

**CHARLES
KINGSLEY**

YEAST: A
PROBLEM

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Yeast: a Problem

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PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION

This book was written nearly twelve years ago; and so many things have changed since then, that it is hardly fair to send it into the world afresh, without some notice of the improvement—if such there be—which has taken place meanwhile in those southern counties of England, with which alone this book deals.

I believe that things are improved. Twelve years more of the new Poor Law have taught the labouring men greater self-help and independence; I hope that those virtues may not be destroyed in them once more, by the boundless and indiscriminate almsgiving which has become the fashion of the day, in most parishes where there are resident gentry. If half the money which is now given away in different forms to the agricultural poor could be spent in making their dwellings fit for honest men to live in, then life, morals, and poor-rates, would be saved to an immense amount. But as I do not see how to carry out such a plan, I have no right to complain of others for not seeing.

Meanwhile cottage improvement, and sanitary reform, throughout the country districts, are going on at a fearfully slow rate. Here and there high-hearted landlords, like the Duke of Bedford, are doing their duty like men; but in general, the apathy of the educated classes is most disgraceful.

But the labourers, during the last ten years, are altogether better off. Free trade has increased their food, without lessening their employment. The politician who wishes to know the effect on agricultural life of that wise and just measure, may find it in Mr. Grey of Dilston's answers to the queries of the French Government. The country parson will not need to seek so far. He will see it (if he be an observant man) in the faces and figures of his school-children. He will see a rosier, fatter, bigger-boned race growing up, which bids fair to surpass in bulk the puny and ill-fed generation of 1815-45, and equal, perhaps, in thew and sinew, to the men who saved Europe in the old French war.

If it should be so (as God grant it may), there is little fear but that the labouring men of England will find their aristocracy able to lead them in the battle-field, and to develop the agriculture of the land at home, even better than did their grandfathers of the old war time.

To a thoughtful man, no point of the social horizon is more full of light, than the altered temper of the young gentlemen. They have their faults and follies still—for when will young blood be other than hot blood? But when one finds, more and more, swearing banished from the hunting-field, foul songs from the universities, drunkenness and gambling from the barracks; when one finds everywhere, whether at college, in camp, or by the cover-side, more and more, young men desirous to learn their duty as Englishmen, and if possible to do it; when one hears their altered tone toward the middle classes, and that word 'snob' (thanks very much to Mr. Thackeray) used by them in its true sense, without regard of rank; when one watches, as at Aldershott, the care and kindness of officers toward their men; and over and above all this, when one finds in every profession (in that of the soldier as much as any) young men who are not only 'in the world,' but (in religious phraseology) 'of the world,' living God-fearing, virtuous, and useful lives, as Christian men should: then indeed one looks forward with hope and confidence to the day when these men shall settle down in life, and become, as holders of the land, the leaders of agricultural progress, and the guides and guardians of the labouring man.

I am bound to speak of the farmer, as I know him in the South of England. In the North he is a man of altogether higher education and breeding: but he is, even in the South, a much better man than it is the fashion to believe him. No doubt, he has given heavy cause of complaint. He was demoralised, as surely, if not as deeply, as his own labourers, by the old Poor Law. He was bewildered—to use the mildest term—by promises of Protection from men who knew better. But his worst fault

after all has been, that young or old, he has copied his landlord too closely, and acted on his maxims and example. And now that his landlord is growing wiser, he is growing wiser too. Experience of the new Poor Law, and experience of Free-trade, are helping him to show himself what he always was at heart, an honest Englishman. All his brave persistence and industry, his sturdy independence and self-help, and last, but not least, his strong sense of justice, and his vast good-nature, are coming out more and more, and working better and better upon the land and the labourer; while among his sons I see many growing up brave, manly, prudent young men, with a steadily increasing knowledge of what is required of them, both as manufacturers of food, and employers of human labour.

The country clergy, again, are steadily improving. I do not mean merely in morality—for public opinion now demands that as a *sine qua non*—but in actual efficiency. Every fresh appointment seems to me, on the whole, a better one than the last. They are gaining more and more the love and respect of their flocks; they are becoming more and more centres of civilisation and morality to their parishes; they are working, for the most part, very hard, each in his own way; indeed their great danger is, that they should trust too much in that outward ‘business’ work which they do so heartily; that they should fancy that the administration of schools and charities is their chief business, and literally leave the Word of God to serve tables. Would that we clergymen could learn (some of us are learning already) that influence over our people is not to be gained by perpetual interference in their private affairs, too often inquisitorial, irritating, and degrading to both parties, but by showing ourselves their personal friends, of like passions with them. Let a priest do that. Let us make our people feel that we speak to them, and feel to them, as men to men, and then the more cottages we enter the better. If we go into our neighbours’ houses only as judges, inquisitors, or at best gossips, we are best—as too many are—at home in our studies. Would, too, that we would recollect this—that our duty is, among other things, to preach the Gospel; and consider firstly whether what we commonly preach be any Gospel or good news at all, and not rather the worst possible news; and secondly, whether we preach at all; whether our sermons are not utterly unintelligible (being delivered in an unknown tongue), and also of a dulness not to be surpassed; and whether, therefore, it might not be worth our while to spend a little time in studying the English tongue, and the art of touching human hearts and minds.

But to return: this improved tone (if the truth must be told) is owing, far more than people themselves are aware, to the triumphs of those liberal principles, for which the Whigs have fought for the last forty years, and of that sounder natural philosophy of which they have been the consistent patrons. England has become Whig; and the death of the Whig party is the best proof of its victory.

It has ceased to exist, because it has done its work; because its principles are accepted by its ancient enemies; because the political economy and the physical science, which grew up under its patronage, are leavening the thoughts and acts of Anglican and of Evangelical alike, and supplying them with methods for carrying out their own schemes. Lord Shaftesbury’s truly noble speech on Sanitary Reform at Liverpool is a striking proof of the extent to which the Evangelical leaders have given in their adherence to those scientific laws, the original preachers of which have been called by his Lordship’s party heretics and infidels, materialists and rationalists. Be it so. Provided truth be preached, what matter who preaches it? Provided the leaven of sound inductive science leaven the whole lump, what matter who sets it working? Better, perhaps, because more likely to produce practical success, that these novel truths should be instilled into the minds of the educated classes by men who share somewhat in their prejudices and superstitions, and doled out to them in such measure as will not terrify or disgust them. The child will take its medicine from the nurse’s hand trustfully enough, when it would scream itself into convulsions at the sight of the doctor, and so do itself more harm than the medicine would do it good. The doctor meanwhile (unless he be one of Hesiod’s ‘fools, who know not how much more half is than the whole’) is content enough to see any part of his prescription got down, by any hands whatsoever.

