carefully superintending that most important yet most neglected part of the handicraft, the sewing, he never undertook cheap work. Never, indeed, without persuasion on the part of his employer and expostulation on his own, did he consent to *half-bind* a book. Hence it comes to be confessed, that, when *carte blanche* was given him, he would not infrequently expend upon a book an amount of labour and a value of material quite out of proportion to the importance of the book. Still, being a thoroughly conscientious workman, who never hurried the forwarding, never cut from a margin a hair's breadth more than was necessary, and hated finger-marks on the whiteness of a page, he was well known as such, and had plenty of work—had often, indeed, to refuse what was offered him, hence was able to decline all such jobs as would give him no pleasure, and grew more fastidious as he grew older in regard to the quality of the work he would undertake. He had never employed a journeyman, and would never take more than two apprentices at a time.

As Richard Lestrange grew, his chief pleasure was to be in the shop with his uncle, and watch him at his varying work. I think his knowledge of books as things led him the sooner to desire them as realities, for to read he learned with avidity. When he was old enough to go to school, his adopted father spared nothing he could spend to make him fit for his future; wisely resolved, however, that he should know nothing of his rights until he was of an age to understand them—except, indeed, sir Wilton should die before that age arrived, when his cause would be too much prejudiced by farther postponement of claim. Heartily they hoped that their secret might remain a secret until their nephew should be capable of protecting them from any untoward consequence of their well intended crime.

Happily there was in the place, and near enough for the boy to attend it easily, a good day-school upon an old foundation, whose fees were within his father's means. Richard proved a fair student and became a great reader. But he took such an intelligent and practical interest in the work he saw going on at home, that he began, while yet a mere child, to use paste and paper of his own accord. First he made manuscript-books for his work at school, and for the copying of such verses as he took a fancy to in his reading. Then inside the covers of some of these he would make pockets for papers; and so advanced to small portfolios and pocket-books, of which he would make presents to his companions, and sometimes, when more ambitiously successful, to a master. In their construction he used bits of coloured paper and scraps of leather, chiefly morocco, which his father willingly made over to him,

watching his progress with an interest quite paternal, and showing a workman's wisdom in this, that only when he saw him in a real difficulty would he come to his aid—as, for instance, when first he struggled with a piece of leather too thick for the bonds of paste, and must be taught how to pare it to the necessary flexibility and compliance.

To become able to *make* something is, I think, necessary to thorough development. I would rather have son of mine a carpenter, a watchmaker, a wood-carver, a shoemaker, a jeweller, a blacksmith, a bookbinder, than I would have him earn his bread as a clerk in a counting-house. Not merely is the cultivation of operant faculty a better education in faculty, but it brings the man nearer to every thing operant; humanity unfolds itself to him the readier; its ways and thoughts and modes of being grow the clearer to both intellect and heart. The poetry of life, the inner side of that nature which comes from him who, on the Sabbath-days even, "worketh hitherto," rises nearer the surface to meet the eyes of the man who *makes.* What advantage the carpenter of Nazareth gathered from his bench, is the inheritance of every workman, in proportion as he does divine, that is, honest work.

Perceiving the faculty of the boy, his father—so let us call John Tuke for the present—naturally thought it well to make him a gift of his trade: it would always be a possession! "Whatever turn things may take," he would remark to his wife, "the boy will have his bread in his hands. And say what they will, the man who can gather his food off his own bench, or screw it out of his own press, must be a freer man than he who but for his inheritance would have to beg, steal, or die of hunger. And who knows how long the world may permit idlers to fare of its best!"

For, after a fashion of his own, Tuke was a philosopher and a politician. But his politics were those of the philosopher, not of the politician.

Richard, with his great love of reading, and therefore of books, was delighted to learn the craft which is their attendant and servitor. When too young yet to wield the hammer without danger both to himself and the book under it, he began to sew, and in a few weeks was able to bring the sheets together entirely to the satisfaction of his father. From the first he set him to do that essential part of the work in the best way, that is, to sew every sheet round every cord: it is only when one can perfectly work after the perfect rule, that he may be trusted with variations and exceptions.

He went on teaching him until the boy could, he confessed, do almost everything better than himself—went on until he had taught him every delicacy, every secret of the craft. Richard developed a positive genius for the work, seeming almost to learn it by intuition. A pocket-book, with which he presented his father on his fiftieth birthday, brought out his unqualified praise.

In the process he gradually revealed a predilection for a rarer use of his faculty—a use more nice, while less distinguished, and not much favoured by his father. It had its prime source deeper than the art of book-binding—in the love of books themselves, not as leaves to be bound, but as utterances to be heard. Certain dealers in old books have loved some of them so as to refuse to part with them on any terms; Richard, unable to possess more than a very few, manifested his veneration for them in another and nearer fashion, running, as was natural and healthy, in the lines of his calling.

For many months in diligent attendance at certain of the evening-classes at King's College, he had developed a true insight into and sympathy with what is best in our literature—chiefly in that of the sixteenth century: from this grew an almost peculiar regard for old books. With three or four shillings weekly at his disposal, he laid himself out to discover and buy such volumes as, in themselves of value, were in so bad a condition as to be of little worth from the mere bookseller's point of view: with these for his first patients he opened a hospital, or angel-asylum, for the lodging, restorative treatment, and systematic invigoration of decayed volumes. Love and power combined made him look on the dilapidated, slow-wasting abodes of human thought and delight with a healing compassion —almost with a passion of healing. The worse gnawed of the tooth of insect-time, the farther down any choice book in the steep decline of years, the more intent was Richard on having it. More and more skillful he grew, not only in rebinding such whose clothing was past repair, but in restoring the tone of their very constitution; and in so mending the ancient and beggarly garments of others that

they reassumed a venerable respectability. Through love, he passed from an artisan to an artist. His reverence for the inner reality, the book itself, in itself beyond time and decay, had roused in him a child-like regard for its body, for its broken inclosure and default of manifestation. He would espy the beauty of an old binding through any amount of abrasion and laceration. To his eyes almost any old binding was better for its book than any new one.

His father came to regard with wonder and admiration the redeeming faculty of his son, whereby he would reinstate in strength and ripe dignity a volume which he would have taken to pieces, and redressed like an age-worn woman in a fashionable gown. So far did his son's superior taste work upon his, that at length, if he opened a new binding, however sombre, and saw a time-browned paper and old type within, the sight would give him the shock of a discord.

But Tuke was in many things no other than a man of this world, and sorely he doubted if such labour would ever have its counterpoise in money. It paid better, because it was much easier, to reclothe than to restore! to destroy and replace than to renew! When he had watched many times for minutes together his son's delicate manipulation—in which he patched without pauperizing, and subaided without humiliating—and at last contemplating the finished result, he concluded him possessed of a quite original faculty for book-healing.—"But alas," he thought, "genius seldom gets beyond board-wages!" It did not occur to him that genius least requires more than board-wages. He encouraged him, nevertheless, though mildly, in the pursuit of this neglected branch of the binding-art.

As the days went on, and their love for their nephew grew with his deserts, the uncle and aunt shrank more and more from the thought, which every year compelled them to think the oftener, that the day was drawing nigh when they must volunteer the confession that he was not their child.

When he was about seventeen, Richard settled down to work with his father, occasionally assisting him, but in general occupied with his own special branch, in which Tuke, through his long connection with book-lovers possessing small cherished libraries, was able to bring him almost as many jobs as he could undertake. The fact that a volume could be so repaired, stimulated the purchase of shabby books; and part of what was saved on the price of a good copy was laid out on the amendment of the poor one. But however much the youth delighted in it, he could not but find the work fidgety and tiring; whence ensued the advantage that he left it the oftener for a ramble, or a solitary hour on the river. He had but few companions, his guardians, wisely or not, being more fastidious about his associates than if he had been their very son. His uncle, of strong socialistic opinions, and wont to dilate on human equality—as if the thing that ought to be, and must one day come, could be furthered by the assertion of its present existence—was, like the holders of even higher theories, not a little apt to forget the practice necessarily involved: this son of a baronet, seeing that he was the son also of his wife's sister, was not to be brought up like one of the many!

Ugliness in infancy is a promise, though perhaps a doubtful one, of beauty in manhood; and in Richard's case the promise was fulfilled: hardly a hint was left of the baby-face which had repelled his father. He was now a handsome well-grown youth, with dark-brown hair, dark-green eyes, broad shoulders, and a little stoop which made his aunt uneasy: she would have had him join a volunteer corps, but he declared he had not the time. He accepted her encouragement, however, to forsake his work as often as he felt inclined. He had good health; what was better, a good temper; and what was better still, a willing heart toward his neighbour. A certain over-hanging of his brows was—especially when he contracted them, as, in perplexity or endeavour, he not infrequently did—called a scowl by such as did not love him; but it was of shallow insignificance, and probably the trick of some ancestor.

Before long, his thinking began to take form in verse-making. It matters little to my narrative whether he produced anything of original value or not; utterance aids growth, which is the prime necessity of human as of all other life. Not seldom, bent over his work, he would be evolving some musical fashion of words—with no relaxation, however, of the sharp attention and delicate handling required by the nature of that work. It is the privilege of some kinds of labour, that they are compatible

with thoughts of higher things. At the book-keeper's desk, the clerk must think of nothing but his work; he is chained to it as the galley-slave to his oar; the shoemaker may be poet or mystic, or both; the ploughman may turn a good furrow and a good verse together; Richard could at once use hands and thoughts. It troubled his protectors that they could not send him to college, but they comforted themselves that it would not be too late when he returned to his natural position in society. They had no plan in their minds, no date settled at which to initiate his restoration. All they had determined was, that he must at least be a grown man, capable of looking after his own affairs, when the first step for it was taken.

John Tuke was one of those who acknowledge in some measure the claims of their neighbour, but assert ignorance of any one who must be worshipped. And in truth, the God presented to him by his teachers was one with little claim on human devotion. The religious system brought to bear on his youth had operated but feebly on his conscience, and not at all on his affections. It had, however, so wrought upon his apprehensions, that, when afterward persuaded there was no ground for agonizing anticipation, he welcomed the conviction as in itself a redemption for all men; "for, surely," he argued, "fear is the worst of evils!" The very approach of such a relief predisposed him to receive whatever teaching might follow from the same source; and soon he believed himself satisfied that the notion of religion—of duty toward an unseen maker—was but an old-wives'-fable; and that, as to the hereafter, a mere cessation of consciousness was the only reasonable expectation. The testimony of his senses, although negative, he accepted as stronger on that side than any amount of what could, he said, be but the purest assertion on the other. Why should he heed an old book? why one more than another? The world was around him: some things he must believe; other things no man could! One thing was clear: every man was bound to give his neighbour fair-play! He would press nothing upon Richard as to God or no God! he would not be dogmatic! he only wanted to make a man of him! And was he not so far successful? argued John. Was not Richard growing up a diligent, honest fellow, loving books, and leading a good life; whereas, had he been left to his father, he could not have escaped being arrogant and unjust, despising the poor of his own flesh, and caring only to please himself! In the midst of such superior causes of satisfaction, it also pleased Tuke to reflect that the trade he had taught his nephew was a clean one, which, while it rendered him superior to any shrewd trick fortune might play him, would not make his hands unlike those of a gentleman.

His aunt, however, kept wishing that Richard were better "set up," and looked more like his grandfather the blacksmith, whose trade she could not help regarding as manlier than that of her husband. Hence she had long cherished the desire that he should spend some time with her father. But John would not hear of it. He would get working at the forge, he said, and ruin his hands for the delicate art in which he was now unapproachable.

For in certain less socialistic moods, John would insist on regarding bookbinding, in all and any of its branches, not as a trade, but an art.

CHAPTER V. *THE MANSONS*

At school, Richard had been friendly with a boy of gentle nature, not many years older than himself. The boy had stood his friend in more than one difficulty, and Richard heartily loved him. But he had suddenly disappeared from the school, and so from Richard's ken: for years he had not seen him. One evening, as he was carrying home a book, he met this Arthur Manson, looking worn and sad. He would have avoided Richard, but he stopped him, and presently the old friendship was dominant. Arthur told him his story. He had had to leave school because of the sudden cessation, from what cause he did not know, of a certain annuity his mother had till then enjoyed—rendering it imperative that he should earn his own living, and contribute to her support, for although she still had a little money, it was not nearly enough. His sister was at work with a dressmaker, but as yet earning next to nothing. His mother was a lady, he said, and had never done any work. He was himself in a counting-house in the City, with a salary of forty pounds. He told him where they lived, and Richard promised to go and see him, which he did the next Sunday.

His friend's mother lived in a little house of two floors, one of a long row lately built. The furniture was much too large, and it was difficult to move in the tiny drawing-room. It showed a feeble attempt at decoration, which made it look the poorer. Accustomed to his mother's care of her things, Richard perceived a difference: these were much finer but neglected, and looked as if they felt it. At their evening meal, however, the tea was good, and the bread and butter were of the best.

The mother was a handsome middle-aged woman—not so old, Richard somehow imagined, as she looked. She was stout and florid, with plenty of black, rather coarse hair, and seemed to Richard to have the carriage of a lady, but not speech equal to her manners. She was polite to him, but not apparently interested in her son's friend. Yet several times he found her gazing at him with an expression that puzzled him. He had, however, too clear a conscience to be troubled by any scrutiny. All the evening Arthur's face wore the same look of depression, and Richard wondered what could be amiss. He learned afterward that the mother was so self-indulgent, and took so little care to make the money go as far as it could, that he had not merely to toil from morning to night at uncongenial labour, but could never have the least recreation, and was always too tired when he came home to understand any book he attempted to read. Richard learned also that he had no greatcoat, and went to the City in the winter with only a shabby comforter in addition to the clothes he had worn all the summer. But it was not Arthur who told him this.

The girl was a graceful little creature, with the same sad look her brother had, but not the same depression. She seemed more delicate, and less capable of labour; yet her hours were longer than his, and her confinement greater. Alice had to sit the whole day plying her needle, while Arthur was occasionally sent out to collect money. But her mistress was a kind-hearted woman, and not having a fashionable *clientèle*, had not yet become indifferent to the well-being of her work-women. She even paid a crippled girl a trifle for reading to them, stipulating only that she should read fast, for she found the rate of their working greatly influenced by the rate of the reading. Life, if harder, was therefore not quite so uninteresting to Alice as to Arthur, and that might be why she seemed to have more vitality. Like her mother she had a quantity of hair, as dark as hers, but finer; dark eyes, not without meaning; irregular but very pleasing and delicate features; and an unusually white rather than pale complexion, with a sort of sallow glow under the diaphanous skin. There was not a little piquancy in the expression of her countenance, and Richard felt it strangely attractive.

The youths found they had still tastes in common, although Arthur had neither time nor strength to follow them. Richard spoke of some book he had been reading. Arthur was interested, but Alice so much that Richard offered to lend it her: it was the first time she had heard a book spoken of in such a tone—one of suppressed feeling, almost veneration.

The mother did not join in their talk, and left them soon—her daughter said to go to church.

"She always goes by herself," Alice added. "She sees we are too tired to go."

They sat a long time with no light but that of the fire. Arthur seemed to gather courage, and confessed the hopeless monotony of his life. He complained of no privation, only of want of interest in his work.

"Do *you* like your work?" he asked Richard.

"Indeed I do!" Richard answered. "I would sooner handle an old book than a bunch of bank-notes!"

"I don't doubt it," returned Arthur. "To me your workshop seems a paradise."

"Why don't you take up the trade, then? Come to us and I will teach you. I do not think my father would object."

"I learn nothing where I am!" continued Arthur.

"Our boat is not over-manned," resumed Richard. "Say you will come, and I will speak to my father."

"I wish I could! But how are we to live while I am learning?—No; I must grind away till—"

He stopped short, and gave a sigh.

"Till when, Arty?" asked his sister.

"Till death set me free," he answered.

"You wouldn't leave me behind, Arty!" said Alice; and rising, she put her arm round his neck.

"I wouldn't if I could help it," he replied.

"It's a cowardly thing to want to die," said Richard.

"I think so sometimes."

"There's your mother!"

"Yes," responded Arthur, but without emotion.

"And how should I get on without you, Arty?" said his sister.

"Not very well, Ally. But it wouldn't be for long. We should soon meet."

"Who told you that?" said Richard almost rudely.

"Don't you think we shall know each other afterwards?" asked Arthur, with an expression of weary rather than sad surprise.

"I would be a little surer of it before I talked so coolly of leaving a sister like that! I only wish *I* had one to care for!"

A faint flush rose on the pale face of the girl, and as swiftly faded.

"Do you think, then, that this life is only a dream?" she said, looking up at Richard with something in her great eyes that he did not understand.

"Anyhow," he answered, "I would bear a good deal rather than run the risk of going so fast asleep as to stop dreaming it. A man can die any time," he continued, "but he can't dream when he pleases! I would wait! One can't tell when things may take a turn! There are many chances on the cards!"

"That's true," replied Arthur; but plainly the very chances were a weariness to him.

"If Arthur had enough to eat, and time to read, and a little amusement, he would be as brave as you are, Mr. Tuke!" said Alice. "—But you can't mean to say there will be no more of anything for us after this world! To think I should never see Arty again, would make me die before my time! I should be so miserable I would hardly care to keep him as long as I might. We must die some day, and what odds whether it be a few days sooner, or a few days later, if we're never going to meet again?"