But there is another cause for the improved tone of the Landlord class, and of the young men of what is commonly called the aristocracy; and that is, a growing moral earnestness; which is in great

part owing (that justice may be done on all sides) to the Anglican movement. How much soever Neo-Anglicanism may have failed as an Ecclesiastical or Theological system; how much soever it may have proved itself, both by the national dislike of it, and by the defection of all its master-minds, to be radically un-English, it has at least awakened hundreds, perhaps thousands, of cultivated men and women to ask themselves whether God sent them into the world merely to eat, drink, and be merry, and to have 'their souls saved' upon the Spurgeon method, after they die; and has taught them an answer to that question not unworthy of English Christians.

The Anglican movement, when it dies out, will leave behind at least a legacy of grand old authors disinterred, of art, of music; of churches too, schools, cottages, and charitable institutions, which will form so many centres of future civilisation, and will entitle it to the respect, if not to the allegiance, of the future generation. And more than this; it has sown in the hearts of young gentlemen and young ladies seed which will not perish; which, though it may develop into forms little expected by those who sowed it, will develop at least into a virtue more stately and reverent, more chivalrous and self-sacrificing, more genial and human, than can be learnt from that religion of the Stock Exchange, which reigned triumphant—for a year and a day—in the popular pulpits.

I have said, that Neo-Anglicanism has proved a failure, as seventeenth-century Anglicanism did. The causes of that failure this book has tried to point out: and not one word which is spoken of it therein, but has been drawn from personal and too-intimate experience. But now—peace to its ashes. Is it so great a sin, to have been dazzled by the splendour of an impossible ideal? Is it so great a sin, to have had courage and conduct enough to attempt the enforcing of that ideal, in the face of the prejudices of a whole nation? And if that ideal was too narrow for the English nation, and for the modern needs of mankind, is that either so great a sin? Are other extant ideals, then, so very comprehensive? Does Mr. Spurgeon, then, take so much broader or nobler views of the capacities and destinies of his race, than that great genius, John Henry Newman? If the world cannot answer that question now, it will answer it promptly enough in another five-and-twenty years. And meanwhile let not the party and the system which has conquered boast itself too loudly. Let it take warning by the Whigs; and suspect (as many a looker-on more than suspects) that its triumph may be, as with the Whigs, its ruin; and that, having done the work for which it was sent into the world, there may only remain for it, to decay and die.

And die it surely will, if (as seems too probable) there succeeds to this late thirty years of peace a thirty years of storm.

For it has lost all hold upon the young, the active, the daring. It has sunk into a compromise between originally opposite dogmas. It has become a religion for Jacob the smooth man; adapted to the maxims of the market, and leaving him full liberty to supplant his brother by all methods lawful in that market. No longer can it embrace and explain all known facts of God and man, in heaven and earth, and satisfy utterly such minds and hearts as those of Cromwell's Ironsides, or the Scotch Covenanters, or even of a Newton and a Colonel Gardiner. Let it make the most of its Hedley Vicars and its Havelock, and sound its own trumpet as loudly as it can, in sounding theirs; for they are the last specimens of heroism which it is likely to beget—if indeed it did in any true sense beget them, and if their gallantry was really owing to their creed, and not to the simple fact of their being—like others—English gentlemen. Well may Jacob's chaplains cackle in delighted surprise over their noble memories, like geese who have unwittingly hatched a swan!

But on Esau in general:—on poor rough Esau, who sails Jacob's ships, digs Jacob's mines, founds Jacob's colonies, pours out his blood for him in those wars which Jacob himself has stirred up—while his sleek brother sits at home in his counting-house, enjoying at once 'the means of grace' and the produce of Esau's labour—on him Jacob's chaplains have less and less influence; for him they have less and less good news. He is afraid of them, and they of him; the two do not comprehend one another, sympathise with one another; they do not even understand one another's speech. The same social and moral gulf has opened between them, as parted the cultivated and wealthy Pharisee

of Jerusalem from the rough fishers of the Galilæan Lake: and yet the Galilæan fishers (if we are to trust Josephus and the Gospels) were trusty, generous, affectionate—and it was not from among the Pharisees, it is said, that the Apostles were chosen.

Be that as it may, Esau has a birthright; and this book, like all books which I have ever written, is written to tell him so; and, I trust, has not been written in vain. But it is not this book, or any man's book, or any man at all, who can tell Esau the whole truth about himself, his powers, his duty, and his God. Woman must do it, and not man. His mother, his sister, the maid whom he may love; and failing all these (as they often will fail him, in the wild wandering life which he must live), those human angels of whom it is written—'The barren hath many more children than she who has an husband.' And such will not be wanting. As long as England can produce at once two such women as Florence Nightingale and Catherine Marsh, there is good hope that Esau will not be defrauded of his birthright; and that by the time that Jacob comes crouching to him, to defend him against the enemies who are near at hand, Esau, instead of borrowing Jacob's religion, may be able to teach Jacob his; and the two brothers face together the superstition and anarchy of Europe, in the strength of a lofty and enlightened Christianity, which shall be thoroughly human, and therefore thoroughly divine.

C. K.

February 17th, 1859.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

This little tale was written between two and three years ago, in the hope that it might help to call the attention of wiser and better men than I am, to the questions which are now agitating the minds of the rising generation, and to the absolute necessity of solving them at once and earnestly, unless we would see the faith of our forefathers crumble away beneath the combined influence of new truths which are fancied to be incompatible with it, and new mistakes as to its real essence. That this can be done I believe and know: if I had not believed it, I would never have put pen to paper on the subject.

I believe that the ancient Creed, the Eternal Gospel, will stand, and conquer, and prove its might in this age, as it has in every other for eighteen hundred years, by claiming, and subduing, and organising those young anarchic forces, which now, unconscious of their parentage, rebel against Him to whom they owe their being.

But for the time being, the young men and women of our day are fast parting from their parents and each other; the more thoughtful are wandering either towards Rome, towards sheer materialism, or towards an unchristian and unphilosophic spiritualism. Epicurism which, in my eyes, is the worst evil spirit of the three, precisely because it looks at first sight most like an angel of light. The mass, again, are fancying that they are still adhering to the old creeds, the old church, to the honoured patriarchs of English Protestantism. I wish I could agree with them in their belief about themselves.

To me they seem—with a small sprinkling of those noble and cheering exceptions to popular error which are to be found in every age of Christ's church—to be losing most fearfully and rapidly the living spirit of Christianity, and to be, for that very reason, clinging all the more convulsively—and who can blame them?—to the outward letter of it, whether High Church or Evangelical; unconscious, all the while, that they are sinking out of real living belief, into that dead self-deceiving belief-in-believing, which has been always heretofore, and is becoming in England now, the parent of the most blind, dishonest, and pitiless bigotry.

In the following pages I have attempted to show what some at least of the young in these days are really thinking and feeling. I know well that my sketch is inadequate and partial: I have every reason to believe, from the criticisms which I have received since its first publication, that it is, as far as it goes, correct. I put it as a problem. It would be the height of arrogance in me to do more than indicate the direction in which I think a solution may be found. I fear that my elder readers may complain that I have no right to start doubts without answering them. I can only answer,—Would that I had started them! would that I was not seeing them daily around me, under some form or other, in just the very hearts for whom one would most wish the peace and strength of a fixed and healthy faith. To the young, this book can do no harm; for it will put into their minds little but what is there already. To the elder, it may do good; for it may teach some of them, as I earnestly hope, something of the real, but too often utterly unsuspected, state of their own children's minds; something of the reasons of that calamitous estrangement between themselves and those who will succeed them, which is often too painful and oppressive to be confessed to their own hearts! Whatever amount of obloquy this book may bring upon me, I shall think that a light price to pay, if by it I shall have helped, even in a single case, to 'turn the hearts of the parents to the children, and the hearts of the children to the parents, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come,'—as come it surely will, if we persist much longer in substituting denunciation for sympathy, instruction for education, and Pharisaism for the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

1851.

CHAPTER I: THE PHILOSOPHY OF FOX-HUNTING

As this my story will probably run counter to more than one fashion of the day, literary and other, it is prudent to bow to those fashions wherever I honestly can; and therefore to begin with a scrap of description.

The edge of a great fox-cover; a flat wilderness of low leafless oaks fortified by a long, dreary, thorn capped clay ditch, with sour red water oozing out at every yard; a broken gate leading into a straight wood ride, ragged with dead grasses and black with fallen leaves, the centre mashed into a quagmire by innumerable horsehoofs; some forty red coats and some four black; a sprinkling of young-farmers, resplendent in gold buttons and green; a pair of sleek drab stable-keepers, showing off horses for sale; the surgeon of the union, in Mackintosh and antigropelos; two holiday schoolboys with trousers strapped down to bursting point, like a penny steamer's safety-valve; a midshipman, the only merry one in the field, bumping about on a fretting, sweating hack, with its nose a foot above its ears; and Lancelot Smith, who then kept two good horses, and 'rode forward' as a fine young fellow of three-and-twenty who can afford it, and 'has nothing else to do,' has a very good right to ride.

But what is a description, without a sketch of the weather?—In these Pantheist days especially, when a hero or heroine's moral state must entirely depend on the barometer, and authors talk as if Christians were cabbages, and a man's soul as well as his lungs might be saved by sea-breezes and sunshine; or his character developed by wearing guano in his shoes, and training himself against a south wall—we must have a weather description, though, as I shall presently show, one in flat contradiction of the popular theory. Luckily for our information, Lancelot was very much given to watch both the weather and himself, and had indeed, while in his teens, combined the two in a sort of a soul-almanack on the principles just mentioned—somewhat in this style:—

'Monday, 21st.—Wind S.W., bright sun, mercury at 30½ inches. Felt my heart expanded towards the universe. Organs of veneration and benevolence pleasingly excited; and gave a shilling to a tramp. An inexpressible joy bounded through every vein, and the soft air breathed purity and self-sacrifice through my soul. As I watched the beetles, those children of the sun, who, as divine Shelley says, "laden with light and odour, pass over the gleam of the living grass," I gained an Eden-glimpse of the pleasures of virtue.

'N.B. Found the tramp drunk in a ditch. I could not have degraded myself on such a day—ah! how could he?

'Tuesday, 22d.—Barometer rapidly falling. Heavy clouds in the south-east. My heart sank into gloomy forebodings. Read *Manfred*, and doubted whether I should live long. The laden weight of destiny seemed to crush down my aching forehead, till the thunderstorm burst, and peace was restored to my troubled soul.'

This was very bad; but to do justice to Lancelot, he had grown out of it at the time when my story begins. He was now in the fifth act of his 'Werterean' stage; that sentimental measles, which all clever men must catch once in their lives, and which, generally, like the physical measles, if taken early, settles their constitution for good or evil; if taken late, goes far towards killing them. Lancelot had found Byron and Shelley pall on his taste and commenced devouring Bulwer and worshipping *Ernest Maltravers*. He had left Bulwer for old ballads and romances, and Mr. Carlyle's reviews; was next alternately chivalry-mad; and Germany-mad; was now reading hard at physical science; and on the whole, trying to become a great man, without any very clear notion of what a great man ought to be. Real education he never had had. Bred up at home under his father, a rich merchant, he had gone to college with a large stock of general information, and a particular mania for dried plants, fossils, butterflies, and sketching, and some such creed as this:—

That he was very clever.

That he ought to make his fortune.

That a great many things were very pleasant—beautiful things among the rest.
That it was a fine thing to be ‘superior,’ gentleman-like, generous, and courageous.
That a man ought to be religious.

And left college with a good smattering of classics and mathematics, picked up in the intervals of boat-racing and hunting, and much the same creed as he brought with him, except in regard to the last article. The scenery-and-natural-history mania was now somewhat at a discount. He had discovered a new natural object, including in itself all—more than all—yet found beauties and wonders—woman!

Draw, draw the veil and weep, guardian angel! if such there be. What was to be expected?

Pleasant things were pleasant—there was no doubt of that, whatever else might be doubtful. He had read Byron by stealth; he had been flogged into reading Ovid and Tibullus; and commanded by his private tutor to read Martial and Juvenal ‘for the improvement of his style.’ All conversation on the subject of love had been prudishly avoided, as usual, by his parents and teacher. The parts of the Bible which spoke of it had been always kept out of his sight. Love had been to him, practically, ground tabooed and ‘carnal.’ What was to be expected? Just what happened—if woman’s beauty had nothing holy in it, why should his fondness for it? Just what happens every day—that he had to sow his wild oats for himself, and eat the fruit thereof, and the dirt thereof also.