"The best way is not to think about it," returned Richard. "Why should you? Look at the butterflies! They take what comes, and don't grumble at their sunshine because there's only one day of it."

"But when there's no sunshine that day?" suggested Alice.

"Well, when they lie crumpled in the rain, they're none the worse that they didn't think about it beforehand! We must make the best of what we have!"

"It's not worth making the best of," cried Alice indignantly, "if that's all!"

My reader may well wonder at Richard: how could he be a lover of our best literature and talk as he did? or rather, talking as he did, how could he love it? But he had come to love it while yet under the influence of what his aunt taught him, poor as was her teaching. Then his heart and imagination were more in the ascendency. Now he had begun to admire the intellectual qualities of that literature more, and its imaginative less; for he had begun to think truth attainable through the forces of the brain, sole and supreme.

In matters of conduct, John Tuke and his wife were well agreed; in matters of opinion, they differed greatly. Jane went to church regularly, listened without interest, and accepted without question; had her husband gone, he would have listened with the interest of utter dissent. When Jane learned that her husband no longer "believed in the Bible," she was seized with terror lest he should die without repentance and be lost. Thereupon followed fear for herself: was not an atheist a horribly wicked man?—and she could not feel that John was horribly wicked! She tried her hardest, but could not; and concluded therefore that his unbelief must be affecting her. She prayed him to say nothing against the Bible to Richard—at least before he arrived at years of discretion. This John promised; but subtle effluences are subtle influences.

John Tuke did right so far as he knew—at least he thought he did—and refused to believe in any kind of God; Jane did right, she thought, as far as she knew—and never imagined God cared about her: let him who has a mind to it, show the value of the difference!

Tuke was a thinking man;—that is, set a going in any direction that interested him, he could take a few steps forward without assistance. But he could start in no direction of himself. At a small club to which he belonged, he had been brought in contact with certain ideas new to him, and finding himself able to grasp them, felt at once as if they must be true. Certain other ideas, new to him, coming self-suggested in their train, he began immediately to imagine himself a thinker, able to generate notions to which the people around him were unequal. He began to grow self-confident, and so to despise. Taking courage then to deny things he had never believed, had only not thought about, and finding he thereby gave offence, he chose to imagine himself a martyr for the truth. He did not see that a denial involving no assertion, cannot witness to any truth; nor did he perceive that denial in his case meant nothing more than non-acceptance of things asserted. Had he put his position logically, it would have been this: I never knew such things; I do not like the notion of them; therefore I deny them: they do not exist. But no man really denies a thing which he knows only by the words that stand for it. When John Tuke denied the God in his notion, he denied only a God that could have no existence.

A man will be judged, however, by his truth toward what he professes to believe; and John was far truer to his perception of the duty of man to man than are ninety-nine out of the hundred of so-called Christians to the things they profess to believe. How many men would be immeasurably better, if they would but truly believe, that is, act upon, the smallest part of what they untruly profess to believe, even if they cast aside all the rest. John cast aside an allegiance to God which had never been more than a mockery, and set about delivering his race from the fear of a person who did not exist. For, true enough, there was no God of the kind John denied; only, what if, in delivering his kind from the tyranny of a false God, he aided in hiding from them the love of a true God—of a God that did and ought to exist? There are other passions besides fear, and precious as fear is hateful. If there be a God and one has never sought him, it will be small consolation to remember that he could not get proof of his existence. Is a child not to seek his father, because he cannot prove he is alive?

The aunt continued to take the boy to church, and expose him, for it was little more she did, to a teaching she could not herself either supply or supplement. It was the business of the church to teach Christianity! her part was to accept it, and bring the child where he also might listen and accept! But what she accepted as Christianity, is another question; and whether the acceptance of anything makes a Christian, is another still.

How much of Christianity a child may or may not learn by going to church, it is impossible to say; but certainly Richard did not learn anything that drew his heart to Jesus of Nazareth, or caught him in any heavenly breeze, or even the smallest of celestial whirlwinds! He learned nothing even that made unwelcome such remarks as his father would now and then let fall concerning the clergy and the way they followed their trade; while the grin, full of conscious superiority, with which he unconsciously accompanied them, found its reflection in the honourable but not yet humble mind, beginning to be aware of its own faculty, and not aware that the religion presented in his aunt's church, a religion neither honourable nor elevating, was but the dullest travesty of the religion of St. Paul. Richard had, besides, read several books which, had his uncle been *careful* of the promise he had given his wife, he would have intentionally removed instead of unintentionally leaving about.

In the position Richard had just taken toward his new friends, he was not a little influenced by the desire to show himself untrammelled by prevailing notions, and capable of thinking for himself; but this was far from all that made him speak as he did. Many young fellows are as ready to deny as Richard, but not many feel as strongly that life rests upon what we know, that knowledge must pass into action. The denial of every falsehood under the sun would not generate one throb of life.

Richard told his adoptive parents where he had been, and asked if he might invite his new friends for the next Sunday. They made no objection, and when Arthur and Alice came, received them kindly. Richard took Arthur to the shop, and showed him the job he was engaged upon at the time, lauding his department as affording more satisfaction than mere binding.

"For," he said, "the thing that is not, may continue not to be; but the thing that is, should be as it was meant to be. Where it is not such, there is an evil that wants remedy. It may be that the sole remedy is binding, but that involves destruction, therefore is a poor thing beside renovation."

The argument came from a well of human pity in himself, deeper than Richard knew. But both the pity he felt and the *truth* in what he said came from a source eternal of which he yet knew nothing.

"It would be much easier," continued Richard, "to make that volume look new, but how much more delightful to send it out with a revived assertion of its ancient self!"

Some natures have a better chance of disclosing the original in them, that they have not been to college, and set to think in other people's grooves, instead of those grooves that were scored in themselves long before the glacial era.

"For my part," said Arthur, "I feel like a book that needs to be fresh printed, not to say fresh bound! I don't feel why I am what I am. I would part with it all, except just being the same man!"

While the youths were having their talk, Alice was in Jane's bedroom, undergoing an examination, the end and object of which it was impossible she should suspect. Caught by a certain look in her sweet face, reminding her of a look that was anything but sweet, Jane had set herself to learn from her what she might as to her people and history.

"Is your father alive, my dear?" she asked, with her keen black eyes on Alice's face.

That grew red, and for a moment the girl did not answer. Jane pursued her catechizing.

"What was his trade or profession?" she inquired.

The girl said nothing, and the merciless questioner went on.

"Tell me something about him, dear. Do you remember him? Or did he die when you were quite a child?"

"I do not remember him," answered Alice. "I do not know if I ever saw him."

"Did your mother never tell you what he was like?"

"She told me once he was very handsome—the handsomest man she ever saw—but cruel—so cruel! she said.—I don't want to talk about him, please, ma'am!" concluded Alice, the tears running down her cheeks.

"I'm sorry, my dear, to hurt you, but I'm not doing it from curiosity. You have a look so like a man I once knew,—and your brother has something of the same!—that in fact I am bound to learn what I can about you."

"What sort was the man we put you in mind of?" asked Alice, with a feeble attempt at a smile. "Not a *very* bad man, I hope!"

"Well, not very good—as you ask me.—He was what people call a gentleman!"

"Was that all?"

"What do you mean?"

"I thought he was a nobleman!"

"Oh!—well, he wasn't that; he was a baronet."

Alice gave a little cry.

"Do tell me something about him," she said. "What do you know about him?"

"More than I choose to tell. We will forget him now, if you please!"

There was in her voice a tone of displeasure, which Alice took to be with herself. She was in consequence both troubled and perplexed. Neither made any more inquiries. Jane took her guest back to the sitting-room.

The moment her brother came from the workshop, Alice said to him—

"Are you ready, Arthur? We had better be moving!"

Arthur was a gentle creature, and seldom opposed her; he seemed only surprised a little, and asked if she was ill. But Richard, who had all the week been looking forward to a talk with Alice, and wanted to show her his little library, was much disappointed, and begged her to change her mind. She insisted, however, and he put on his hat to walk with them.

But his aunt called him, and whispered that she would be particularly obliged to him if he would go to church with her that evening. He expostulated, saying he did not care to go to church; but as she insisted, he yielded, though not with the best grace.

Before another Sunday, there came, doubtless by his aunt's management, an invitation to spend a few weeks with his grandfather, the blacksmith.

Richard was not altogether pleased, for he did not like leaving his work; but his aunt again prevailed with him, and he agreed to go. In this, as in most things, he showed her a deference such as few young men show their mothers. Her influence came, I presume, through the strong impression of purpose she had made on him.

His uncle objected to his going, and grumbled a good deal. As the brewer looks down on the baker, so the bookbinder looked down on the blacksmith.

He said the people Richard would see about his grandfather, were not fit company for the heir of Mortgrange! But he knew the necessity of his going somewhere for a while, and gave in.

CHAPTER VI. *SIMON ARMOUR*

Simon Armour was past only the agility, not the strength of his youth, and in his feats of might and skill he cherished pride. Without being offensively conceited, he regarded himself—and well might—as the superior of any baronet such as his daughter's husband, and desired of him no recognition of the relationship. All he looked for from any man, whether he stood above or beneath his own plane, was proper pay for good work, and natural human respect. Some of the surrounding gentry, possibly not uninfluenced, in sentiment at least, by the growing radicalism of the age, enjoyed the free, jolly, but unpresuming carriage of the stalwart old man, to whom, if indeed on his head the almond-tree was already in blossom, the grasshopper was certainly not yet a burden: he could still ply a sledge-hammer in each hand. "My lord," came from his lips in a clear, ringing tone of good-fellowship, which the nobleman who occasionally stopped at his forge to give him some direction about the shoeing of this or that horse, liked well to hear, and felt the friendlier for—though I doubt if he would have welcomed it from a younger man.

Besides his daughter Jane and her husband, he alone was aware of the real parentage of the lad who passed as their son; and he knew that, if he lived long enough, an hour would call him to stand up for the rights of his grandson. Perhaps it was partly in view of this, that he had for years been an abstainer from strong drink; but I am inclined to attribute the fact chiefly to his having found the love of it gaining upon him. "Damn the drink!" he had been more than once overheard to say, "it shall know which of us is master!" And when Simon had made up his mind to a thing, the thing was—not indeed as good, but almost as sure as done. The smallest of small beer was now his strongest drink.

He was a hard-featured, good-looking, white-haired man of sixty, with piercing eyes of quite cerulean blue, and a rough voice with an undertone of music in it. There was music, indeed, all through him. In the roughest part of his history it was his habit to go to church—mainly, I may say entirely, for the organ, but his behaviour was never other than reverent. How much he understood, may be left a question somewhat dependent on how much there may have been to understand; but he had a few ideas in religion which were very much his own, and which, especially some with regard to certain of the lessons from the Old Testament, would have considerably astonished some parsons, and considerably pleased others. He was a big, broad-shouldered man, with the brawniest arms, and eyes so bright and scintillant that one might fancy they caught and kept for their own use the sparks that flew from his hammer. His face was red, with a great but short white beard, suggesting the sun in a clean morning-fog.

A rickety omnibus carried Richard from the railway-station some five miles to the smithy. When the old man heard it stop, he threw down his hammer, strode hastily to the door, met his grandson with a gripe that left a black mark and an ache, and catching up his portmanteau, set it down inside.

"I'll go with you in a moment, lad!" he said, and seizing with a long pair of pincers the horse-shoe that lay in process on the anvil, he thrust it into the fire, blew a great roaring blast from the bellows, plucked out the shoe glowing white, and fell upon it as if it were a devil. Having thus cowed it a bit, he grew calm, and more deliberately shaped it to an invisible idea. His grandson was delighted with the mingling of determination, intent, and power, with certainty of result, manifest in every blow. In two minutes he had the shoe on the end of a long hooked rod, and was hanging it beside others on a row of nails in a beam. Then he turned and said—

"There, lad! that's off the anvil—and off my mind! Now I'm for you!"

"Grandfather," said Richard, "I shouldn't like to have you for an enemy!"

"Why not, you rascal! Do you think I would take unfair advantage of you?"

"No, that I don't! But you've got awful arms and hands!"

"They've done a job or two in their day, lad!" he answered; "but I'm getting old now! I can't do what I thought nothing of once. Well, no man was made to last for ever—no more than a horse-shoe! There'd be no work for the Maker if he did!"

"I'm glad to see we're of one mind, grandfather!" said Richard.

"Well, why shouldn't we—if so be we're in the right mind!—Yes; we must be o' one mind if we're o' the right mind! The year or two I may be ahead o' you in gettin' at it, goes for nothing: I started sooner!—But what may be the mind you speak of, sonny?"

The look of keen question the old man threw on him, woke a doubt in Richard whether he might not have misunderstood his grandfather.

"I think," he answered, "if a man was made to last for ever, the world would get tired of him. When a horse or a dog has done his work, he's content—and so is his master."

"Nay, but I bean't! I bean't content to lose the old horse as I've shod mayhap for twenty years —no, not if I bean't his master!"

"There's no help for it, though!"

"None as I knows on. I'd be main glad to hear any news on the subjec' as you can supply!—No, I ain't content; I'm sorry!"

"Why don't the parsons say the old horse'll rise again?"

"'Cause the parsons knows nought about it. How should they?"

"They say we're going to rise again."

"Why shouldn't they? I guess I'll be up as soon as I may! I don't want no night to lie longer than rest my bones!"

"I mistook what you meant, grandfather. I thought, when you said you weren't made to last for ever, that you meant there was an end of you!"

"Well, so you might, and small blame to you! It's a wrong way of speaking we all have. But you've set me thinking—whether by mistake or not, where's the matter! I never thought what come o' the old horse, a'ter all his four shoes takes to shinin' at oncet! For the old smith when he drops his hammer—I have thought about *him*. Lord!—to think o' that anvil never ringin' no more to this here fist o' mine!"

While they talked, the blacksmith had put off his thick apron of hide; and now, catching up Richard's portmanteau as if it had been a hand-basket, he led the way to a cottage not far from the forge, in a lane that here turned out of the high road. It was a humble place enough—one story and a wide attic. The front was almost covered with jasmine, rising from a little garden filled with cottage flowers. Behind was a larger garden, full of cabbages and gooseberry-bushes.

A girl came to the door, with a kind, blushing face, and hands as red as her cheeks—a great-niece of the old smith. He passed her and led the way into a room half kitchen, half parlour.

"Here you are, lad—*at* home, I hope! Sech as it is, an' as much as it's mine, it's yours, an' I hope you'll make it so."

He deposited the portmanteau, glanced quickly round, saw that Jessie had not followed them, and said—

"You'll keep your good news till I've turned it over!"

"What good news, grandfather?"

"The good news that them as is close pared, has no call to look out for the hoof to grow. I'm not saying you're wrong, lad—not *yet*; but everybody mightn't think your news so good as to be worth a special messenger! So till you're quite sure of it—"

"I *am* quite sure of it, grandfather!"

"I'm not; and having charge of the girl there, I'll ha' no dish served i' my house as I don't think wholesome!"

"You're right there, grandfather! You may trust me!" answered Richard respectfully.

The blacksmith had spoken with a decision that was imperative. His red face shone out of his white beard, and his eyes sparkled out of his red face; his head gave a nod, and his jaws a snap.

They had tea, with bread and butter and marmalade, and much talk about John and Jane Tuke, in which the old man said oftener, "your aunt," and "your uncle," than "your father" or "your mother;" but Richard put it down to the confusion that often accompanies age. When the bookbinding came up, Richard was surprised to discover that the blacksmith was far from looking upon their trade as superior to his own. It was plain indeed that he regarded bookbinding as a quite inferior and scarce manly employment. To the blacksmith, bookbinding and tailoring were much the same—fit only for women. Richard did not relish this. He endeavoured to make his grandfather see the dignity of the work, insisting that its difficulty was the greater because of the less strength required in it: the strength itself had, he said, in certain of its operations, to be pared to the requisite fineness, to be modified with extreme accuracy; while in others, all the strength a man had was necessary, and especially in a shop like theirs, where everything was done by hand. But the fine work, he said, tired one much the most.

"Fine work!" echoed the smith with contempt. "There came a gentleman here to be shod t'other day from the Hall, who was a great traveller; and he told me he seen in Japan a blacksmith with a sprig of may on the anvil before him, an' him a-copyin' to the life them blossoms in hard iron with his one hammer! What say you to that, lad?"

"Wonderful! But that same man couldn't do the heavy work you think nothing of, grandfather!"

"Nay, for that I don't know. I know I couldn't do his!"

"Then we'll allow that fine work may be a manly thing as well as hard work. But I do wish I could shoe a horse!"

"What's to hinder you?"

"Will you let me learn, grandfather?"

"Learn! I'll learn you myself. *You'll* soon learn. It's not as if you was a bumpkin to teach! The man as can do anything, can do everything."

"Come along then, grandfather! I want to let you see that though my hands may catch a blister or two, they're not the less fit for hard work that they can do fine. I'll be safe to shoe a horse before many days are over. Only you must have a little patience with me."

"Nay, lad, I'll have a great patience with you. Before many days are over, make the shoe you may, and make it well; but to shoe a horse as the horse ought to be shod, that comes by God's grace."

They went back to the smithy, and there, the very day of his arrival, more to Simon's delight than he cared to show, the soft-handed bookbinder began to wield a hammer, and compel the stubborn iron. So deft and persevering was he, that, ere they went from the forge that same night, he could not only bend the iron to a proper curve round the beak of the anvil, but had punched the holes in half a dozen shoes. At last he confessed himself weary; and when his grandfather saw the state of his hands, blistered and swollen so that he could not close them, he was able no longer to restrain his satisfaction.