O fathers! fathers! and you, clergymen, who monopolise education! either tell boys the truth about love, or do not put into their hands, without note or comment, the foul devil’s lies about it, which make up the mass of the Latin poets—and then go, fresh from teaching Juvenal and Ovid, to declaim at Exeter Hall against poor Peter Dens’s well-meaning prurience! Had we not better take the beam out of our own eye before we meddle with the mote in the Jesuit’s?

But where is my description of the weather all this time?

I cannot, I am sorry to say, give any very cheerful account of the weather that day. But what matter? Are Englishmen hedge-gnats, who only take their sport when the sun shines? Is it not, on the contrary, symbolical of our national character, that almost all our field amusements are wintry ones? Our fowling, our hunting, our punt-shooting (pastime for Hymir himself and the frost giants)—our golf and skating,—our very cricket, and boat-racing, and jack and grayling fishing, carried on till we are fairly frozen out. We are a stern people, and winter suits us. Nature then retires modestly into the background, and spares us the obtrusive glitter of summer, leaving us to think and work; and therefore it happens that in England, it may be taken as a general rule, that whenever all the rest of the world is in-doors, we are out and busy, and on the whole, the worse the day, the better the deed.

The weather that day, the first day Lancelot ever saw his beloved, was truly national. A silent, dim, distanceless, steaming, rotting day in March. The last brown oak-leaf which had stood out the winter’s frost, spun and quivered plump down, and then lay; as if ashamed to have broken for a moment the ghastly stillness, like an awkward guest at a great dumb dinner-party. A cold suck of wind just proved its existence, by toothaches on the north side of all faces. The spiders having been weather-bewitched the night before, had unanimously agreed to cover every brake and brier with gossamer-cradles, and never a fly to be caught in them; like Manchester cotton-spinners madly glutting the markets in the teeth of ‘no demand.’ The steam crawled out of the dank turf, and reeked off the flanks and nostrils of the shivering horses, and clung with clammy paws to frosted hats and dripping boughs. A soulless, skylless, catarrhal day, as if that bustling dowager, old mother Earth—what with match-making in spring, and *fêtes champêtres* in summer, and dinner-giving in autumn—was fairly worn out, and put to bed with the influenza, under wet blankets and the cold-water cure.

There sat Lancelot by the cover-side, his knees aching with cold and wet, thanking his stars that he was not one of the whippers-in who were lashing about in the dripping cover, laying up for themselves, in catering for the amusement of their betters, a probable old age of bed-ridden torture, in the form of rheumatic gout. Not that he was at all happy—indeed, he had no reason to be so; for, first, the hounds would not find; next, he had left half-finished at home a review article on the

Silurian System, which he had solemnly promised an abject and beseeching editor to send to post that night; next, he was on the windward side of the cover, and dare not light a cigar; and lastly, his mucous membrane in general was not in the happiest condition, seeing that he had been dining the evening before with Mr. Vaurien of Rottenpalings, a young gentleman of a convivial and melodious turn of mind, who sang—and played also—as singing men are wont—in more senses than one, and had ‘ladies and gentlemen’ down from town to stay with him; and they sang and played too; and so somehow between vingt-un and champagne-punch, Lancelot had not arrived at home till seven o’clock that morning, and was in a fit state to appreciate the feelings of our grandfathers, when, after the third bottle of port, they used to put the black silk tights into their pockets, slip on the leathers and boots, and ride the crop-tailed hack thirty miles on a winter’s night, to meet the hounds in the next county by ten in the morning. They are ‘gone down to Hades, even many stalwart souls of heroes,’ with John Warde of Squerries at their head—the fathers of the men who conquered at Waterloo; and we their degenerate grandsons are left instead, with puny arms, and polished leather boots, and a considerable taint of hereditary disease, to sit in club-houses, and celebrate the progress of the species.

Whether Lancelot or his horse, under these depressing circumstances, fell asleep; or whether thoughts pertaining to such a life, and its fitness for a clever and ardent young fellow in the nineteenth century, became gradually too painful, and had to be peremptorily shaken off, this deponent sayeth not; but certainly, after five-and-thirty minutes of idleness and shivering, Lancelot opened his eyes with a sudden start, and struck spurs into his hunter without due cause shown; whereat Shiver-the-timbers, who was no Griselda in temper—(Lancelot had bought him out of the Pytchley for half his value, as unrideably vicious, when he had killed a groom, and fallen backwards on a rough-rider, the first season after he came up from Horncastle)—responded by a furious kick or two, threw his head up, put his foot into a drain, and sprawled down all but on his nose, pitching Lancelot unawares shamefully on the pommel of his saddle. A certain fatality, by the bye, had lately attended all Lancelot’s efforts to shine; he never bought a new coat without tearing it mysteriously next day, or tried to make a joke without bursting out coughing in the middle . . . and now the whole field were looking on at his mishap; between disgust and the start he turned almost sick, and felt the blood rush into his cheeks and forehead as he heard a shout of coarse jovial laughter burst out close to him, and the old master of the hounds, Squire Lavington, roared aloud—

‘A pretty sportsman you are, Mr. Smith, to fall asleep by the cover-side and let your horse down—and your pockets, too! What’s that book on the ground? Sapping and studying still? I let nobody come out with my hounds with their pocket full of learning. Hand it up here, Tom; we’ll see what it is. French, as I am no scholar! Translate for us, Colonel Bracebridge!’

And, amid shouts of laughter, the gay Guardsman read out,—

‘St. Francis de Sales: Introduction to a Devout Life.’

Poor Lancelot! Wishing himself fathoms under-ground, ashamed of his book, still more ashamed of himself for his shame, he had to sit there ten physical seconds, or spiritual years, while the colonel solemnly returned him the book, complimenting him on the proofs of its purifying influence which he had given the night before, in helping to throw the turnpike-gate into the river.

But ‘all things do end,’ and so did this; and the silence of the hounds also; and a faint but knowing whimper drove St. Francis out of all heads, and Lancelot began to stalk slowly with a dozen horsemen up the wood-ride, to a fitful accompaniment of wandering hound-music, where the choristers were as invisible as nightingales among the thick cover. And hark! just as the book was returned to his pocket, the sweet hubbub suddenly crashed out into one jubilant shriek, and then swept away fainter and fainter among the trees. The walk became a trot—the trot a canter. Then a faint melancholy shout at a distance, answered by a ‘Stole away!’ from the fields; a doleful ‘toot!’ of the horn; the dull thunder of many horsehoofs rolling along the farther woodside. Then red coats, flashing like sparks of fire across the gray gap of mist at the ride’s-mouth, then a whipper-in, bringing up a belated hound, burst into the pathway, smashing and plunging, with shut eyes, through ash-saplings and hassock-

grass; then a fat farmer, sedulously pounding through the mud, was overtaken and bespattered in spite of all his struggles;—until the line streamed out into the wide rushy pasture, startling up pewits and curlews, as horsemen poured in from every side, and cunning old farmers rode off at inexplicable angles to some well-known haunts of pug; and right ahead, chiming and jangling sweet madness, the dappled pack glanced and wavered through the veil of soft grey mist. ‘What’s the use of this hurry?’ growled Lancelot. ‘They will all be back again. I never have the luck to see a run.’

But no; on and on—down the wind and down the vale; and the canter became a gallop, and the gallop a long straining stride; and a hundred horsehoofs crackled like flame among the stubbles, and thundered fetlock-deep along the heavy meadows; and every fence thinned the cavalcade, till the madness began to stir all bloods, and with grim earnest silent faces, the initiated few settled themselves to their work, and with the colonel and Lancelot at their head, ‘took their pleasure sadly, after the manner of their nation,’ as old Froissart has it.

‘Thorough bush, through brier,
Thorough park, through pale;’

till the rolling grass-lands spread out into flat black open fallows, crossed with grassy baulks, and here and there a long melancholy line of tall elms, while before them the high chalk ranges gleamed above the mist like a vast wall of emerald enamelled with snow, and the winding river glittering at their feet.

‘A polite fox!’ observed the colonel. ‘He’s leading the squire straight home to Whitford, just in time for dinner.’

* * * * *

They were in the last meadow, with the stream before them. A line of struggling heads in the swollen and milky current showed the hounds’ opinion of Reynard’s course. The sportsmen galloped off towards the nearest bridge. Bracebridge looked back at Lancelot, who had been keeping by his side in sulky rivalry, following him successfully through all manner of desperate places, and more and more angry with himself and the guiltless colonel, because he only followed, while the colonel’s quicker and unembarrassed wit, which lived wholly in the present moment, saw long before Lancelot, ‘how to cut out his work,’ in every field.

‘I shan’t go round,’ quietly observed the colonel.

‘Do you fancy I shall?’ growled Lancelot, who took for granted—poor thin-skinned soul! that the words were meant as a hit at himself.

‘You’re a brace of geese,’ politely observed the old squire; ‘and you’ll find it out in rheumatic fever. There—“one fool makes many!” You’ll kill Smith before you’re done, colonel!’ and the old man wheeled away up the meadow, as Bracebridge shouted after him,—

‘Oh, he’ll make a fine rider—in time!’

‘In time!’ Lancelot could have knocked the unsuspecting colonel down for the word. It just expressed the contrast, which had fretted him ever since he began to hunt with the Whitford Priors hounds. The colonel’s long practice and consummate skill in all he took in hand,—his experience of all society, from the prairie Indian to Crockford’s, from the prize-ring to the continental courts,—his varied and ready store of information and anecdote,—the harmony and completeness of the man,—his consistency with his own small ideal, and his consequent apparent superiority everywhere and in everything to the huge awkward Titan-cub, who, though immeasurably beyond Bracebridge in intellect and heart, was still in a state of convulsive dyspepsia, ‘swallowing formulæ,’ and daily well-nigh choked; diseased throughout with that morbid self-consciousness and lust of praise, for

which God prepares, with His elect, a bitter cure. Alas! poor Lancelot! an unlicked bear, 'with all his sorrows before him!'—

'Come along,' quoth Bracebridge, between snatches of a tune, his coolness maddening Lancelot.

'Old Lavington will find us dry clothes, a bottle of port, and a brace of charming daughters, at the Priory. In with you, little Mustang of the prairie! Neck or nothing!'—

And in an instant the small wiry American, and the huge Horncastle-bred hunter, were wallowing and staggering in the yeasty stream, till they floated into a deep reach, and swam steadily down to a low place in the bank. They crossed the stream, passed the Priory Shrubberies, leapt the gate into the park, and then on and upward, called by the unseen Ariel's music before them.—Up, into the hills; past white crumbling chalk-pits, fringed with feathered juniper and tottering ashes, their floors strewn with knolls of fallen soil and vegetation, like wooded islets in a sea of milk.—Up, between steep ridges of tuft crested with black fir-woods and silver beech, and here and there a huge yew standing out alone, the advanced sentry of the forest, with its luscious fretwork of green velvet, like a mountain of Gothic spires and pinnacles, all glittering and steaming as the sun drank up the dew-drops. The lark sprang upward into song, and called merrily to the new-opened sunbeams, while the wreaths and flakes of mist lingered reluctantly about the hollows, and clung with dewy fingers to every knoll and belt of pine.—Up into the labyrinthine bosom of the hills,—but who can describe them? Is not all nature indescribable? every leaf infinite and transcendental? How much more those mighty downs, with their enormous sheets of spotless turf, where the dizzy eye loses all standard of size and distance before the awful simplicity, the delicate vastness, of those grand curves and swells, soft as the outlines of a Greek Venus, as if the great goddess-mother Hertha had laid herself down among the hills to sleep, her Titan limbs wrapt in a thin veil of silvery green.

Up, into a vast amphitheatre of sward, whose walls banked out the narrow sky above. And here, in the focus of the huge ring, an object appeared which stirred strange melancholy in Lancelot,—a little chapel, ivy-grown, girded with a few yews, and elders, and grassy graves. A climbing rose over the porch, and iron railings round the churchyard, told of human care; and from the graveyard itself burst up one of those noble springs known as winter-bournes in the chalk ranges, which, awakened in autumn from the abysses to which it had shrunk during the summer's drought, was hurrying down upon its six months' course, a broad sheet of oily silver over a temporary channel of smooth greensward.

The hounds had checked in the woods behind; now they poured down the hillside, so close together 'that you might have covered them with a sheet,' straight for the little chapel.

A saddened tone of feeling spread itself through Lancelot's heart. There were the everlasting hills around, even as they had grown and grown for countless ages, beneath the still depths of the primeval chalk ocean, in the milky youth of this great English land. And here was he, the insect of a day, fox-hunting upon *them*! He felt ashamed, and more ashamed when the inner voice whispered—'Fox-hunting is not the shame—thou art the shame. If thou art the insect of a day, it is thy sin that thou art one.'