"Come!" he cried; "you're a man after all, bookbinder! In six months I should have you a thorough blacksmith."

"I wouldn't undertake to make a bookbinder of you, grandfather, in the time!" returned Richard.

"Tit for tat, sonny, and it's fair!" said Simon. "I should leave the devil his mark on your white pages.—How much of them do you rend now, as you stick them together?"

"Not a word as I stick them together. But many are brought me to be doctored and mended up, and from some of them I take part of my pay in reading them—books, I mean, that I wouldn't otherwise find it easy to lay my hands upon—scarce books, you know."

"You would like to go to Oxford, wouldn't ye, lad—and lay in a stock to last your life out?"

"You might as well think to lay victuals into you for a lifetime, grandfather! But I should like to lay in a stock of the tools to be got at Oxford! It would be grand to be able to pick the lock of any door I wanted to see the other side of."

"I'll put you up to pick any lock you ever saw, or are likely to see," returned Armour. "I served my time to a locksmith. We didn't hit it off always, and so hit one another—as often almost as the anvil. So when I was out of my time, and couldn't get locksmith's work except in a large forge, I knew better than take it: for I couldn't help getting into rows, and was afraid of doing somebody a mischief when my blood was up. So I started for myself as a general blacksmith-in a small way, of course. But my right hand 'ain't forgot its cunning in locks! I'll teach you to pick the cunningest lock in the world—whether made in Italy or in China."

"The lock I was thinking of," said Richard, "was that of the tree of knowledge."

"I've heerd," returned Simon, with more humour than accuracy, "as that was a raither pecooliar lock. How it was kep' red hot all the time without coal and bellows, I don't seem to see!"

"Ah!" said Richard, "you mean the flaming sword that turned every way?"

"I reckon I do!"

"You don't say you believe that story, grandfather?"

"I don't say what I believe or what I don't believe. The flamin' iron as I've had to do with, has both kep' me out o' knowledge, an' led me into knowledge! I'll turn the tale over again! You see, lad, when I was a boy, I thought everything my mother said and my father did, old-fashioned, and a bit ignorant-like; but when I was a man, I saw that, if I had started right off from where they set me down, I would ha' been farther ahead. To honour your father an' mother don't mean to stick by their chimbley-corner all your life, but to start from their front door and go foret. I went by the back door, like the fool I was, to get into the front road, and had a long round to make."

"I shan't do so with my father. He don't read much, but he thinks. He's got a head, my father!"

"There was fathers afore yours, lad! You needn't scorn yer gran'ther for your father!"

"Scorn you, grandfather! God forbid!—or, at least,—"

"You don't see what I'm drivin' at, sonny!—When an old tale comes to me from the far-away time, I don't pitch it into the road, any more'n I would an old key or an old shoe—a horse-shoe, I mean: it was something once, and it may be something again! I hang the one up, and turn the other over. An' if you be strong set on throwin' either away, lad, I misdoubt me you an' me won't blaze together like *one* flamin' sword!"

Richard held his peace. The old man had already somehow impressed him. If he had not, like his father, bid good-bye to superstition, there was in him a power that was not in his father—a power like that he found in his favourite books.

"Mind what he says, and do what he tells you, and you'll get on splendid!" his mother had said as he came away.

"Don't be afraid of him, but speak up: he'll like you the better for it," his father had counselled. "I should never have married your mother if I'd been afraid of him."

Richard, trying to follow both counsels, got on with his grandfather better than fairly.

CHAPTER VII. *COMPARISONS*

All things belong to every man who yields his selfishness, which is his one impoverishment, and draws near to his wealth, which is humanity—not humanity in the abstract, but the humanity of friends and neighbours and all men. Selfishness, I repeat, whether in the form of vanity or greed, is our poverty. John Tuke, being a clever man without a spark of genius, worshipped *faculty* as he called it—worshipped it where he was most familiar with it—that is, in his own mind and its operations, in his own hands and their handiwork. His natural atmosphere, however, was, happily, goodwill and kindliness: else the scorn of helplessness which sprang from his worship, would have supplied the other pole to his selfishness.

He even cherished unconsciously the feeling that his faculty was a merit. He took the credit of his individual humanity, as if the good working of his brain, the thing he most admired, was attributable to his own will and forethought. The idea had never arisen in that brain, that he was in the world by no creative intent of his own. Nothing had as yet suggested to him that, after all, if he was clever, he could not help it. It had not occurred to him that there was a stage in his history antecedent to his consciousness—a stage in which his pleasure with regard to the next could not have been appealed to, or his consent asked—a stage, for any satisfaction concerning which, his resultant consciousness must repose on a creative will, answerable to itself for his existence. A man's patent of manhood is, that he can call upon God—not the God of any theology, right or wrong, but the God out of whose heart he came, and in whose heart he is. This is his highest power—that which constitutes his original likeness to God. Had any one tried to wake this idea in Tuke, he would have mocked at the sound of it, never seeing it. The words which represented it he would have thought he understood, but he would never have laid hold of the idea. He found himself what he found himself, and was content with the find; therefore asked no questions as to whence he came—was to himself consequently as if he had come from nowhere—which made it easy for him to imagine that he was going nowhither. He had never reflected that he had not made himself, and that therefore there might be a power somewhere that had called him into being, and had a word to say to him on the matter. The region where he began to be, had never, in speculation or mirage any more than in direct vision, lifted itself above the horizon-line of his consciousness. An ordinarily well-behaved man, with a vague narrow regard for his moral nature, and an admiration of intellectual humanity in the abstract, he thought of himself as exceptionally worthy, and as having neighbours mostly inferior. In relation to Richard, he was specially pleased with himself: had he not, for the sake of the youth, put himself in the danger of the law!

With not much more introspection than his uncle, but with a keener conscience and quicker observation, Richard had early remarked that, notwithstanding her assiduity in church-going, his mother did not seem the happier for her religion: there was a cloud, or seeming cloud, on her forehead —a something that implied the lack of clear weather within. Had he known more he might have attributed it to anxiety about his own future, and the bearing her deed might have upon it. He might have argued that she dreaded the opposition she foresaw to the claim of her nephew; and felt that if her act should have despoiled him of his inheritance, life would be worthless to her. But in truth the cause of her habitual gloom was much deeper. She had from her mother inherited a heavy sense of responsibility, but not the confidence in whose strength her mother had borne it. She had, that is, an oppressive sense of the claims of a supernal power, but no feeling of the relationship which gives those claims, no knowledge of the loving help offered with the presentation of the claims. Where she might have rejoiced in the correlative claims bestowed upon her, she nourished only complaint. That God had made her, she could not sometimes help feeling a liberty he had taken. How could she help it, not knowing him, or the love that gave him both the power and the right to create! She had no window to let in the perpendicular light of heaven; all the light she had was the horizontal light of

duty—invaluable, but, ever accompanied by its own shadow of failure, giving neither joy nor hope nor strength. Her husband's sense of duty was neither so strong nor so uneasy.

She had not attempted to teach Richard more, in the way of religion, than the saying of certain prayers, a ceremony of questionable character; but the boy, dearly loving his mother, and saddened by her lack of spirits, had put things together—amongst the rest, that she was always gloomiest on a Sunday—and concluded that religion was the cause of her misery. This made him ready to welcome the merest hint of its falsehood. Well might the doctrine be false that made such a good woman miserable! He had no opportunity of learning what any vital, that is, *obedient* believer in the lord of religion, might have to say. Nothing he did hear would, without the reflex of his mother's unhappiness, have waked in him interest enough for hate: what was there about the heap of ashes he heard called the means of grace, to set him searching in it for seeds of truth! If we consider, then, the dullness of the prophecy, the evident suffering of his mother, and the equally evident though silent contempt of his father, we need not wonder that Richard grew up in what seemed to him a conviction that religion was worse than a thing of nought, was an evil phantom, with a terrible power to blight; a miasm that had steamed up from the foul marshes of the world, before man was at home in it, or yet acquainted with the beneficent laws of Nature. It was not merely a hopeless task to pray to a power which could not be entreated, because it did not exist; to believe in what was not, must be ruinous to the nature that so believed! He would give the lie no quarter! The best thing to do for his fellow, the first thing to be done before anything else could be done, was to deliver him from this dragon called Faith—the more fearful that it had no life, but owed its being and strength to the falsehood of cowards! Had he known more of the working of what is falsely called religion, he would have been yet more eager to destroy it. But he knew something of the tares only; he knew nothing of the wheat among the tares; knew nothing of the wintry gleams of comfort shed on thousands of hearts by the most poverty-stricken belief in the merest and faultiest silhouette of a God. What a mission it would be, he thought, to deliver human hearts from the vampyre that, sucking away the very essence of life, kept fanning its unconscious victims with the promise of a dreary existence beyond the grave, secured by self-immolation on the desolate altar of an unlovable God, who yet called himself *Love*! Was it not a high emprise to rescue men from the incubus of such a misimagined divinity?

From the first dawn of consciousness, the young Lestrange had loved his kind. He gathered the chief joy of his life from a true relation to the life around him. Perhaps the cause of the early manifestation of this bent in him, was the longing of his mother in her loneliness after a love that grew the move precious as it seemed farther away. She had parted with those who always loved her, for the love of a man who never loved her! But left to think and think, she had come at last to see that her loss was her best gain. For, with the loss of their presence, she began to know and prize the simplicities of human affection; from lack of love began to lift up her heart to Love himself, the father of all our loves.

Richard's love was not such as makes of another the mirror wherein to realize self; he loved his kind objectively, and was ready to suffer for it. At school he was the champion of the oppressed. Almost always one or other of the little boys would be under his protection; and more than once, for the sake of a weaker he had got severely beaten. But having set himself to learn the art of self-defence, his favour alone became shelter; and successful coverture aroused in him yet more the natural passion of protection. It became his pride as well as delight to be a saviour to his kind. His championship now sought extension to his mother, and to all sufferers from usurping creeds.

His grandfather found him, as he said, a chip of the old block; and rejoiced that Nature had granted his humble blood so potent a part in this compound of gentle and plebeian; for Richard showed himself a worthy workman! Simon Armour declared there was nothing the fellow could not do; and said to himself there never was such a baronet in the old Hall as his boy Dick would make. If only, he said, all the breeds worn out with breeding-in, would revert to the old blood of Tubal Cain, they might recover his lease of life. The day was coming, he said to himself, when there would be a

sight to see at Mortgrange—a baronet that could shoe a horse better than any smith in the land! If his people then would not stand up for a landlord able to thrash every man-jack of them, and win his bread with his own hands, they deserved to become the tenants of a London grocer or American money-dealer! For his part, the French might have another try! *He* would not lift hammer against them!

By right of inheritance, Richard's muscles grew sinewy and hard, and speedily was he capable of handling a hammer and persuading iron to the full satisfaction of his teacher. When it came to such heavy work as required power and skill at once, the difference between the two men was very evident: where the whole strength is tasked, skill finds itself in the lurch; but Simon understood what could not be at once, as well as what would be at length. Neither was he disappointed, for, in far less than half the time an ordinary apprentice would have taken, Richard could hold alternate swing with the blacksmith or his man, as, blow for blow, they pierced a block of metal to form the nave of a wheel. In ringing a wheel, he soon excelled; and his grandfather's smithy being the place for all kinds of blacksmith-work, Richard had learned the trade before he left. For, as his fortnight's holiday drew to an end, he heard from his parents that, as he was doing so well, they would like him to stay longer.

One reason for this their wish was, that he might become thoroughly attached to his grandfather: they desired to secure the prejudice of the future baronet for his own people. At the same time, by developing in him the workman, they thought to give him a better chance against further dishonouring and degrading his race, than his wretched father had ever had: the breed of Lestranges must, they said, be searched back for generations to find an honest man in it. A landlord above the selfishness, and free from the prejudices of his class, would be a new thing in the county-histories!

At the end of six weeks, Richard could shoe a sound horse as well as his grandfather himself. The old man had taken pains he would not have spent on an ordinary apprentice: it was worth doing, he said; and the return was great. Richard had made, not merely wonderful, but wonderfully steady progress. Not once had he touched the quick in driving those perfect nails through the rind of the marvellous hoof. From the first he disapproved of the mode of shoeing in use, and was certain a better must one day be discovered—one, namely, that would leave the natural motions of hoof and leg unimpeded; but in the meantime he shod as did other blacksmiths, and gave thorough satisfaction.

CHAPTER VIII. *A LOST SHOE*

It was now late in the autumn. Several houses in the neighbourhood were full of visitors, and parties on horseback frequently passed the door of the smithy—well known to not a few of the horses.

One evening, as the sun was going down red and large, with a gorgeous attendance of clouds, for the day had been wet but cleared in the afternoon, a small mounted company came pretty fast along the lane, which was deep in mud. They were no sooner upon the hard road by the smithy, than one of the ladies discovered her mare had lost a hind shoe.

"She couldn't have pulled it off in a more convenient spot!" said a handsome young fellow, as he dismounted and gave his horse to a groom. "I'll take you down, Bab! Old Simon will have a shoe on Miss Brown in no time!"

Richard followed his grandfather to the door. A little girl, as she seemed to him, was sliding, with her hand on the young man's shoulder, from the back of the huge mare. She was the daintiest little thing, as lovely as she was tiny, with clear, pale, regular features, under a quantity of dark-brown hair. But that she was not a child, he saw the moment she was down; and he soon discovered that, not her beauty, but her heavenly vivacity, was the more captivating thing in her. At once her very soul seemed to go out to meet whatever object claimed her attention. She must know all about everything, and come into relations with every live thing! As she stood by the side of the great brown creature from which she had dismounted—huge indeed, but carrying its bulk with a grand grace—her head reaching but half-way up the slope of its shoulder, she laid her cheek against it caressingly. So small and so bright, the little lady looked a very diamond of life.

A new shoe had to be forged; those already half-made were for work-horses. Partly from pride in his skill, Simon left the task to his grandson, and stood talking to the young man. Little thought Richard, as he turned the shoe on the anvil's beak, that he was his half-brother! He was a handsome youth, not so tall as Richard, and with more delicate features. His face was pale, and wore a rather serious, but self-satisfied look. He talked to the old blacksmith, however, without the slightest assumption: like others in the neighbourhood, he regarded him as odd and privileged. There were more ladies and gentlemen, but Richard, absorbed in his shoe, heeded none of the company.

He was not more absorbed, however, than the girl who stood beside him: she watched every point in the making of it. Heedless of the flying sparks, she gazed as if she meant to make the next shoe herself. Had Richard not been too busy even to glance at her, he might have noticed, now and then, an involuntary sympathetic motion, imitatively responsive to one of his, invariably recurrent when he changed the position of the glowing iron. Her mind seemed working in company with his hands; she was all the time doing the thing herself; Richard's activity was not merely reflected, but lived in her. When he carried the half-forged iron, to apply it for one tentative instant to the mare's hoof, Barbara followed him. The mare fidgeted. But her little mistress, who, noiseless and swift as a moth, was already at her head, spoke to her, breathed in her nostril, and in a moment made her forget what was happening in such a far-off province of her being as a hind foot. When Richard, back at the forge, was placing the shoe again in the fire, to his surprise her little gloved hand alighted beside his own on the lever of the bellows, powerfully helping him to blow. When once again the shoe was on the anvil, there again she stood watching—and watched until he had shaped the shoe to his intent.

Old Simon did not move to interfere: the hoof required no special attention. Almost every horse-hoof in a large circuit of miles was known to him—as well, he would remark, as the nail of his own thumb.

When Richard took up the foot, in order to prepare it for the reception of its new armour, again the mare was fidgety; and again the lady distracted her attention, comforting and soothing her while Richard trimmed the hoof a little.

"I say, my man," cried Mr. Lestrange, "mind what you're about there with your paring! I don't want that mare lamed.—She's much too good for 'prentice hands to learn upon, Simon!"

"Keep your mind easy, sir," answered the blacksmith. "That lad's ain't 'prentice hands. He knows what he's about as well as I do myself!"

"He's young!"

"Younger, perhaps, than you think, sir!—but he knows his work."

It was a pretty picture—the girl peeping round under the neck of the great creature she was caressing, to see how the smith was getting on, whose back, alas! hid his hands from her. Just as he finished driving his second nail, the nervous animal gave her foot a jerk, and the point of the nail, through the hoof and projecting a little, tore his hand, so that the blood ran to the ground in a sudden rivulet.

"Hey! that don't look much like proper shoeing!" cried the young man. "I hope to goodness that's not the mare!"

"She's all right," answered Richard, rearranging the animal's foot.

But Simon saw the blood, and sprang to his side.

"What the devil are you about, making a fool of me, Dick!" he cried. "Get out of the way."

"It was my fault," said the sweetest voice from under the neck of the mare, to the top of which a tiny hand was trying to reach. "My feather must have tickled her nose!"

She caught a glimpse of the blood, and turned white.

"I am so sorry!" she said, almost tearfully. "I hope you're not much hurt, Richard!"

Nothing seemed to escape her; she had already learned his name!

"It's not worth being sorry about, miss!" returned Richard, with a laugh. "The mare meant no harm!"

"That I'm sure she didn't—poor Miss Brown!" answered the girl, patting the mare's neck. "But I wish it had been *my* hand instead!"