And his sadness, foolish as it may seem, grew as he watched a brown speck fleet rapidly up the opposite hill, and heard a gay view-halloo burst from the colonel at his side. The chase lost its charm for him the moment the game was seen. Then vanished that mysterious delight of pursuing an invisible object, which gives to hunting and fishing their unutterable and almost spiritual charm; which made Shakespeare a nightly poacher; Davy and Chantrey the patriarchs of fly-fishing; by which the twelve-foot rod is transfigured into an enchanter's wand, potent over the unseen wonders of the water-world, to 'call up spirits from the vasty deep,' which will really 'come if you do call for them'—at least if the conjuration be orthodox—and they there. That spell was broken by the sight of poor wearied pug, his once gracefully-floating brush all draggled and drooping, as he toiled up the sheep-paths towards the open down above.

But Lancelot's sadness reached its crisis, as he met the hounds just outside the churchyard. Another moment—they had leaped the rails; and there they swept round under the gray wall, leaping and yelling, like Berserk fiends among the frowning tombstones, over the cradles of the quiet dead.

Lancelot shuddered—the thing was not wrong—‘it was no one's fault,’—but there was a ghastly discord in it. Peace and strife, time and eternity—the mad noisy flesh, and the silent immortal spirit,—the frivolous game of life's outside show, and the terrible earnest of its inward abysses, jarred together without and within him. He pulled his horse up violently, and stood as if rooted to the place, gazing at he knew not what.

The hounds caught sight of the fox, burst into one frantic shriek of joy—and then a sudden and ghastly stillness, as, mute and breathless, they toiled up the hillside, gaining on their victim at every stride. The patter of the horsehoofs and the rattle of rolling flints died away above. Lancelot looked up, startled at the silence; laughed aloud, he knew not why, and sat, regardless of his pawing and straining horse, still staring at the chapel and the graves.

On a sudden the chapel-door opened, and a figure, timidly yet loftily stepped out without observing him, and suddenly turning round, met him full, face to face, and stood fixed with surprise as completely as Lancelot himself.

That face and figure, and the spirit which spoke through them, entered his heart at once, never again to leave it. Her features were aquiline and grand, without a shade of harshness; her eyes shone out like twain lakes of still azure, beneath a broad marble cliff of polished forehead; her rich chestnut hair rippled downward round the towering neck. With her perfect masque and queenly figure, and earnest, upward gaze, she might have been the very model from which Raphael conceived his glorious St. Catherine—the ideal of the highest womanly genius, softened into self-forgetfulness by girlish devotion. She was simply, almost coarsely dressed; but a glance told him that she was a lady, by the courtesy of man as well as by the will of God.

They gazed one moment more at each other—but what is time to spirits? With them, as with their Father, ‘one day is as a thousand years.’ But that eye-wedlock was cut short the next instant by the decided interference of the horse, who, thoroughly disgusted at his master's whole conduct, gave a significant shake of his head, and shamming frightened (as both women and horses will do when only cross), commenced a war-dance, which drove Argemone Lavington into the porch, and gave the bewildered Lancelot an excuse for dashing madly up the hill after his companions.

‘What a horrible ugly face!’ said Argemone to herself, ‘but so clever, and so unhappy!’

Blest pity! true mother of that graceless scamp, young Love, who is ashamed of his real pedigree, and swears to this day that he is the child of Venus!—the coxcomb!

* * * * *

[Here, for the sake of the reader, we omit, or rather postpone a long dissertation on the famous Erototheogonic chorus of Aristophanes's Birds, with illustrations taken from all earth and heaven, from the Vedas and Proclus to Jacob Boëhmen and Saint Theresa.]

‘The dichotomy of Lancelot's personality,’ as the Germans would call it, returned as he dashed on. His understanding was trying to ride, while his spirit was left behind with Argemone. Hence loose reins and a looser seat. He rolled about like a tipsy man, holding on, in fact, far more by his spurs than by his knees, to the utter infuriation of Shiver-the-timbers, who kicked and snorted over the down like one of Mephistopheles's Demon-steeds. They had mounted the hill—the deer fled before them in terror—they neared the park palings. In the road beyond them the hounds were just killing their fox, struggling and growling in fierce groups for the red gobbets of fur, a panting, steaming ring of horses round them. Half a dozen voices hailed him as he came up.

‘Where have you been?’ ‘He'll tumble off!’ ‘He's had a fall!’ ‘No he hasn't!’ ‘Ware hounds, man alive!’ ‘He'll break his neck!’

‘He has broken it, at last!’ shouted the colonel, as Shiver-the-timbers rushed at the high pales, out of breath, and blind with rage. Lancelot saw and heard nothing till he was awakened from his dream by the long heave of the huge brute’s shoulder, and the maddening sensation of sweeping through the air over the fence. He started, checked the curb, the horse threw up his head, fulfilling his name by driving his knees like a battering-ram against the pales—the top-bar bent like a withe, flew out into a hundred splinters, and man and horse rolled over headlong into the hard flint-road.

For one long sickening second Lancelot watched the blue sky between his own knees. Then a crash as if a shell had burst in his face—a horrible grind—a sheet of flame—and the blackness of night. Did you ever feel it, reader?

When he awoke, he found himself lying in bed, with Squire Lavington sitting by him. There was real sorrow in the old man’s face, ‘Come to himself!’ and a great joyful oath rolled out. ‘The boldest rider of them all! I wouldn’t have lost him for a dozen ready-made spick and span Colonel Bracebridges!’

‘Quite right, squire!’ answered a laughing voice from behind the curtain. ‘Smith has a clear two thousand a year, and I live by my wits!’

CHAPTER II: SPRING YEARNINGS

I heard a story the other day of our most earnest and genial humorist, who is just now proving himself also our most earnest and genial novelist. ‘I like your novel exceedingly,’ said a lady; ‘the characters are so natural—all but the baronet, and he surely is overdrawn: it is impossible to find such coarseness in his rank of life!’

The artist laughed. ‘And that character,’ said he, ‘is almost the only exact portrait in the whole book.’

So it is. People do not see the strange things which pass them every day. ‘The romance of real life’ is only one to the romantic spirit. And then they set up for critics, instead of pupils; as if the artist’s business was not just to see what they cannot see—to open their eyes to the harmonies and the discords, the miracles and the absurdities, which seem to them one uniform gray fog of commonplaces.

Then let the reader believe, that whatsoever is commonplace in my story is my own invention.