"God forbid!" cried Richard. "That *would* have been a calamity!"

"It wouldn't have been half so great a one. My hand is—well, not of *much* use. Yours can shoe a horse!"

"Yours would have been spoiled; mine will shoe as well as before!" said Richard.

It did not occur to the lady that the youth spoke better than might have been expected of a country smith. She was one of the elect few that meet every one on the common human ground, that never fear and never hurt. Her childish size and look harmonized with the childlike in her style, but she affected nothing. She would have spoken in the same way to prince or poet-laureate, and would have pleased either as much as the blacksmith. At the same time she did have pleasure in knowing that her frankness pleased. She could not help being aware that she was a favourite, and she wanted to be; but she wanted nothing more than to be a favourite. She desired it with old Betty, sir Wilton's dairymaid, just as much as with Mr. Lestrange, sir Wilton's heir; and everybody showed her favour, for she showed everybody grace.

The old smith was finishing the shoeing, and the mare, well used to him, and with more faith in him, stood perfectly quiet. Richard, a little annoyed, had withdrawn, and scarce thinking what he did, had taken a rod of iron, thrust it into the fire, and begun to blow. The little lady approached him softly.

"I'm *so* sorry!" she said.

"I shall be sorry too, if you think of it any more, miss!" answered Richard. "Then there will be two sorry where there needn't be one!"

She looked up at him with a curious, interested, puzzled look, which seemed to say, "What a nice smith you are!"

The youth's manners had a certain—what shall I call it?—not polish, but rhythm, which came of, or at least was nourished by his love of the finer elements in literature. His friendly converse with books, and through them with certain of the dead who still speak, fell in with yet deeper influences,

helping to set him in right atomic position toward other human atoms. His breed also contributed something. Happily for Richard, a man is not born only of his father or his grandfather; mothers have a share in the form of his being; ancestors innumerable, men and women, leave their traces in him. But what I have ventured to call the rhythm of his manner came of his love of verse, and of the true material of verse.

His hand kept on bleeding, and for a moment he was tempted, by bravado as well as kindness, to use the cautery so nigh, and prove to the girl how little he set by what troubled her; but he saw at once it would shock her, and took, instead, a handkerchief from his pocket to bind it with. Instantly the little lady was at his service, and he yielded to her ministration with a pleasure hitherto unknown to him. She took the handkerchief from his hand, but immediately gave it him again, saying, “It is too black!” and drawing her own from her pocket, deftly bound up his wound with it. Speech abandoned Richard. All present looked on in silence. Certain of the company had seen her the day before tie up the leg of a wounded dog, and had admired her for it; but this was different! She was handling the hand of a human being—man—a workman!—black and hard with labour! There was no necessity: the man was not in the least danger! It was nothing but a scratch! She was forgetting what was due to herself—and to them! Thus they thought, but thus they dared not speak. They knew her, and feared what she might say in reply. The mare was shod ere the handkerchief was tied to the lady’s mind, and Simon stood, hammer in hand, looking on like the rest in silence, but with a curious smile.

As she took her hands from his, the young blacksmith looked thankfulness into her eyes—which sparkled and shone with the pleasure of human fellowship, and without the least shyness returned his gaze.

“There! Good-bye! I am so sorry! I hope your hand will be well soon!” she said, and at once followed her mare, which the smith’s man was leading with caution through the door of the smithy, rather too low for Miss Brown.

Lestrange helped her to the saddle in silence, and before Richard realized that she was gone, he heard the merriment of the party mingling with the clang of their horses’ hoofs, as they went swinging down the road. The fairy had set them all laughing already!

The instant they were gone, Simon showed a strange concern over the insignificant wound: he had been hasty with Richard, and unfair to him! Had he driven his nail one hair’s-breadth too near the quick, Miss Brown would have made the smithy tight for them! He seemed anxious to show, without actual confession, that he knew he had spoken angrily, and was sorry for it. He could not have shod the mare better himself, he said—but why the deuce did he let her tear his hand! It was not likely to gather, though, seeing Richard drank water! He must do nothing for a day or two! To-morrow being Saturday, they would have a holiday together, and leave the work to George!

CHAPTER IX. *A HOLIDAY*

Richard was willing enough, and it only remained to settle what they would do with their holiday. Suppressing a chuckle, Simon proposed that they should have a walk, and a look at Mortgrange: it was a place well worth seeing! “And then,” he added, giving his grandson a poke, “we can ask after the mare, and learn how her new shoe fits.” They had known him there, he said, the last thirty years, and would let them have the run of the place, for sir Wilton and his lady were from home. Richard had never—to his knowledge—heard of Mortgrange, for Simon had hitherto avoided even mentioning the place; but he was ready to go wherever his grandfather pleased. Jessie would have company of her own, Simon said, with a nod and a wink: they need not trouble themselves about her!

So the next day, as soon us they had had their breakfast, they set out to walk the four or five miles that, by the road, lay between them and Mortgrange. It was a fine frosty morning. Not a few yellow leaves were still hanging, and the sun was warm and bright. It was one of those days near the death of the year, that make us wonder why the heart of man should revive and feel strong, while nature is falling into her dreary trance. Richard was dressed in a tradesman’s Sunday clothes, but tradesman as he was, and was proud to be, he did not altogether look one. He was in high spirits—for no reason but that his spirits were high. He was happy because he was happy—“like any other body!” he would have said: where was the wonder such a fine day, with a pleasant walk before him, and his jolly grandfather for company! That he could not make one hair white or black, one hour blessed or miserable, did not occur to him. Yet he believed that joy or sorrow determined whether life was or was not worth living! He had never said to himself, “Here I am, and cannot help being, and yet can order nothing! Even to-day I am happy only because I cannot help it!” He had indeed begun to learn that a man has his duty to mind before his happiness, and that was much; but he had not yet been tried in the matter of doing his duty when unhappy. How would he feel then? Would he think duty without happiness worth living for? He was happy now, and that was enough! The putting forth of their strength and skill doubtless makes many men feel happy—so long as they are in health; but how when they come to feel that that health is nowise in their power? While they have it, it seems a part of their being inalienable; when they have lost it, a thing irrecoverable. Richard took the thing that came, asked no questions, returned no thanks. He found himself here:—whence he came he did not care; whither he went he did not inquire. The present was enough, for the present was good; when the present was no longer good, why, then,—!

There are those to whom the present cannot be good save as a mode of the infinite. In such their divine origin asserts itself. Once known for what it is, the poorest present is a phial holding the elixir of life.

On their way Simon talked about the place they were going to see, and said its present owner was an elderly man, not very robust, with a second wife, who looked as if she had not a drop of warm blood, and yet as if she might live for ever.

“That was their son that came with the little lady,” he said.

“And the little lady was their daughter, I suppose!” rejoined Richard, with an odd quiver somewhere near his heart.

“She’s an Australian, they say,” answered his grandfather; “—no relation, I fancy.”

“Is Mortgrange a grand place?” asked Richard.

“It’s a fine house and a great estate,” answered Simon. “More might be made of it, no doubt; and I hope one day more will be made of it.”

“What do you mean by that, grandfather?”

“That I hope the son will make a better landlord than the father.”

They came to a great iron gate, standing open, without any lodge.

"We're in luck!" said the blacksmith. "This will save us a long round! Somebody must have rode out, and been too lazy to shut it! We'd better leave it as we find it, though! Or say we bring the two halves together without snapping the locks! I know the locks; I put 'em both on myself.—See now what a piece of work that gate is! All done with the hand! None o' your beastly casting there! Up to *your* work, that, I'm thinking, lad!"

"Indeed it is! Those gates are worth reducing, for plates to stamp the covers of a right precious volume with!"

Simon misunderstood, and was on the point of flaring up, but what Richard followed with quieted him.

"I could almost give up bookbinding to work a pair of gates like those!" he said.

"I believe you, my boy!" returned his grandfather. "Come and live with me, and you shall!"

"But who would buy them when I had worked them?"

"If nobody had the sense, we'd put 'em up before the cottage!"

"Like a door-lock on a prayer-book!"

"No matter! They would be worth the worth of themselves!"

"You would have to make the wall so high, there would be no light in the house!" persisted Richard.

"Tut, man! did you never hear of a joke? All I say is, that if you'll come and work with me—I don't need to slave more than I like; I've got a few pounds in the bank!—if you'll work, I'll teach you. Leave me to find a fit place for what comes of it! They do most things at the foundries now, but there's a market yet for hammer-work—if it be good enough, and not too dear; for them as knows a good thing when they sees it, ain't generally got much money to buy things. It's my opinion the only way to learn the worth of a thing, is to have to go without it."

"Few people fancy iron gates, I fear."

"More might fancy them if they were to be had good," returned the old man.

The gate had admitted them to a long winding road, with clumps of trees here and there on the borders of it. The road was apparently not much used, for it was more than sprinkled with grass all over. A ploughed field was on one side, and a wild heathy expanse, dotted with fir-trees, on the other. Suddenly on the side of the field, gradually on that of the heath, the ground changed to the green sward of a park.

"A grand place for thinking!" said Richard to himself.

But in truth Richard had hardly yet begun to think. He only followed the things that came to him; he never said to things, *Come;* neither, when they came, did he keep them, and make them walk up and down before him till he saw what they were; he did not search out their pedigree, get them to give an account of themselves, show what they could do, or, in short, be themselves to him. He had written a few verses—not bad verses, but with feeling only, not thought in them. For instance, he had addressed an ode to the allegorical personage called Liberty, in which he bepraised her until, had she been indeed a woman, she must have been ashamed: she was the one essential of life! the one glory of existence! he was no man who would not die for her! But what was the thing he thus glorified? Liberty to go where you pleased, do what you liked, say what you chose!—that was all. Of inward liberty, of freedom from mental or spiritual oppression, from passion, from prejudice, from envy, from jealousy, from selfishness, from unfairness, from ambition, from false admiration, from the power of public opinion, from any motive energy save that of love and truth—a freedom of which outward freedom is scarce the shadow—of such liberty, for all the good books he had read, for all the good poems he had admired, Richard had not yet begun to dream, not to say *think*. Then again, he would write about love, and he had never been in love in his life! All he knew of love was the pleasure of imagining himself the object of a tall, dark-eyed, long-haired, devoted woman's admiration. He had never even thought whether he was worthy of being loved. He was indeed more worthy of love than many to whom it is freely given; but he knew no more about it, I say, than a chicken in the shell

knows of the blue sky. The shabby spinster, living with her cousin the baker in the house opposite, knew a hundred times better than he what the word *love* meant: she had a history, he had none.

I will not describe the house of Mortgrange. It seemed to Richard the oldest house he had ever seen, and it moved him strangely. He said to himself the man must be happy who called such a house his own, lived in it, and did what he liked with it. The road they had taken brought them to the back of the Hall, as the people on the estate called the house. The blacksmith went to a side-door, and asked if he and his grandson might have a look at the place: he had heard the baronet was from home! The man said he would see; and returning presently, invited them to walk in.

Knowing his grandson's passion, Simon's main thought in taking him was to see him in the library, with its ten thousand volumes: it would be such a joke to watch him pondering, admiring, coveting his own! As soon, therefore, as they were in the great hall, he asked the servant whether they might not see the library. The man left them again, once more to make inquiry.

It was a grand old hall where they stood, fitter for the house of a great noble than a mere baronet; but then the family was older than any noble family in the county, and the poor baronetcy, granted to a foolish ancestor, on carpet considerations, by the needy hand of the dominie-king, was no great feather in the cap of the Lestranges. The house itself was older than any baronetcy, for no part of it was later than the time of Elizabeth. It was of fine stone, and of great size. The hall was nearly sixty feet in height, with three windows on one side, and a great one at the end. They were thirty feet from the floor, had round heads, and looked like church-windows. The other side was blank. Mid-height along the end opposite the great window ran a gallery.

To the sudden terror of Richard, who stood absorbed in the stateliness of the place, an organ in the gallery burst out playing. He looked up trembling, but could see only the tops of the pipes. As the sounds rolled along the roof, reverberated from the solid walls, and crept about the corners, it seemed to him that the soul of the place was throbbing in his ears the words of a poem centuries old, which he had read a day or two before leaving London:—

"Erthe owte of erthe es wondirly wroghte, Erthe hase getyn one erthe a dignyte of noghte, Erthe appone erthe hase sett alle his thoghte, How that erthe appone erthe may be heghe broghte."

As he listened, his eyes settled upon a suit of armour in position: it became to him a man benighted, lost, forgotten in the cold; the bones were all dusted out of him by the wintry winds; only the shell of him was left.

"Mr. Lestrange is in the library, and will see Mr. Armour," said the voice of the servant.

An election was at hand, and at such a time certain persons are more courteous than usual.

CHAPTER X. *THE LIBRARY*

Simon and Richard followed the man through a narrow door in the thick wall, across a wide passage, and then along a narrow one. A door was thrown open, and they stepped into a sombre room. The floor of the hall was of great echoing slabs of stone, but now their feet sank in the deep silence of a soft carpet.

Here a new awe, dwelling, however, in an air of homeliness, awoke in Richard. Around him, from floor to ceiling, was ranged a whole army of books, mostly in fine old bindings; in spite of open window and great fire and huge chimney, the large lofty room was redolent of them. Their odour, however, was not altogether pleasing to Richard, whose practised organ detected in it the signs of a blamable degree of decay. The faint effluvia of decomposing paper, leather, paste, and glue, were to Richard as the air of an ill-ventilated ward in the nostrils of a physician. He sniffed and made an involuntary grimace: he had not seen Mr. Lestrange, who was close to him, half hidden by a bookcase that stood out from the wall.

"Good morning, Armour!" said Lestrange. "Your young man does not seem to relish books!"

"In a grand place like this, sir," remarked Richard, taking answer upon himself, "such a library as I never saw, except, of course, at the British Museum, it makes a man sorry to discover indications of neglect."

"What do you mean?" returned Lestrange in displeasure.

Richard's remark was the more offensive that his superior style issued in a comparatively common tone. Neither was there anything in the appearance of the place to justify it.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, fearing he had been rude, "but I am a bookbinder!"

"Well?" rejoined Lestrange, taking him now for a sneaking tradesman on the track of a big job.

"I know at once the condition of an old book by the smell of it," pursued Richard. "The moment I came in, I knew there must be some here in a bad way—not in their clothes merely, but in their bodies as well—the paper of them, I mean. Whether a man has what they call a soul or not, a book certainly has: the paper and print are the body, and the binding is the clothes. A gentleman I know—but he's a mystic—goes farther, and says the paper is the body, the print the soul, and the meaning the spirit."

A pretty fellow to be an atheist! my reader may well think.

Mr. Lestrange stared. He must be a local preacher, this blacksmith, this bookbinder, or whatever he was!

"I am sorry you think the books hypocrites," he said. "They look all right!" he added, casting his eyes over the shelves before him.

"Would you mind me taking down one or two?" asked Richard. "My hands are rather black, but the colour is ingrain, as Spenser might say."

"Do so, by all means," answered Lestrange, curious to see how far the fellow could support with proof the accuracy of his scent.

Richard moved three paces, and took down a volume—one of a set, the original edition in quarto of "The Decline and Fall," bound in russia-leather.

"I thought so!" he said; "going!—going!—Look at the joints of this Gibbon, sir. That's always the way with russia—now-a-days, at least!—Smell that, grandfather! Isn't it sweet? But there's no stay in it! Smell that joint! The leather's stone-dead!—It's the rarest thing to see a volume bound in russia, of which the joints are not broken, or at least cracking. These joints, you see, are gone to powder! All russia does—sooner or later, whatever be the cause.—Just put that joint to your nose, sir! That's part of what you smell so strong in the room."

He held out the book to him, but Lestrange drew back: it was not fit his nose should stoop to the request of a tradesman!

Richard replaced the book, and took down one after another of the same set.

"Every one, you see, sir," he said, "going the same way! Dust to dust!"

"If they're *all* going that way," remarked the young man, "it would cost every stick on the estate to rebind them!"

"I should be sorry to rebind any of them. An old binding is like an old picture! Just look at this French binding! It's very dingy, and a good deal broken, but you never see anything like that nowadays—as mellow as modest, and as rich as roses! Here's one says the same thing as your grand hall out there, only in a piping voice."

Lestrange was not exactly stuck-up; he had feared the fellow was bumptious, and felt there was no knowing what he might say next, but by this time had ceased to imagine his dignity in danger. The young blacksmith's admiration of the books and of the hall pleased him, and he became more cordial.

"Do you say *all* russia-leather behaves in the same fashion?" he asked.

"Yes, now. I fancy it did not some years ago. There may be some change in the preparation of the leather. I don't know. It is a great pity! Russia is lovely to the eye—and to the nostrils.—May I take a look at some of the *old* books, sir?"

"What do you call an *old* book?"

"One not later, say, than the time of James the First.—Have you a first folio, sir?"

Lestrange was thinking of his coming baronetcy.

"First folio?" he answered absently. "I dare say you will find a good many first folios on the shelves!"

"I mean the folio Shakespeare of 1623. There are, of course, many folios much scarcer! I saw one the other day that the booksellers themselves gave eight hundred guineas for!"

"What was it?" asked Lestrange carelessly.

"It was a wonderful copy—unique as to condition—of Gower's *Confessio Amantis;*—not a *very* interesting book, though I do not doubt Shakespeare was fond of it. You see Shakespeare could hear the stones preaching!"

"By Jove, a man may hear the sticks do that any Sunday!"

"True enough, sir, ha-ha!"

"Have you read Gower, then?"

"A good deal of him."

"Was it that same precious copy you read him in?"

"It was; but I hadn't time for more than about the half. I must finish on another edition, I fear."

"How did you get hold of a book of such value?"

"The booksellers who bought it, asked me to take it into my hospital. It wanted just a little, a very little patching. The copy in the museum is not to compare to it."

"You say it was not interesting?"

"Not *very* interesting, I said, sir."

"Why did you read so much of it, then?"

"When a book is hard to come at, you are the more ready to read it when you have the chance."

"I suppose that's why one borrows his neighbour's books and don't read his own! I seldom take one down from those shelves."

Richard felt as if a wall was broken down between them.

All the time they talked, old Simon stood beside, pleased to note how well his grandson could hold up the ball with the young squire, but saying nothing. If the matter had been hoof of horse, cow, or ass, he would not have been silent: he knew hoofs better than Richard knew books.

Richard took down a small folio, the back of which looked much too soft and loose. Opening it, he found what he expected—a wreck. It was hardly fit to be called any more a book. The clothes had forsaken the body, or rather the body had decayed away from the clothes.

"Now, look here!" he said. "Here is Cowley's Poems—in such a state that I doubt if anything would ever make a book of it again. I thought by the back all was wrong inside! See how the leaves have come away singly: the paper itself is rotten! I doubt if there is any way to make paper so far gone as this hold together. I know a good deal can be done, and I must learn what is known. I shan't be master of my trade till I know all that can be done now to stop such a book from crumbling into dust! Then I may find out something more!"

"Well, for that one, I don't think it matters: Cowley ain't much!" said Lestrange, throwing the volume on a table. "I remember once taking down the book, and trying to read some of it: I could not; it's the dullest rubbish ever written."

"It's not so bad as that, sir!" answered Richard, and taking up the book he turned the leaves with light, practiced hand. "He was counted the greatest poet of his day, and no age loves dullness! Listen a moment, sir; I will read only one stanza."

He had found the "Hymn to the Light," and read:—

"First born of *Chaos*, who so fair didst come From the old Negro's darksome womb! Which when it saw the lovely Child, The melancholy Mass put on kind looks and smil'd."

"I don't see much in that!" said Lestrange, as Richard closed the book, and glanced up expectant.

Richard was silent for an instant.

"At any rate," he returned, "it is necessary to the understanding of our history, that we should know the kind of thing admired and called good at any given time of it: so our lecturer at King's used to tell us."

"At King's!" cried Lestrange.

"King's college, London, I mean," said Richard. "They have evening classes there, to which a man can go after his day's work. My father always took care I should have time for anything I wanted to do. I go still when I am at home—not always, but when the lecturer takes up any special subject I want to know more about."

"You'll be an author yourself some day, I suppose!"

"There's little hope or fear of that, sir! But I can't bear not to know what's in my very hands. I can't be content with the outsides of the books I bind. It seems a shame to come so near light and never see it shine. If I were a tailor, I should learn anatomy. I know one tailor who is as familiar with the human form as any sculptor in London—more, perhaps!"

Lestrange began to feel uncomfortable. If he let this prodigy go on talking and asking questions, he would find out how little he knew about anything! But Richard was no prodigy. He was only a youth capable of interest in everything, with the stimulus of not finding the fountains of knowledge at his very door, and the aid of having to work all day at some pleasant task, nearly associated with higher things that he loved better. He did know a good deal for his age, but not so very much for his opportunity, his advantages being great. Most men who learn would learn more, I suspect, if they had work to do, and difficulty in the way of learning. Those counted high among Richard's advantages. He was, besides, considerably attracted by the mechanics of literature—a department little cultivated by those who have most need of what grows in it.

Further talk followed. Lestrange grew interested in the phenomenon of a blacksmith that bound books and read them. He began to dream of patronage and responsive devotion. What a thing it would be for him, in after years, with the cares of property and parliament combining to curtail his leisure, to have such a man at his beck, able to gather the information he desired, and to reduce, tabulate, and embody it so as to render his chief the best-informed man in the House! while at other times he would manage for him his troublesome tenants, and upon occasion shoe his wife's favourite horse! He could also depend upon him to provide, from the rich stores of his memory, suitable quotations when he wished to make a speech! Lestrange had never thought whether the wish to *appear* might not indicate the duty to *be*; had never seen that, until he *was*, to desire to *appear* was to cherish the soul

of a sneak. He had no notion of anything but the look; no notion that, having made a good speech, he would deserve an atom the less praise for it that he could not have made it without his secretary. Did any one think the less of clearing a five-barred gate, he would have answered, that it could not be done without a horse? Where was the difference? A man you paid to be your secretary, still more a man whose education to be your secretary you had paid for—was he not yours in a way at least analogous to that in which a horse was yours? He could break away from you more easily, no doubt, but a man knew better than a horse on which side his bread was buttered!

"I think, squire, I'll go and have a pipe with the coachman!" said the blacksmith at length.

"As you please, Armour," answered Lestrange. "I will take care of your—nephew, is he?"

"My grandson, sir—from London."

"All right! There's good stuff in the breed, Armour!—I will bring him to you."

Richard went on taking down book after book, and showing his host how much they required attention.

"And you could set all right for—?—for how much?" asked Lestrange.

"That no one could say. It would, however, cost little more than time and skill. The material would not come to much. Only, where the paper itself is in decay, I do not know about that. I have learned nothing in that department yet."

"For generations none of us have cared about books—that must be why they have gone so to the bad!—the books, I mean," he added with a laugh. "There was a bishop, and I think there was a poet, somewhere in the family; but my father—hm!—I doubt if he would care to lay out money on the library!"

"Tell him," suggested Richard, "that it is a very valuable library—at least so it appears to me from the little I have seen of it; but I am sure of this, that it is rapidly sinking in value. After another twenty years of neglect it would not fetch half the price it might easily be brought up to now."

"I don't know that that would weigh much with him. So long as he sees the shelves full, and the book-backs all right, he won't want anything better. He cares only how things look."

"But the whole look of the library is growing worse—gradually, it is true, and in a measure it can't be helped—but faster than you would think, and faster than it ought. The backs, which, from a library point of view, are the faces of the books, may, up to a certain moment, look well, and after that go much more rapidly. I fear damp is getting at these from somewhere!"

"Would you undertake to set all right, if my father made you a reasonable offer?"

"I would—provided I found no injury beyond the scope of my experience."

Richard spoke in book-fashion: he was speaking about books, and to a social superior! he was not really pompous.

"Well, if my father should come to see the thing as I do, I will let you know. Then will be the time for a definite understanding!"

"The best way would be that I should come and work for a set time: by the progress I made, and what I cost, you could judge."

Lestrange rang the bell, and ordered the attendant to take the young man to his grandfather.

The two wandered together over the grounds, and Richard saw much to admire and wonder at, but nothing to approach the hall or the library.

On their way home, Simon, to his grandson's surprise, declared himself in favour of his working at the Mortgrange library. But the idea tickled his fancy so much, that Richard wondered at the oddity of his grandfather's behaviour.

CHAPTER XI. *ALICE*

Soon after his visit to Mortgrange, the young bookbinder went home, recalled at last by his parents. John Tuke was shocked with the hardness and blackness of his hands, and called his wife's attention to them. She, however, perhaps from nearer alliance with the smithy, professed to regard their condition as by no means a serious matter. She could not, nevertheless, quite conceal her regret, for she was proud of her boy's hands.

Richard supposed of course that his father's annoyance came only from the fear that his touch would be no longer sufficiently delicate for certain parts of his work; and certainly, when he looked at them, he thought the points of his fingers were broader than before, and was a little anxious lest they should have lost something of their cunning. He did not know that mechanical faculty, for fine work as well as rough, goes in general with square-pointed fingers. Delicately tapered fingers, whatever they may indicate in the way of artistic invention, are not the fingers of the painter or the sculptor. The finest fingers of the tapering kind I have ever seen, were those of a distinguished chemist of the last generation. Eager to satisfy both his father and himself, that the hands of the bookmender had not degenerated more than his skill could counteract, Richard selected, from a few that were waiting his return, the book worthiest of his labour, set to work, and by a thorough success quickly effected his purpose.

He was now, however, anxious, before doing anything else, to learn all that was known for the restoration and repair of the insides of books. In this an old-bookseller, a friend of his father, was able to give him no little help, putting him up to wrinkles not a few. Richard was surprised to see how, with a penknife, on a bit of glass, he would pare the edge of a scrap of paper to half the thickness, in order to place two such edges together, and join them without a scar. He taught him how to clean letterpress and engravings from ferruginous, fungous, and other kinds of spots. He made him acquainted with a process which considerably strengthened paper that had become weak in its cohesion; and when Richard would make further experiment, he supplied him with valueless letterpress to work upon. His time was thus more than ever occupied. For many weeks he scarcely even read.

It was not long, however, before he bethought him that he must see Arthur. He went the same evening to call on him, but found other people in the house, who could tell him nothing about the family that had left. His aunt said she had seen Alice once, and knew they were going, but did not know where they were gone. Richard would have inquired at the house in the City where Arthur was employed, but he did not know even the name of the firm. Once, from the top of an omnibus, he saw him—in the same shabby old comforter, looking feebler and paler and more depressed than ever; but when he got down, he had lost sight of him, and though he ran hither and thither, looking up this street and that, he recovered no glimpse of him. The selfish mother and the wasting children came back to him vividly as he walked sadly home.

He had counted Alice the nicest girl he had ever seen, but since going to the country had not thought much about her; and now, since seeing the fairy-like lady with the big brown mare, he had a higher idea of the feminine. But although therefore he would not have thought the pale, sweet-faced dressmaker quite so pleasing as before, he would, because of the sad look into which her countenance always settled, have felt her quite as interesting.

Richard had not yet arrived at any readiness to fall in love. It is well when this readiness is delayed until the individuality is sufficiently developed to have its own demands. I venture to think one cause of unhappiness in marriages is, that each person's peculiar self, was not, at the time of engagement, sufficiently grown for a natural selection of the suitable, that is, the *correspondent;* and that the development which follows is in most cases the development of what is reciprocally non-correspondent, and works for separation and not approximation. The only thing to overcome this or any other disjunctive power, is development in the highest sense, that is, development of the highest

and deepest in us—which can come only by doing right. The man who is growing to be one with his own nature, that is, one with God who is the *naturing* nature, is coming nearer and nearer to every one of his fellow-beings. This may seem a long way round to love, but it is the only road by which we can arrive at true love of any kind; and he who does not walk in it, will one day find himself on the verge of a gulf of hate.

Individuality, forestalled by indifference, had no chance of keeping sir Wilton and lady Ann apart, but certainly had done nothing to bring them together. Where all is selfishness on both sides, what other correspondences may exist will hardly come into play. The loss of the unloved heir had perhaps done a little to approximate them; but they speedily ceased to hold any communication of ideas on the matter. As they did nothing to recover him, so they seemed to take almost no thought as to his existence or non-existence. If he were alive, neither father nor stepmother had the least desire to discover him. Answering honestly, each would have chosen that he should remain unheard of. As to the possibility of his dying in want, or being brought up in wickedness, that did not trouble either of them. His stepmother did not think the more tenderly of another woman's child that she cared for her own children only because they were hers. If you could have got the idea into the pinched soul of lady Ann, that the human race is one family, it would but have enhanced her general dislike, her feeble enmity to humanity. When she did or said anything to displease him, sir Wilton would sometimes hint at a new advertisement, but she did not much heed the threat. On the whole, however, they had got on better than might have been expected, partly in virtue of her sharp tongue and her thick skin, which combination of the offensive and defensive put sir Wilton at a disadvantage: however sharp his retort might be, she never felt it, but went on; and harping does not always mean such pleasant music, that you want to keep the harper awake. She had brought him four children—Arthur, the one whose acquaintance Richard had made, a younger brother who promised foully, and two girls—the elder common in feature and slow in wits, but with eyes and a heart; the younger clever and malicious.

One stormy winter night, as Richard was returning from a house in Park Crescent, to which he had carried home a valuable book restored to strength and some degree of aged beauty, from one of the narrow openings on the east side of Regent Street, came a girl, fighting with the wind and a weak-ribbed umbrella, and ran buffeted against him, notwithstanding his endeavour to leave her room. The collision was very slight, but she looked up and begged his pardon. It was Alice. Before he could speak, she gave a cry, and went from him in blind haste as fast as she could go; but with the fierce wind, her perturbation, and the unruliness of the umbrella, which she was vainly trying to close that she might run the better, she struck full against a lamp-post, and stood like one stunned and on the point of falling. Richard, however, was close behind her, and put an arm round her. She did not resist; she was indeed but half-conscious. The same moment he saw a cab and hailed it. The man heard and came. Richard lifted her into it, and got in after her. But Alice came to herself, got up, and leaning out of the cab on the street side, tried to open the door. Richard caught her, drew her back, and made her sit down again.

"Richard! Richard!" she cried, as she yielded to his superior strength, and burst into tears, "where are you taking me?"

"Wherever you like, Alice. You shall tell the cabman yourself. What is the matter with you? Don't be angry with me. It is not my fault that I have not been to see you and Arthur. You went away, and nobody could tell me where to find you! Give the cabman your address, Alice."

"I'm not going home," sobbed Alice.

"Where are you going, then? I will go with you. You're not fit to go anywhere alone! I'm afraid you're badly hurt!"

"No, no! Do let me out. Indeed, indeed, you must!"

"Well, then, I won't! You'll drop down and be left to the police! It's horrible to think of you out in such a night! Come home with me. If you are in any trouble, my mother will help you."

Here Alice, who had yielded to the pressure with which Richard held her, broke from him, and pushed him away. Richard put his other arm across, and laid hold of the door of the cab, telling the man to get up on his box, and have a little patience. He obeyed, and Richard turned again to Alice.

"Richard," she said, "your mother would kill me!"

"Nonsense!" he rejoined; "what a fancy! My mother!"

"I've seen her since you went. She made me promise—"

But there Alice stopped, and Richard could get from her nothing but entreaties to be let out.

"If you don't," she said at last, growing desperate, "I will scream."

"Let me take you at least, then, a little nearer where you want to go," pleaded Richard.

"No! no I set me down."

"Tell me where you live."

"I daren't."

"I must see my old friend, Arthur! and why shouldn't I see his sister? My father and mother ain't tyrants! They know what that would make of me! They let me go where I please, or give a good reason why I should not."

"Oh, they'll do that fast enough!" returned Alice, in a tone of mingled despair and scorn. "But," she added immediately, "the worst of it is, they'll be in the right. Let me out, Richard, or I shall hate you!"

But with the word she dropped her head on his shoulder, and sobbed as if her heart would sob its last.

He made repeated attempts to soothe her, but, as he made them, he felt them foolish, for he saw that nothing would alter her determination to be set down.

"Must I leave you, then, on this very spot?" he said.

"Yes, yes! here—here!" she answered, and rose with apparent eagerness to get away from him.

He got out, and turned to her, but she did not accept his offered help.

"Won't you shake hands with me?" he said. "I did not mean to offend you!"

She answered nothing, but hurried away a step or two, then turned and lifted her arms as if to embrace him, but turned again instantly, and fled away among the shadows of the wildly flickering lamps. By the time he had paid the cabman, he saw it would be useless to follow, for she was out of sight.

The wide street was almost deserted; its lamps shuddered flaring and streaming and darkening in the fierce gusts of the wind. A vague army of evil things seemed to start up and come crowding between him and Alice. He turned homeward, with a sense of loss and a great sadness at his heart, unable even to speculate as to the cause of Alice's behaviour. All he knew was, that his mother had something to do with it. For the first time since childhood, he felt angry with his mother.

"She fancies," he said to himself, "that I am in love with the girl, and she thinks her not good enough for me! I'm not in love with her; but *any* good girl I cared for, I should count good enough! When my mother's turn comes, off she goes to the rest of the social tyrants that look down on a brother because he can do twenty things they can't! If the world went out of gear, would *they* make it go! I'll be fair whatever I be! It'll be my mother's own fault if I fall in love with Alice! She has made me pity her with all my heart—the poor, white thing!—so thin and pinched, and such big eyes! It would be just bliss to have a creature like that to trust you, so that you could comfort her! What can my mother have said to her? She has made her awfully miserable, anyhow! Perhaps her mother drinks!—What if she do! Alice don't!"

He was determined to have some explanation from his mother. But she foiled him. The moment she saw what he meant, she turned away, listened in silence, and spoke with a decision that savoured of anger.

"They're not people your father and I will have you know," she said, without looking at him.

"But why, mother?" asked Richard.

"We're not bound to explain everything to you, Richard. It ought to be enough that we *have* a good reason."

"If it be a good reason, why shouldn't I know it, mother?" he persisted. "Good things don't require to be hidden."

"That's very true; they do not."

"Then why hide this one?"

"Because it is not good."

"You said it was a good reason!"

"So it is."

"Good and not good! How can that be?" said Richard, with a great lack of logic. By this time he ought to have been able to see that the worst of facts may be the best of reasons.

His mother held her peace, knowing she was right, but not knowing how to answer what she thought his cleverness.

"I mean to go and see them, mother," he said.

"You'll repent it, Richard. The woman is not respectable!"

"She won't bite me!"

"There's worse than biting!"