Whatsoever may seem extravagant or startling is most likely to be historic fact, else I should not have dared to write it down, finding God’s actual dealings here much too wonderful to dare to invent many fresh ones for myself.

Lancelot, who had had a severe concussion of the brain and a broken leg, kept his bed for a few weeks, and his room for a few more. Colonel Bracebridge installed himself at the Priory, and nursed him with indefatigable good-humour and few thanks. He brought Lancelot his breakfast before hunting, described the run to him when he returned, read him to sleep, told him stories of grizzly bear and buffalo-hunts, made him laugh in spite of himself at extempore comic medleys, kept his tables covered with flowers from the conservatory, warmed his chocolate, and even his bed.

Nothing came amiss to him, and he to nothing. Lancelot longed at first every hour to be rid of him, and eyed him about the room as a bulldog does the monkey who rides him. In his dreams he was Sinbad the Sailor, and Bracebridge the Old Man of the Sea; but he could not hold out against the colonel’s merry bustling kindness, and the almost womanish tenderness of his nursing. The ice thawed rapidly; and one evening it split up altogether, when Bracebridge, who was sitting drawing by Lancelot’s sofa, instead of amusing himself with the ladies below, suddenly threw his pencil into the fire, and broke out, *à propos de rien*—

‘What a strange pair we are, Smith! I think you just the best fellow I ever met, and you hate me like poison—you can’t deny it.’

There was something in the colonel’s tone so utterly different from his usual courtly and measured speech, that Lancelot was taken completely by surprise, and stammered out,—

‘I—I—I—no—no. I know I am very foolish—ungrateful. But I do hate you,’ he said, with a sudden impulse, ‘and I’ll tell you why.’

‘Give me your hand,’ quoth the colonel: ‘I like that. Now we shall see our way with each other, at least.’

‘Because,’ said Lancelot slowly, ‘because you are cleverer than I, readier than I, superior to me in every point.’

The colonel laughed, not quite merrily. Lancelot went on, holding down his shaggy brows.

‘I am a brute and an ass!—And yet I do not like to tell you so. For if I am an ass, what are you?’

‘Heyday!’

‘Look here.—I am wasting my time and brains on ribaldry, but I am worth nothing better—at least, I think so at times; but you, who can do anything you put your hand to, what business have you, in the devil’s name, to be throwing yourself away on gimcracks and fox-hunting foolery? Heavens!

If I had your talents, I’d be—I’d make a name for myself before I died, if I died to make it.’ The

colonel griped his hand hard, rose, and looked out of the window for a few minutes. There was a dead, brooding silence, till he turned to Lancelot,—

‘Mr. Smith, I thank you for your honesty, but good advice may come too late. I am no saint, and God only knows how much less of one I may become; but mark my words,—if you are ever tempted by passion, and vanity, and fine ladies, to form *liaisons*, as the Jezebels call them, snares, and nets, and labyrinths of blind ditches, to keep you down through life, stumbling and grovelling, hating yourself and hating the chain to which you cling—in that hour pray—pray as if the devil had you by the throat,—to Almighty God, to help you out of that cursed slough! There is nothing else for it!—pray, I tell you!’

There was a terrible earnestness about the guardsman’s face which could not be mistaken.

Lancelot looked at him for a moment, and then dropped his eyes ashamed, as if he had intruded on the speaker’s confidence by witnessing his emotion.

In a moment the colonel had returned to his smile and his polish.

‘And now, my dear invalid, I must beg your pardon for sermonising. What do you say to a game of *écarté*? We must play for love, or we shall excite ourselves, and scandalise Mrs. Lavington’s piety.’

And the colonel pulled a pack of cards out of his pocket, and seeing that Lancelot was too thoughtful for play, commenced all manner of juggler’s tricks, and chuckled over them like any schoolboy.

‘Happy man!’ thought Lancelot, ‘to have the strength of will which can thrust its thoughts away once and for all.’ No, Lancelot! more happy are they whom God will not allow to thrust their thoughts from them till the bitter draught has done its work.

From that day, however, there was a cordial understanding between the two. They never alluded to the subject; but they had known the bottom of each other’s heart. Lancelot’s sick-room was now pleasant enough, and he drank in daily his new friend’s perpetual stream of anecdote, till March and hunting were past, and April was half over. The old squire came up after dinner regularly (during March he had hunted every day, and slept every evening); and the trio chatted along merrily enough, by the help of whist and backgammon, upon the surface of this little island of life,—which is, like Sinbad’s, after all only the back of a floating whale, ready to dive at any moment.—And then?—

But what was Argemone doing all this time? Argemone was busy in her boudoir (too often a true boudoir to her) among books and statuettes, and dried flowers, fancying herself, and not unfairly, very intellectual. She had four new manias every year; her last winter’s one had been that bottle-and-squirt mania, miscalled chemistry; her spring madness was for the Greek drama. She had devoured Schlegel’s lectures, and thought them divine; and now she was hard at work on Sophocles, with a little help from translations, and thought she understood him every word. Then she was somewhat High-Church in her notions, and used to go up every Wednesday and Friday to the chapel in the hills, where Lancelot had met her, for an hour’s mystic devotion, set off by a little graceful asceticism. As for Lancelot, she never thought of him but as an empty-headed fox-hunter who had met with his deserts; and the brilliant accounts which the all smoothing colonel gave at dinner of Lancelot’s physical well doing and agreeable conversation only made her set him down the sooner as a twin clever-do-nothing to the despised Bracebridge, whom she hated for keeping her father in a roar of laughter.

But her sister, little Honoria, had all the while been busy messing and cooking with her own hands for the invalid; and almost fell in love with the colonel for his watchful kindness. And here a word about Honoria, to whom Nature, according to her wont with sisters, had given almost everything which Argemone wanted, and denied almost everything which Argemone had, except beauty. And even in that, the many-sided mother had made her a perfect contrast to her sister,—tiny and luscious, dark-eyed and dark-haired; as full of wild simple passion as an Italian, thinking little, except where she felt much—which was, indeed, everywhere; for she lived in a perpetual April-shower of exaggerated sympathy for all suffering, whether in novels or in life; and daily gave the lie to that shallow old calumny, that ‘fictitious sorrows harden the heart to real ones.’