"I allow," pursued Richard, "she may take a drop too much; her nose does look a little suspicious! But if she ain't what she should be, it's hard lines Arthur and Alice should suffer for the sins of their mother."

"The Bible says the sins of the fathers are visited on the children."

"The Bible! If the Bible says what ain't right, are we to do it?"

"Richard, I'll have no such word spoken again in my house!" exclaimed his mother.

"Are you going to turn me out, mother, because I say we should not do what is wrong, whoever tells us to?"

"No, Richard! You said the Bible said what was wrong; and that's blasphemy!"

"Didn't you say, mother, that the Bible said we ought to visit the sins of the fathers on the children?"

"God forbid!" cried the poor woman, driven almost to distraction; "I said nothing of the kind! That would be awful! What the Bible says is, that God does so."

"Well, if God chooses, we must leave him to do as he chooses—not do likewise!"

"Surely, surely, Richard! If *he* does it, he knows what he's about, and we don't."

"All right, mother! Then tell me where Arthur and Alice are gone. I want to go and see them."

"I don't know. In fact, I took care not to know, that I mightn't be able to tell you."

"But why?"

"Never mind why. I don't know where they are, and couldn't tell you if I would."

Richard turned angrily away, and went to his room, weary and annoyed. In the morning his mother said to him—

"Richard, I can't bear there should be any misunderstanding between you and me! The moment you are one and twenty, ask me and I will tell you why I would not have you knowing those people. Believe me, I was right to stop it, for fear of what might follow."

"If you are afraid of my falling in love with a girl you don't think good enough for me, you have taken the wrong way to keep me from thinking about her, mother. You remember the costermonger whose family quarrelled with him for marrying beneath him? If a girl be a good girl, she is good for me, whether she be the daughter of the cats'-meat-man or of a royal duke! I know that's not the way people who call themselves Christians think! They want, of course, to keep up the selfishness of the breed!"

It was horribly rude, and Jane burst into tears. Richard's heart softened. It is well our hearts are sometimes in advance of our consciences—we are so slow to recognize injustice in defence of

the right! Richard's wrong to his mother was a lack of faith in her. Where he did not understand and she would not explain, he did not even give her the benefit of the doubt. He treated her just as many of us, calling ourselves Christians, treat the Father—not in words, perhaps, or even in definite thoughts, but in feelings and actions.

"You will be sorry for this one day, Richard!" she sobbed. "Whatever I do is from care over you!"

"To wrong another for my sake, never can be any good to me. If money wrong-got be a curse, so is any good wrong-got."

"You won't trust me, Richard! My own father is a blacksmith: why should I look down upon a dressmaker?"

"That's just what I think, mother!—Why?"

"I don't!" returned Mrs. Tuke—and there she paused: another step might bring her to the edge of the gulf!

Richard looked at her moodily for a moment, then turned away to the workshop; where, after his ill success with his mother, he was hardly less disinclined to challenge his father than before, for he knew him inexpugnable.

CHAPTER XII. *MORTGRANGE*

In the spring came a letter from young Lestrange, through Simon Armour, asking Richard upon what terms he would undertake the work wanted in the library.

He handed the letter to his father, and they held a consultation.

"There's this to be considered," said the bookbinder, "that, if you go there, you lose your connection here—in a measure, at least. Therefore you cannot do the work at the same rate as in your own shop."

"On the other hand, I should have my keep."

"That is true, and of course is something; but I think it may fairly be held to do no more than make up for the advantages of living in London—your classes, for instance."

"Anyhow I must be paid so much a month, and do what I can in the time. I couldn't charge by the individual job in a man's own house!—The thing I am afraid of is, that, not knowing the niceties of the work, they may fancy I don't do enough."

"In the other way they would fancy you charged too much, and that would come to the same thing!—But they will at least discover that you keep to your hours and stick to your work!—We must calculate by what the best hands in the trade get a week!"

The terms they concluded to ask appeared to Lestrange reasonable. He proposed then that Richard should bind himself for not less than a year, while Lestrange reserved the right of giving him a month's notice; and these points being willingly assented to by Richard, an agreement was drawn up and signed—much to the satisfaction of Simon Armour, whose first thought was that the work would not be too hard for Richard to want a little exercise at the forge after hours. Richard, however, well as he liked the anvil, was not so sure about this: there might be books to read after he had done his day's duty by their garments! He had half laid out for himself a plan of study in his leisure time, he said.

It was a lovely evening when he arrived at Mortgrange from his grandfather's. He was shown to his new quarters in the old mansion by the housekeeper, an elderly, worthy creature, with the air of a hostess. She liked the young man; the honest friendliness of his carriage pleased her. He was handsome too, though not strikingly so, and his expression was better than any handsomeness, inspiring the honest with confidence, and giving little hope to the designing. His brave outlook, not bold so much as fearless, and his ready smile, seemed those of a man more prepared than eager to do his part in the world. He was well set up, and of good figure, for the slight roundness of his shoulders had almost disappeared. The poise of his head, and the proportions of his limbs, left nothing to be desired. His foster-parents had encouraged him in every manly exercise, for they were wise enough to have regard to the impression he must make at first sight: they would have it easy to believe that he might be what they were about to swear he was. Nor had his sojourn with his grandfather been the least factor in the result that he sat down to his work as lightly as a gentleman to his dinner, turned from it as if he had been playing a game instead of earning his bread, and altogether gave the impression of being a painter or sculptor rather than a tradesman. There was that in his bearing which suggested a will rather than necessity to labour.

"Here is your room, young man," said Mrs. Locke.

It was a large, rather neglected chamber, at the end of a long passage on the second floor—the very room out of which one midnight he had been borne in terror, twenty years before, by the woman he called his mother.

"And I hope you will find yourself comfortable," continued the old lady, in a tone that implied —"You ought to be!"—"If you want anything, or have anything to complain of, let me know," she added. "—I thought it better not to put you in the servant's quarters!"

"Thank you, ma'am," said Richard. "This is a beautiful room for me! Do you know, ma'am, where I'm to work?"

"I have not been informed," she answered, as she left the room. "Mr. Lestrange will see to that."

Richard went to the window. Before him spread an extensive but somewhat bare park, for the trees in it were rather few. Some of them, however, were grand ones: many had been cut down, but a few of the finest left. A sea of grass lay in every direction, with islands of clumps and thickets, and vague shores of hedge and wood and ploughed field. On the grass were cattle and sheep and fallow deer. On this side, nothing came between the park and the house.

The day was late in the spring; summer was close at hand. There had been rain all the morning and afternoon, but the clouds were clearing away as now the sun went down. Everything was wet, but the undried tears of the day flashed in the sunset. Nature looked a child whose gladness had come, but who could not stop crying: so heartily had she gone in for sorrow, that her mind was shaped to weeping. Most of the clouds, late so dark and sullen, were putting on garments of light, as if resolved to forgive and forget, and leave no doubt of it. But the sun did not look satisfied with his day's work. Slant across the world to Richard's window came the last of his vanishing rays, blinding him as he brooded, and obliterating all between them in a throbbing splendour; yet somehow the sun seemed sad, as if atonement had come too late. The edge extreme of the glory vanished; a moment's cloud followed; and then, when the radiance of him who was gone grew rosy and golden above his grave, Richard began to see much that his presence had been hiding. But the revelation did not linger long. The clouds closed on the twilight, the world grew almost dismal, and the sadness crept into Richard; or was it not rather that his own hidden sadness rose up to meet the sadness of the world? Yet, even as he became aware of it, something in him recognised it as a thing foreign to the human heart: "We were not made for this!" he said. "—We are not here, I mean," he corrected himself, "—we have not sprung into being in order to be sad! There is no reason in sadness! There is cause enough, man at least knows, but essential reason at the heart of its existence there is none!—Whence, then, comes this mistake, this sadness?" he went on with himself. "Why should there be so much of it in the world? Is it that, as for all other good things, a man must put forth his will for joy? It is plain a man must assert what is highest in him, else he cannot lay hold of the best: must a man will to be glad, else deserve to be sorrowful?" He began to whistle. "I will be glad!" he said, "even in the midst of a world of rain!—Yet again, why should the mere look of a rainy night make it needful for me to assert joy and resist sadness?—After all, what is there to be merry about, in this best of possible worlds? I like going to the theatre; but if I don't like the play, am I to be pleased all the same, sit it out with smiles, and applaud at the end?—I don't see what there is to make me miserable, and I don't see what there is to make me glad!"

Would it have cast any light either on Richard's gloom or his perplexity, had he been told that, in the place where he stood staring out on the gray, formless twilight, his mother had often sought refuge, and tasted the comfort of an assuagement of splendour. She had not appropriated the room, and it was some time before the household knew that she was in the way of going there: it was awkwardly situated in a remote part of the house and rarely used—which made its attraction for lady Lestrange. But the faithful sister did not forget where she had once found her on her knees weeping, and chose it for herself and her charge when she was gone.

In a few minutes Richard arrived at the conclusion that he would be all right as soon as he got among the wine-bins of the library. He did not reflect how little of a man is he whose sense of well-being is at the mercy of a Scotch mist or a cloudy twilight. Neither did he put to himself the question whether the mending of the old leather bottles in which lie stored the varied wines of the human spirit, ought to be labour and gladness enough for the soul of a man. It is a poor substitute for food that helps us to forget the want of it. But how can we wonder when he would have no father, and claimed the black Negation, the grandmother of Chaos, as his mother! Yet was it the presence all the time of that father he refused that made it possible for him to drink the water of any poorest little well of salvation that sprang in the field of his life; and such a well was his work among books.

CHAPTER XIII. *THE BEECH-TREE*

He went to bed, and after a dreamless night, rose to find the world overflowed with bliss. The sun was at his best, and every water-drop on the grass was shining all the colours of the rainbow. Surely the gems that are dug from the earth have their prototype in the dew-drops that lie on its surface. One might in a moment of sweet maundering imagine Nature hiding those sunless dew-drops of the mines in the darkness of a sweet sorrow that the youth of the morning must be so evanescent.

The whole world lay before Richard his inheritance. The sunlight gave it him, a gift from the height of his heaven. What was it to Richard that the park, its trees, its grass, its dew-drops, its cattle, its shadows, belonged to sir Wilton! He never even thought of the fact! He felt them his own! Was the soft, clear, fresh, damp air, with all the unreachable soul of it, not his, because it was sir Wilton's?

The highest property, as Dante tells us, increases to each by the sharing of it with others. But the common mind does not care for such property. Was not the blue, uplifted, hoping sky, that spoke to the sky inside Richard—was not that sir Wilton's? Yes, indeed; for were it not sir Wilton's, it could not be Richard's. But sir Wilton did not claim it, because he did not care for it, heard no sound of the speech it uttered. Happy would it have been for sir Wilton, that anything he called his, was his as it was Richard's! He could not prevent Richard from possessing Mortgrange in a way he himself did not and would not possess it. But neither yet were they Richard's in the full eternal way. Nature was a noble lady whose long visit made him glad; she was not yet at her own home in his house. There were things in the world that might come in and drive her out. Say rather, there was yet no chamber in that house in which she could take up her dwelling all night.

The setting sun had made Richard sad; his resurrection made him blessed! He dressed in haste, and went to find his way from the house.

Arrived in the park, and walking in cool delight on the wet grass, he began to think about the men and the races whom the greed of other men and races had pinched and shouldered and squeezed from the world. He thought of the men who, by preventing others and refusing to let them share, imagine to increase the length and breadth and depth of their own possessing; and thus by degrees he fell into a retributive mood. What should, what could, what would be done with such men?

"As they refuse their neighbours ground to stand upon," he said to himself, "as the very cubic space they cannot disrobe them of they begrudge them because it measures from what they count their land, I should like to know how high their possession goes! Is there any law that lays that down? To what point above him can the landowner complain of trespass in the gliding or hovering balloon? When hawking comes in again, as it will one day, by the law of revival, at what height will another man's falcon be an intruder on him who stands gazing up from his corn? Were I a power in the universe, I would cram the air over the heads of such incarnate greeds with clouds of souls! The sun should reach them only through the vapours of other life than theirs, inimical to them because of their selfishness. I would set the dead burrowing beneath them, so that the land they boast should heave under their feet with the writhing of the bodies they drove from the surface into the deeps. They should have but a carpet, wallowing in the waves of a continuous live earthquake. I know I am thinking like a fool; but surely at least there ought to be some set season for Truth and Justice to return to the forsaken earth! Are we for ever to bear without hope the presence of the cruel, the vulgar self-souled, the neighbour-crushing rich? Are the wicked the favourites of Nature, that they flourish like a green bay-tree? Doubtless it is right to forgive—but how to be able? Nobody has ever done me any harm yet; I have nothing to complain of; it cannot be revenge in me that longs for something, call it God, or Nature, or Justice, that will repay!—God it cannot be; but something sure there must be to which vengeance belongs!"

He might have gone further in his thinking, and perhaps come to ask what satisfaction there could be in any vengeance, so long as the evil-doer remained unhumbled by the perception and the

shame of his doing, was neither sorry for it nor turned away from it—in a word, did not repent; but there came an interruption.

He was walking slowly along, unheeding where he went, when he heard a sound that made him look up. Then he saw that he was under a great beech, and the sound seemed to come from somewhere in the top of it—a sound like the pleased cooing of a dove. He looked hard into the branches and their wilderness of fresh leaves, but could descry nothing. Then came a little laugh, and with a preparatory rustling and rustling in its passage, a book—a small folio—fell plump at his feet.

"Will you please put it in the library!" said a voice he had heard before—long before, it seemed—but had not forgotten.

"I will bring it to you—at least I would, if I could see where you are!" answered Richard, gazing with yet keener search into the thick mass of leaf-cloud over his head.

"No, no; I don't want more of it. I can't see you, and don't know who you are; but please take the book, and lay it on the middle table in the library. It may be hurt, and I don't want to come down just yet."

"Very well, miss!" answered Richard; "I will.—The fall from such a height, and through all those branches, must have done it quite enough harm already!"

"Oh!—I never thought of that!" said the voice.

Richard took up the book, and walked away with it, pondering.

"Is it possible," he said to himself, "that the little lady, whose big mare I shod last year, is up there in that tree? It must be her voice!—I cannot, surely, be mistaken!—But how on earth, or rather how in heaven, did she get up? Yet why shouldn't she climb as well as any other? It must be as easy as riding that huge mare. And then she's not like other ladies! She's not of the ordinary breed of this planet! Which of them would have spoken to a blacksmith-lad as she spoke to me! Who but herself would have tied up a scratch in a working man's hand!"

He was right so far: she could climb as no other in that county, no other, perhaps, in England, man or boy or girl, could climb. She was like a squirrel at climbing; and for the last few mornings, the weather having grown decidedly summery, had gone before breakfast to say her prayers in that tree.

Richard carried the book to the house—it was Pope's Letters—found his way to the library, and laid it where she said, hoping she would come to seek it, and that he might then be present. Would she recognize the fellow that shod her mare? he wondered.

He could do nothing till he knew where he was to work, and therefore, after breakfast in the servants' hall, he asked one of the men to let him know when Mr. Lestrange would see him, and went to his room.

Richard had not yet become aware of any moral pressure. The duty of aspiration or self-conquest, had never in any shape been forced upon him, and his conscience had not made him acquainted with it. What is called a good conscience is often but a dull one that gives no trouble when it ought to bark loudest; but Richard's was not of that sort, and yet was very much at ease. I may say for him that he had done nothing he knew to be bad at the moment; and very little that he had to be ashamed of afterwards, either at school or since he left it. Partly through the care of his parents, he had never got into what is called bad company, had formed no undesirable intimacies. He had a natural cleanliness, a natural sense of the becoming, which did much to keep him from evil: he could not consent to regard himself with disgust, and he would have been easily disgusted with himself. If he did not, as I have indicated, set himself with any conscious effort to rise above himself, he did do something against sinking below himself. The books he chose were almost all of the better sort. He had instinctively laid aside some in which he recognized a degrading influence.

But here let me remark that it depends partly on the degree of a man's moral development, whether this or that book will be to him degrading or otherwise. A book which one man ought to scorn, may be of elevating tendency to another, because it is a little above his present moral condition. A book which to enjoy would harm a more delicate mind, may *perhaps* benefit the nature that would

have chosen a coarser book still. We cannot determine the operation of energies, when we do not know on what moral level they are at work. The dead may be left to bury their dead; it would be sad to see an angel haunting a charnel-house.

I have been led into this digression through the desire to give an approximate idea of the good, rather vacant, unselfish, and yet self-contented, if not self-satisfied condition of Richard's being.

He got out a manuscript-book in which he was in the habit of setting down whatever came to him, and wrote for some time, happily making more than one spot of ink on the toilet-cover, which served to open the eyes of Mrs. Locke to her mistake in thinking a workman would not want a writing-table; so that before the next evening he found in his chamber everything comfortable for writing, as well as for sleeping and dressing.

He was interrupted by the entrance of a servant with the message that Mr. Lestrange was in the morning-room, and wished to see him.

He followed the man and found Lestrange at the breakfast-table, with a tall young woman, very ordinary-looking, except for her large, soft, dark eyes, and the little lady whose mare he had shod, and whose voice he had that morning heard from the tree-top.

He advanced half-way to the table, and stood.

"Ah, there you are!" said Lestrange, glancing up, and immediately reverting to his plate. "We've got to set to work, haven't we?"

He had, I presume, found the ladies not uninterested in the restoration that was about to be initiated, and had therefore sent for Richard while breakfast was going on.

The fledgling baronet, except for his too favourable opinion of himself, in which he was unlike only a very few, and an amount of assumption not small toward his supposed inferiors, was not a disagreeable human, and now spoke pleasantly.

"Yes, sir," answered Richard. "Shall I wait outside until you have done breakfast?"

He feared the servant might have made a mistake.

"I sent for you," replied Lestrange curtly.

"Very well, sir. I have not yet learned whether the tools I sent on have been delivered, but there will be plenty to do in the way of preparation.—May I ask if you have settled where I am to work, sir?"

"Ah! I had not thought of that!"

"It seems to me, sir, that the library itself would suit best; that is, if I might have a good-sized kitchen-table in it, and roll up half the carpet. When I had to beat a book I could take it into the passage, or just outside the window. Nothing else would make any dust."

Lestrange had been thinking how to have the binder under his eye, and yet not seem to watch a fellow so much above his notion of a working man; the family made very little use of the library, and Richard's proposal seemed just the thing. He would be sure to stick to his work where some one might any moment be coming in!

"I don't see any difficulty," he answered.

"I should want a little fire for my glue-pot and polishing-iron. There will be gilding and lettering too, though I hope not much—title-pieces to replace, and a touch here and there to give to the tooling! No man with any reverence in him would meddle much with such delicate, lovely old things as many of these gildings! He would not dare more than just touch them!"

The little lady sat eating her toast, but losing no word that was said. She knew from his voice the young man was the same to whom she had called out of the beech-tree; but now she seemed to recognize him as the blacksmith whose hand she had bound up: what could a blacksmith do in a library? She was puzzled.

Richard noted that she was dressed in some green stuff, which perhaps was the cause of his having been unable to discover her in the tree! Her great eyes—they were bigger than those of the tall lady—every now and then looked up at him with a renewed question, to which they seemed to find no answer. They were big blue eyes—very dark for blue, and rather too round for perfection; but their

roundness was at one with the prevailing expression of her face, which was innocent daring, inquiry, and confidence. The paleness of it was a healthy paleness, with just an inclination to freckle. Her dark, half-scorched-looking hair was so abundant and rebellious, that it had to be all over compelled with gold pins. Its manipulation had neither beginning, middle, nor end. She ate daintily enough, but as if she meant to have a breakfast that should last her till luncheon—when plainly the active little furnace of her life would want fresh fuel. But it was of another kind of fuel she was thinking now. In the man who stood there, so independent, yet so free from self-assertion, she saw a prospect of learning something. She was hungry after knowing, but, though fond of reading, was very ignorant of books. She thought like a poet, but had never read a real poem. She was full of imagination, but very imperfectly knew what the word meant. She had never in her life read a work of genuine imagination —not even *Undine*, not even *The Ugly Duckling*.

CHAPTER XIV. *THE LIBRARY*

After some talk, it was settled that Richard should work in the large oriel of the library. Mrs. Locke was called, and the necessary orders were given. Employer and workman were both anxious, the one to see, the other to make a commencement. In a few minutes Richard had looked out as many of the books in most need of attention as would keep him, turning from the one to the other, as each required time in the press or to dry, thoroughly employed.

"There is a volume here I should like to know your mind about, sir," he said, after looking at one of them a moment or two, "—the first collected edition of Spenser's works, actually bound up with Sir John Harrington's translation of Ariosto! If it were a good, or even an old binding, I should have said nothing."

"It don't seem in a bad way."

"No, but the one book is so unworthy of the other!"

"What would you propose?"

"I would separate them; put the Spenser in plain calf, and make the present cover, with a new back, do for Sir John; it is a good enough coat for him."

"Very well. Do as you think best."

"I should like to send them both to my father."

"But you have undertaken everything!"

"I am quite ready, sir; but in that case these must wait. My faculty is best laid out on mending, and I must do some good work in that first. I don't know that I'm quite up to my father in binding. I mentioned him because if he were to help me with those that must be bound, I should have the more time for what often takes longer. You may trust my father, sir; he does not want to make a fortune."

"I will try him then," answered the cautious heir. "At least I will send him the books, and learn what he would charge."

He had more of the ordinary tradesman in him than Richard and his uncle put together.

"I will put the prices on them, and engage that my father will charge no more," said Richard.

Lestrange was content on hearing them, and Richard set to work with the other volumes.

The bookbinder, always busy, soon began to be respected in the house, and before long had gained several indulgences—among the rest, to have a table for himself in the library, at which, when work-hours were over, he might read or write when he pleased. As his labours went on, the *bookscape* began to revive, and continued slowly putting on an autumnal radiance of light and colour. Dingy and broken backs gradually disappeared. Pamphlets and magazines, such as, from knowledge or inquiry, Richard thought worth the expense, were sent off to his father to be bound. But I must continue my narrative from a point long before his work began to make much of a show.

A few valuable books, much injured by time and rough usage,—among the rest a quarto of *The Merry Wives*—he had pulled apart, and was treating with certain solutions, in preparation for binding them, when Lestrange came in one morning, accompanied by the curate of the parish. His eyes fell on a loose title-page which he happened to know.

"What on earth are you doing?" he cried. "You will destroy that book! By Jove!—You little know what you're about!"

"I do know what I am about, sir. I shall do the book nothing but good," answered Richard. "It could not have lasted many years without what I am doing."

"Leave it alone," said Lestrange. "I must ask some one. The treatment is too dangerous."

"Excuse me, sir; the treatment is by no means dangerous. After this bath, I shall take it through one of thin size, to help the paper to hold together. The book has suffered much, both from damp and insects."

"No matter!" answered Lestrange imperiously. "I will not have you meddle further with that volume.—Would you believe it, Hardy," he went on, turning to the curate, "it is that translation of Ovid he is experimenting upon!"

"I beg your pardon, I am not experimenting," said Richard.

"I hardly think it is such a very rare book!" replied the curate. "I believe it *could* be replaced!"

"Ah, you don't know, I see! I thought I had shown you!" returned Lestrange excitedly. "Look there!"

He pointed to the title-page, which was lying on the table.

"I see!" said Hardy. "It is a first edition—in black letter—of Arthur Golding's Ovid!"

"But you don't look! Why don't you look? Have you no eyes for that faded ink just under the title?"

"Why! What's this? *Gul. Shaksper!*—Is it possible!"

"You find it hard to believe your eyes, and well you may!—There, Tuke! I told you you didn't know what you were doing!"

"I always examine the title-page of a book," answered Richard. "You must allow me to do as I see fit, Mr. Lestrange, or I give up the job."

"You undertook to work for a year, if required!"

"I did not undertake to receive orders as to my mode of working. I care for books far too much for that. Besides, I have my character to see to! I warn you that if I do not go on with that volume, it will be ruined."

"You don't consider the money you risk!—That name makes the book worth hundreds at least."

"It is the greatest of names! Only that name was not written by him who owned it!"

"What do you know about it!" said Lestrange rudely.

"Are you an expert?" asked the curate.

"By no means," answered Richard; "but I have been a good deal with old books, and my impression is you have got there one of the Ireland forgeries!"

"I believe it to be quite genuine!" said Lestrange.

"If it be, there is the more reason in what I am doing, sir."

Lestrange turned abruptly to the curate, saying—"Come along, Hardy! I can't bear to see the butchery!"

"Depend on it," returned the curate laughing, "the surgeon knows his knife!—You *know* what you're about, don't you, Mr. Tuke?"

"If I did not, sir, I wouldn't meddle with a book like that, forgery or no forgery! You should see the quantities of old print I've destroyed in learning how to save such books!—This is no vile body to experiment upon!"

"Mr. Lestrange, you may trust that man!" said the curate.

CHAPTER XV. *BARBARA WYLDER*

It was the height of the season, and sir Wilton and lady Ann were in London—I cannot say *enjoying themselves*, for I doubt if either of them ever enjoyed self, or anything else. Their daughters were at home, in the care of the governess. Theodora had been out a year or two, but preferred Mortgrange to London. She was one of the few girls—perhaps not very few—who imagine themselves uglier than they are. Miss Malliver, the governess, was a lady of uncertain age, for whom lady Ann had an uncertain liking. The younger girl, her pupil, was named Victoria, but commonly called Vic, and not uncommonly Vixen. The younger boy was at school, where they were constantly threatening to send him home. He had been already dismissed from Eton.

In their elder son, Arthur, his parents had as perfect a confidence as such parents could have in any son.

The little lady that rode the great mare, and sat in the beech-tree, was at present their guest —as she often was, in a fluctuating or intermittent fashion. She lived in the neighbourhood, but was more at Mortgrange than at home; one consequence of which was, that, as would-be-clever Miss Malliver phrased it, the house was very much B. Wyldered. Nor was that the first house the little lady had bewildered, for she was indeed an importation from a new colony rather startling to sedate old England. Her father, a younger son, had unexpectedly succeeded to the family-property, a few miles from Mortgrange. He was supposed to have made a fortune in New Zealand, where Barbara was born and brought up. They had been home nearly two years, and she was almost eighteen. Absurd rumours were abroad concerning their wealth, but there were no great signs of wealth about the place. Wylder Hall was kept up, and its life went on in good style, it is true, but mainly because the old servants perpetuated the customs of the house.

The squire was said to have shared in some of the roughest phases of colonial life. Whether he was better or worse for falling in love with the money of an older colonist, and marrying his daughter, it is certain that, for a time at least, he grew a shade or two more respectable. Far from being a woman of refinement, she had more character and more strength than he, and brought him, not indeed into the highways of wisdom, but into certain by-paths of prudence.

Upon his return to his native country, they were everywhere received; but had it not been for their reported wealth, I doubt if the ladies of the county, after some experience of her manners and speech, which were at times very rough, would have continued to call on Mrs. Wylder.

But everybody liked Barbara; and nobody could think how such a flower should have come of two such plants. She seemed to regard every one as of her own family. People were her property—hers to love! And her brain was as active as her heart, and constantly with it. She wanted to know what people thought and felt and imagined; what everything was; how a thing was done, and how it ought to be done. She seemed to understand what the animals were thinking, and what the flowers were feeling. She had from infancy spent the greater part of her life, both night and day, in the open air; and, having no companion, had sought the acquaintance of every live thing she saw—often to the disgust of her mother, and occasionally to the annoyance of her father. She was a child of the whole world, as the naiad is the child of the river, and the oread of the mountain. She could sit a horse's bare back even better than a saddle, could guide him almost as well with a halter as with a bridle, and in general control him without either, though she had ridden more than one horse with terrible bit and spurs. She did not remember the time when she could not swim, and she tried her own running against every new horse, to find what he could do. Some highland girl might perhaps have beaten her, up hill, but I doubt it. She was so small that she looked fragile, but she had nerves such as few men can boast, and muscles like steel. It never occurred to her not to say what she thought, believed, or felt; she would show favour or dislike with equal readiness; and give the reason for anything she did as willingly as do the thing. She was a special favourite at Mortgrange. Not only did she bewitch

the *blasé* man of the world, sir Wilton, but the cold eye of his lady would gleam a faint gleam at the thought of her dowry. Her father "prospected" a little for something higher than a mere baronetcy, but he had in no way interfered. Of herself, divine little savage, she would never have thought of love until she fell in love: a flower cannot know its own blossom until it comes. It did not yet interest her, and until it did, certainly marriage never would. Thus was she healthier-minded than any one born of society-parents, and brought up under the influences of nurse-morality, can well be. When she came to England, it was hard to teach her the ways of the so-called civilized. Servants would sometimes be out searching for her after midnight, perhaps to find her strayed beyond the park, out upon the solitary heath. She knew most of the stars, not by their astronomical names indeed, but by names she had herself given them. She had tales of her own, fashioned in part from the wild myths of the aborigines, to account for the special relations of such as made a group. She would weave the travels of the planets into the steady history of the motionless stars. Waning and waxing moons had a special and strange influence upon her. She would dart out of doors the moment she saw the new moon, and give a wild cry of joy if the old moon was in her arms. Any moon in a gusty night, with a scud of torn clouds, would wake in her an ecstasy. Her old nurse, who had come with her—a strange creature, of what mingled blood no one knew—told of her that she was sometimes seized with such a longing for the ocean, that she would lie for hours ere she went to sleep, moaning with the very moan of its pebble-margined waves. When "in the bush," she would upon occasion wander about from morning to night. No trouble able to keep her still had ever yet laid hold of her. But she had grown neither coarse nor unfeeling through lack of human intercourse. Nature was to her what she was to Wordsworth's Lucy, and made her a lady of her own.

As to what is commonly called education, she had not had the best. Since coming to England, she had had governesses, but none fit for the office. Not merely had no one of them that rare gift, the teaching genius—the faculty of waking hunger and thirst; that would have mattered little, for Barbara needed no such rousing; she was eager to know, and yet more eager to understand; but not one of those teachers knew enough to answer a quarter of Barbara's questions, or was even capable of perceiving that those she could not answer, pointed to anything worth knowing.

Among fashionable girls, affecting a free and easy, or even rough style, Barbara was notable for a sweet, unconscious, graceful daring, never for even a playful rudeness. Nothing she ever did or said or attempted could be called rough, while yet she would say things to make a vulgar duchess stare. Had she been affected, she would have drawn fools and repelled men; real, she charmed alike men and fools.

She had read few books worth reading—had read a few which one would not have chosen she should read, for she grasped at anything a passer-by might have left. Of books properly so called, she knew nothing, therefore had not a notion which to read now she might choose. She imagined them all attractive—but at the first assay turned from the burlesque with a kind of loathing. This made some of her new acquaintance, not refined enough to understand the peculiarity, as it seemed to them, set her down as stupid.

As to religion, she had never been taught any. But from before her earliest recollection she had had the feeling of a Presence. For this feeling she never thought of attempting to account, neither would have recognized it as what I have called it. The sky over her head brought it; a sweep of the earth away from her feet would bring it; any horizon far or near called it up, perhaps most keenly of all. In England she often sorely missed her horizon, and in cities was even unhappy for lack of one. If she could have crystallized, and then formulated her feeling, she would have said she felt lonely, that something or somebody had gone away. Had she been a pagan, it would have been her gods that had forsaken her. Without a horizon she felt as if the wind had forgotten her, the sky did not know her. Often indeed even the farthest horizon could not prevent her from feeling that she had come to a dead country; that things here did not mean anything; that the life was out of them. Was the world so crowded with men and their works as to shut out from her the Presence? When she went to

church, nothing received her, nothing came near her, nothing brought her any message. Something was done, she supposed, that ought to be done—something she had no inclination to dispute, no interest in questioning; a certain good power called God, required from people, in return for the gift of existence, the attention of going to church; therefore she went sometimes. She had no idea of ever having done wrong, no feeling that God was pleased or displeased with her, or had any occasion to be either. She did not know that it was God that came near her in her horse, in her dog, in the people about her who so often disappointed her. He came nearer in a thunderstorm, a moonlit night, a sweet wind—anything that woke the sense of the old freedom of her childhood. She felt the presence then, but never knew it a presence.

Neither did she know that there was a place where the very essence, of that whose loss made her sad was always waiting her—a place called in a certain old book “thy closet.” She did not know that there opened the one horizon—infinitely far, yet near as her own heart. But He is there for them that seek him, not for those who do not look for him. Till they do, all he can do is to make them feel the want of him. Barbara had not begun to seek him. She did not know there was anybody to seek: she only missed him without knowing what she missed. The blind, almost meaningless reverence for the name of God, which somehow she learned at church, had not led her in any way to associate him with her sense of loss and need.

Her father’s desire was to see her so married as to raise his influence in the county. He was proud of her—selfishly proud. Was she not his? Was he not “the author of her being”? If he did not quite imagine he had created her, he certainly never thought of any one but himself as having to do with her existence. All the credit in it was his! He forgot even what share her mother might claim; not to mention what in her might belong to the Sum of Things, the insensate Pan. A self-glorious man is the biggest fool in the world.

Her mother, too, was proud of her—loved her indeed after a careless fashion—was even in a sort obliged to her for having come to her. But she did not care for her enough to interfere with her. Notwithstanding the mother’s coarseness, her outbursts of temper, her intolerance of opposition, she and her daughter had never yet come into collision. The reason did not entirely lie in the sweetness of the daughter, but partly in the fact that the mother had two children besides, one of whom she loved far more, and the other far less.

Barbara had no pride. She spoke in the same tone to lord and tradesman. She had been the champion of the blacks in her own country, and in England looked lovingly on the gypsies in their little tents on the windy downs.

CHAPTER XVI. *BARBARA AND RICHARD*

Hardly had Lestrange left the room, when Barbara entered, noiseless as a moth, which creature she somehow resembled at times: one observant friend came to see that she resembled all swift, gay, and gentle creatures in turn. She was in the same green dress which had favoured her concealment in the beech, and in which Richard had seen her afterward at the breakfast-table, but of which he had not since caught a glimmer. Her blue eyes—at times they seemed black, but they were blue—settled upon Richard the moment she entered, and resting on him seemed to lead her up to the table where he was at work.

"What have you done to make Arthur so angry?" she said, her manner as if they had known each other all their lives.

"What I am doing now, miss—making this book last a hundred years longer."

"Why should you, if he doesn't want you to do it? The book is his!"

"He will be pleased enough by and by. It's only that he thinks I can't, and is afraid I shall ruin it."

"Hadn't you better leave it then?"

"That would be to ruin it. I have gone too far for that."

"Why should you want to make it last so long? They are always printing books over again, and a new book is much nicer than an old one."

"So some people think; but others would much rather read a book in its first shape. And then books get so changed by printers and editors, that it is absolutely necessary to have copies of them as they were at first. You see this little book, miss? It don't look much, does it?"

"It looks miserable—and so dirty!"

"By the time I have done with it, it will be worth fifty, perhaps a hundred pounds—I don't know exactly. It is a play of Shakespeare's us published in his lifetime."

"But they print better and more correctly now, don't they?"

"Yes; but us I said, they often change things."

"How is that?"

"Sometimes they will change a word, thinking it ought to be another; sometimes they will alter a passage because they do not understand it, putting it all wrong, and throwing aside a great meaning for a small one: the change of a letter may alter the whole idea. But they often do it just by blundering. Shall I tell you an instance that came to my knowledge yesterday? It is but a trifle, yet is worth telling. —Of course you know the *Idylls of the King*?"

"No, I don't Why do you say 'of course'?"

"Because I thought every English lady read Tennyson."

"Ah, but I was born in New Zealand!—Tell me the blunder, though."

"There was one thing in *The Pausing of Arthur*—that's the name of one of the Idylls—which I never could understand:—how sir Bedivere could throw a sword with both hands, and make it go in the way Tennyson says it went."

"But who was sir Bedivere?"

"You must read the poem to know that, Miss. He was one of the knights of king Arthur's Round Table."

"I don't know anything about king Arthur."

"I will repeat us much of the poem as is necessary to make you understand about the misprint."

"*Do—please*."

> "Then quickly rose sir Bedivere, and ran,
> And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
> Among the bulrush beds, and clutch'd the sword,

And strongly wheeled and threw it. The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the northern sea.
So flashed and fell the brand Excalibur."

"What does *the brand Excalibur*—is that it?—what does it mean? They put a brand on the cattle in the bush."

"*Brand* means a sword, and *Excalibur* was the name of this sword. They seem to have baptized their swords in those days!"

"There's nothing about *both hands*!"

"True; that comes a little lower down, where sir Bedivere tells king Arthur what he has done. He says—

"'Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him'.

"—Now do you think anybody could do that, and make it go flashing round and round in an arch?"

Barbara thought for a moment, then said—

"No, certainly not. To make it go like that, you would have to take it in one hand, and swing it round your head—and then you couldn't without a string tied to it. Or perhaps it was a sabre, and he was so strong he could send it like a boomerang!"

"No; it was a straight, big, heavy sword.—How then do you think Tennyson came to describe the thing so?"

"Because he didn't know better—or didn't think enough about it."

"There is more than that in it, I fancy: he was misled by a printer's blunder, I suspect. Some months ago I found the passage which Tennyson seems to follow, in a cheap reprint of sir Thomas Malory's History of King Arthur—then just out, and could not make sense of it. Yesterday I found here this long little book, evidently the edition from which the other was printed—and printed correctly too. In both issues, this is what the knight is made to say:

"'Then sir Bedivere departed, and went to the sword, and lightly took it up and went to the water's side, and there he bound the girdle about the belts. And then he threw the sword into the water as far as he might.'"

"Well," said Barbara, "you have not made me any wiser! You said the new one was printed correctly from that old one!"

"But I did not say the old one, as you call it, was itself printed correctly from the much older one! Look here now," continued Richard—and mounting the library-steps, he took down another small volume, very like the former, "—here is another edition, of nearly the same date: let me read what is printed there:—

"'Then sir Bedivere departed, and went to the sword, and lightly took it up, and went to the water side, and there he bound the girdle about the hilt. And then he threw the sword into the water as far as he might.'

"Now, most likely the copy from which both of these editions were printed, had the word *hilts*, for then they always spoke of the *hilts*, not *hilt* of a sword; and the one printer modernized it into *hilt*, and the other, perhaps mistaking the dim print, for *hilts* printed *belts*. To tie the girdle about the *belts* must simply be nonsense. But to tie the girdle to the hilts of the sword, would just give the knight what you said he would want—something long to swing it round his head with, and throw it like a stone, and the sling with it."

"I understand."

"You see then how the printer's blunder, which might not appear to matter much, has come to matter a great deal, for it has, it seems to me, caused a fault-spot in the loveliest poem!"

During this conversation Richard's work had scarcely relaxed; but now that a pause came it seemed to gather diligence.

"Why do you spend your time patching up books?" said Barbara.

"Because they are worth patching up; and because I earn my bread by patching them."

"But you seem to care most for what is inside them!"

"If I did not, I should never have taken to mending, I should have been content with binding them. New covers make more show, and are much easier put on than patches."

Another pause followed.

"What a lot you know!" said Barbara.

"Very little," answered Richard.

"Then where am I!" she returned.

"Perhaps ladies don't need books! I don't know about ladies."

"I think they don't care about them. I never hear them talk as you do—as if books were their friends. But why should they? Books are only books!"

"You would not say that if once you knew them!"

"I wish you would make me know them, then!"

"There are books, and you can read, miss!"

"Ah, but I can't read as you read! I understand that much! I was born where there ain't any books. I can shoot and fish and run and ride and swim, and all that kind of thing. I never had to fight. I think I could shoe a horse, if any one would give me a lesson or two."

"I will, with pleasure, miss."

"Oh, thank you. That will be jolly! But how is it you can do everything?"

"I can only do one or two things. I can shoe a horse, but I never had the chance of riding one."

"Teach me to shoe Miss Brown, and I will teach you to ride her. How is your hand?"

"Quite well, thank you."

"I would rather learn to read, though—the right way, I mean—the way that makes one book talk to another."

"That would be better than shoeing Miss Brown; but I will teach you both, if you care to learn."

"Thank you indeed! When shall we begin?"

"When you please."

"Now?"

"I cannot before six o'clock. I must do first what I am paid to do!—What kind of reading do you like best?"

"I don't know any best. I used to read the papers to papa, but now I don't even do that. I hope I never may."

"Where do you live, miss, when you're at home?" asked Richard, all the time busy with the quarto.

"Don't you know?"

"I don't even know who you are, miss!"

"I am Barbara Wylder. I live at Wylder Hall, a few miles from here.—I don't know the distance exactly, because I always go across country: that way reminds me a little of home. My father was the third son, and never expected to have the Hall. He went out to New Zealand, and married my mother, and made a fortune—at least people say so: he never tells me anything. They don't care much for me: I'm not a boy!"

"Have you any brothers?"

"I have one," she answered sadly. "I had two, but my mother's favourite is gone, and my father's is left, and mamma can't get over it. They were twins, but they did not love each other. How could they? My father and mother don't love each other, so each loved one of the twins and hated the other."

She mentioned the dismal fact with a strange nonchalance—as if the thing could no more be helped, and needed no more be wondered at, than a rainy day. Yet the sigh she gave indicated trouble because of it.

Richard held his peace, rather astonished, both that a lady should talk to him in such an easy way, and that she should tell him the saddest family secrets. But she seemed quite unaware of doing anything strange, and after a brief pause resumed.

"Yes, they had long been tired of each other," she said, us if she had been reflecting anew on the matter, "but the quarrelling came all of taking sides about the twins! At least I do not remember any of it before that. They were both fine children, and they could not agree which was the finer, but, as the boys grew, quarrelled more and more about them. They would be at it whole evenings, each asserting the merits of one of the twins, and neither listening to a word about the other. Each was determined not to be convinced, and each called the other obstinate."

"Were the twins older or younger than you, miss?" asked Richard.

"They were three years younger than me. But when I look back it seems as if I had been born into the bickering. It always looked as natural as the grassy slopes outside the door. I thought it was a consequence of twins, that all parents with twins went on so. When my father's next older brother fell ill, and there seemed a possibility of his succeeding to the property, the thing grew worse; now it was which of them should be heir to it. Waking in the middle of the night, I would hear them going on at it. Then which was the elder, no one could tell. My mother had again and again, before they began to quarrel, confessed she did not know. I don't think I ever saw either of my parents do a kindness to the other, or to the child favoured by the other. So from the first the boys understood that they were enemies, and acted accordingly. Each always wanted everything for himself. They scowled at each other long before they could talk. Their games, always games of rivalry and strife, would for a minute or two make them a little less hostile, but the moment the game ceased, they began to scowl again. They were both kind to me, and I loved them both, and naturally tried to make them love each other; but it was of no use. It seemed their calling to rival and obstruct one another. When they came to blows, as they frequently did, my father and mother would almost come to blows too, each at once taking the usual side. I would run away then, put a piece of bread in my pocket, and get on a horse. Nobody ever missed me."

"Did you never lose your way?" asked Richard: he must say something, he felt so embarrassed.

"My horse always knew the way home. I have often been out all night, though; and how peaceful it was to be alone with Widow Wind, as I used to call the night I—I don't know why now; I suppose I once knew."

Something in this way she ran on with her story, but I fail to approach the charm of her telling. Her narrative was almost childish in its utterance, but childlike in its insight. What could have moved her so to confide in a stranger and a workman? In truth, she needed little moving; her nature was to trust everybody; but there were not many to whom she could talk. Miss Brown helped her with no response; to her parents she had no impulse to speak; the young people she met stared at the least allusion to the wild ways of her past life, making her feel she was not one of them. Even Arthur Lestrange had more than once looked awkward at a remark she happened to make! So, instead of confiding in any of them, that is, letting her heart go in search of theirs, she had taken to amusing them, and in this succeeded so thoroughly as to be an immense favourite—which, however, did not make her happy, did not light up the world within her. Hence it was no great wonder that, being such as she was, she should feel drawn to Richard. He was the first man she had even begun to respect. In her humility she found him every way her superior. It was wonderful to her that he should know so much about books, the way people made them, what they meant, and how mistakes got into them, and went

from one generation to another: they were his very friends! She thought it was his love for books that had made him a bookbinder, as indeed it was his love for them that had made him a book-mender. Her heart and mind were free from many social prejudices. She knew that people looked down upon men who did things with their hands; but she had done so many things herself with her hands, and been so much obliged to others who could do things with their hands better than she, that she felt the superiority of such whose hands were their own perfect servants, and ready to help others as well.

One of the things by which she wounded the sense of propriety in those about her was, that she would talk of some things that, in their judgment, ought to be kept secret. Now Barbara could understand keeping a great joy secret, but a misery was not a nice thing to cuddle up and hide; of a misery she must get rid, and if talking about it was any relief, why not talk? She soon found, however, that it was no relief to talk to Arthur or his sister; and from the commonplace governess, she recoiled. The bookbinder was different; he was a man; he was not what people called a gentleman; he was a man like the men in the Bible, who spoke out what they meant! The others were empty; Richard was full of man! As regarded her father and mother, she could betray no secret of theirs; everybody about them knew the things she talked of; and had they been secrets, neither would have cared a pin what a working man might know or think of them! Did they not quarrel in the presence of the very cat! Then Richard was such a gentlemanly workman! Of course he could not be a gentleman in England, but there must be, certainly there ought to be somewhere the place in which Richard, just as he was, would be a gentleman! She was sure he would not laugh at her behind her back, and she was not sure that Arthur, or Theodora even, would not. More than all, he was ready to open for her the door into the rich chamber of his own knowledge! Must a man be a workman to know about books? What then if a workman was a better and greater kind of man than a gentleman? In her own country, it did not matter so much about books, for there one had so many friends! Why read about the beauties of Nature, where she was at home with her always! What did any one want with poetry who could be out as long as she pleased with the old night, and the stars gray with glory, and the wind wandering everywhere and knowing all things! Here it was different! Here she could not do without books! Where the things themselves were not, she wanted help to think about them! And that help was in books, and Richard could teach her how to get at it!

It was indeed amazing that one who had read so little should have so good, although so imperfect a notion of what books could do. Just so much a few cheap novels had sufficed to reveal to her! But then Barbara was herself a world of uncrystallized poetry. What is feeling but poetry in a gaseous condition? What is fine thought but poetry in a fluid condition? What is thought solidified, but fine prose; thought crystallized, but verse?

"Here," she would say, but later than the period of which I am now writing, "where the weather is often so stupid that it won't do anything, won't be weather at all; will neither blow, nor rain, nor freeze, nor shine, you need books to make a world inside you—to take you away, as by the spell of a magician or on the wings of an eagle, from the walls and the nothingness, into a world where one either finds everything or wants nothing." She had yet to learn that books themselves are but weak ministers, that the spirit dwelling in them must lead back to him who gave it or die; that they are but windows, which, if they look not out on the eternal spaces, will themselves be blotted out by the darkness.

To end her story, she told Richard that, since their coming to this country, her mother's favourite had died. She nearly went mad, she said, and had never been like herself again. For not only had her opposition to her husband deepened into hate, but—here, to Richard's amusement when he found on what the reverential change was attendant, Barbara lowered her voice—she really and actually hated God also. "Isn't it awful?" Barbara said; but meeting no response in the honest eyes of Richard, she dropped hers, and went on.

"I have heard her say the wildest and wickedest things, careless whether any one was near. I think she must at times be out of her mind! One day not long ago I saw her shake her fist as high

as she could reach above her head, looking up with an expression of rage and reproach and defiance that was terrible. Had we been in New Zealand, I should not have wondered so much: there are devils going about there. Nobody knows of any here, but it was here they got into my mother, and made her defy God. She does it straight out in church. That is why I always sit in the poor seats, and not in the little gallery that belongs to my father.—Have you ever been to our church, Mr. Tuke?"

Richard told her he never went to church except when his mother wanted him to go with her.

"My mother goes twice every Sunday; but what do you think she is doing all the time? The gallery has curtains about it, but she never allows those in front to be drawn, and anybody in the opposite gallery can see into it quite well, and the clergyman when he is in the pulpit: she lies there on a couch, in a nest of pillows, reading a novel, a yellow French one generally, just as if she were in her own room! She knows the clergyman sees her, and that is why she does it."

"She disapproves of the whole thing!" said Richard.

"She used to like church well enough."

"She must mean to protest, else why should she go? Has she any quarrel with the clergyman?"

"None that I know of."

"What then do you think she means by going and not joining in? Why is she present and not taking part?"

"I believe she does it just to let God know she is not pleased with him. She thinks he has treated her cruelly and tyrannically, and she will not pretend to worship him. She wants to show him how bitterly she feels the way he has turned against her. She used to say prayers to him; she will do so no more! and she goes to church that he may see she won't."

The absurdity of the thing struck Richard sharply, but he feared to hurt the girl and lose her confidence.

"Her behaviour is only a kind of insolent prayer!" he said. "—Has the clergyman ever spoken to her about it?"

"I don't think he has. He spoke to me, but when I said he ought to speak to her, he did not seem to see it. *I* should speak to her fast enough if it were *my* church!"

"I dare say he thinks her mind is affected, and fears to make her worse," said Richard. "But he might, I think, persuade her that, as she is not on good terms with the person who lives in the church, she ought to stay away."

Barbara looked at him with doubtful inquiry, but Richard went on.

"What sort of a man is the clergyman?" he asked.

"I don't know. He seems always thinking about things, and never finding out. I suppose he is stupid!"

"That does not necessarily follow," said Richard with a smile, reflecting how hard it would be for the man to answer one of a thousand questions he might put to him in connection with his trade. "Your poor mother must be very unhappy!" he added.

"She may well be! I am no comfort to her. She never heeds me; or she tells me to go and amuse myself—she is busy. My father has his twin, and poor mamma has nobody!"

CHAPTER XVII. *BARBARA AND OTHERS*

At this point, Barbara's friend came into the room, and they went away together.

Theodora, so named by her mother because she was born on a Sunday, was a very different girl from Barbara. Nominally friends, neither understood the other. Theodora was the best of the family, but that did not suffice to make her interesting. She was short, stout, rather clumsy, with an honest, thick-featured face, and entirely without guile. Even when she saw it, she could not believe it there. She had not much sympathy, but was very kind. She never hesitated to do what she was sure was right; but then, except for rules, many of them far from right themselves, she would have been almost always in doubt. Anything in the shape of a rule, she received as an angel from heaven. If all the rules she obeyed had been right, and she had seen the right in them, she would have been making rapid progress; as it was, her progress was very slow. How Barbara and she managed to entertain each other, I find it hard to think; but all forms of innocent humanity must have much in common. A contrast, nevertheless, the two must have presented to any power able to read them. Barbara was like a heath of thyme and wild roses and sudden winds; Theodora like a Dutch garden without its flowers. They never quarrelled. I suspect they did not come near enough to quarrel.

Barbara left Richard almost bewitched, and considerably perplexed. He had never seen anything like her. No more had most people that met her. She seemed of another nature from his, a sort of sylph or salamander, yet, in simplest human fashion, she had come quite close to him. She had indeed brought to bear upon him, without knowing it, that humbling and elevating power which ideal womankind has always had, and will eternally have upon genuine manhood. There was an airiness about her, yet a reality, a lightness, yet a force, a readiness, a life, such as he could never have imagined. She was a revelation unrevealed—a presence lovely but incredible, suggesting facts and relations which the commonplace in him said could not exist. The vision was, to use a favourite but pagan phrase, "too good to be true." Richard's knowledge of girls was small indeed, but he had now enough to make his first comparison: Alice was like China, Barbara like Venetian glass. He thought there was something in Alice if he could only get at it: he feared there was nothing in Barbara to get at. For one thing, how could she have such parents and take it so lightly!

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