Argemone was almost angry with her sometimes, when she trotted whole days about the village from school to sick-room: perhaps conscience hinted to her that her duty, too, lay rather there than among her luxurious day-dreams. But, alas! though she would have indignantly repelled the accusation of selfishness, yet in self and for self alone she lived; and while she had force of will for any so-called 'self-denial,' and would fast herself cross and stupefied, and quite enjoy kneeling thinly clad and barefoot on the freezing chapel-floor on a winter's morning, yet her fastidious delicacy revolted at sitting, like Honoria, beside the bed of the ploughman's consumptive daughter, in a reeking, stifling, lean-to garret, in which had slept the night before, the father, mother, and two grown-up boys, not to mention a new-married couple, the sick girl, and, alas! her baby. And of such bedchambers there were too many in Whitford Priors.

The first evening that Lancelot came downstairs, Honoria clapped her hands outright for joy as he entered, and ran up and down for ten minutes, fetching and carrying endless unnecessary cushions and footstools; while Argemone greeted him with a cold distant bow, and a fine-lady drawl of carefully commonplace congratulations. Her heart smote her though, as she saw the wan face and the wild, melancholy, moonstruck eyes once more glaring through and through her; she found a comfort in thinking his stare impertinent, drew herself up, and turned away; once, indeed, she could not help listening, as Lancelot thanked Mrs. Lavington for all the pious and edifying books with which the good lady had kept his room rather than his brain furnished for the last six weeks; he was going to say more, but he saw the colonel's quaint foxy eye peering at him, remembered St. Francis de Sales, and held his tongue.

But, as her destiny was, Argemone found herself, in the course of the evening, alone with Lancelot, at the open window. It was a still, hot, heavy night, after long easterly drought; sheet-lightning glimmered on the far horizon over the dark woodlands; the coming shower had sent forward as his herald a whispering draught of fragrant air.

'What a delicious shiver is creeping over those limes!' said Lancelot, half to himself.

The expression struck Argemone: it was the right one, and it seemed to open vistas of feeling and observation in the speaker which she had not suspected. There was a rich melancholy in the voice;—she turned to look at him.

'Ay,' he went on; 'and the same heat which crisps those thirsty leaves must breed the thunder-shower which cools them? But so it is throughout the universe: every yearning proves the existence of an object meant to satisfy it; the same law creates both the giver and the receiver, the longing and its home.'

'If one could but know sometimes what it is for which one is longing!' said Argemone, without knowing that she was speaking from her inmost heart: but thus does the soul involuntarily lay bare its most unspoken depths in the presence of its yet unknown mate, and then shudders at its own *abandon* as it first tries on the wedding garment of Paradise.

Lancelot was not yet past the era at which young geniuses are apt to 'talk book' at little.

'For what?' he answered, flashing up according to his fashion. 'To be;—to be great; to have done one mighty work before we die, and live, unloved or loved, upon the lips of men. For this all long who are not mere apes and wall-flies.'

'So longed the founders of Babel,' answered Argemone, carelessly, to this tirade. She had risen a strange fish, the cunning beauty, and now she was trying her fancy flies over him one by one.

'And were they so far wrong?' answered he. 'From the Babel society sprung our architecture, our astronomy, politics, and colonisation. No doubt the old Hebrew sheiks thought them impious enough, for daring to build brick walls instead of keeping to the good old-fashioned tents, and gathering themselves into a nation instead of remaining a mere family horde; and gave their own account of the myth, just as the antediluvian savages gave theirs of that strange Eden scene, by the common interpretation of which the devil is made the first inventor of modesty. Men are all

conservatives; everything new is impious, till we get accustomed to it; and if it fails, the mob piously discover a divine vengeance in the mischance, from Babel to Catholic Emancipation.’

Lancelot had stuttered horribly during the latter part of this most heterodox outburst, for he had begun to think about himself, and try to say a fine thing, suspecting all the while that it might not be true. But Argemone did not remark the stammering: the new thoughts startled and pained her; but there was a daring grace about them. She tried, as women will, to answer him with arguments, and failed, as women will fail. She was accustomed to lay down the law *à la* Madame de Staël, to *savants* and *non-savants* and be heard with reverence, as a woman should be. But poor truth-seeking Lancelot did not see what sex had to do with logic; he flew at her as if she had been a very barrister, and hunted her mercilessly up and down through all sorts of charming sophisms, as she begged the question, and shifted her ground, as thoroughly right in her conclusion as she was wrong in her reasoning, till she grew quite confused and pettish.—And then Lancelot suddenly shrank into his shell, claws and all, like an affrighted soldier-crab, hung down his head, and stammered out some incoherencies,—‘N-not accustomed to talk to women—ladies, I mean. F-forgot myself.—Pray forgive me!’ And he looked up, and her eyes, half-amused, met his, and she saw that they were filled with tears.

‘What have I to forgive?’ she said, more gently, wondering on what sort of strange sportsman she had fallen. ‘You treat me like an equal; you will deign to argue with me. But men in general—oh, they hide their contempt for us, if not their own ignorance, under that mask of chivalrous deference!’ and then in the nasal fine ladies’ key, which was her shell, as bitter *brusquerie* was his, she added, with an Amazon queen’s toss of the head,—‘You must come and see us often. We shall suit each other, I see, better than most whom we see here.’

A sneer and a blush passed together over Lancelot’s ugliness.

‘What, better than the glib Colonel Bracebridge yonder?’

‘Oh, he is witty enough, but he lives on the surface of everything! He is altogether shallow and *blasé*. His good-nature is the fruit of want of feeling; between his gracefulness and his sneering persiflage he is a perfect Mephistopheles-Apollo.’

What a snare a decently-good nickname is! Out it must come, though it carry a lie on its back.

But the truth was, Argemone thought herself infinitely superior to the colonel, for which simple reason she could not in the least understand him.

[By the bye, how subtly Mr. Tennyson has embodied all this in *The Princess*. How he shows us the woman, when she takes her stand on the false masculine ground of intellect, working out her own moral punishment, by destroying in herself the tender heart of flesh, which is either woman’s highest blessing or her bitterest curse; how she loses all feminine sensibility to the under-current of feeling in us poor world-worn, case-hardened men, and falls from pride to sternness, from sternness to sheer inhumanity. I should have honoured myself by pleading guilty to stealing much of Argemone’s character from *The Princess*, had not the idea been conceived, and fairly worked out, long before the appearance of that noble poem.]

They said no more to each other that evening. Argemone was called to the piano; and Lancelot took up the Sporting Magazine, and read himself to sleep till the party separated for the night.

Argemone went up thoughtfully to her own room. The shower had fallen, and the moon was shining bright, while every budding leaf and knot of mould steamed up cool perfume, borrowed from the treasures of the thundercloud. All around was working the infinite mystery of birth and growth, of giving and taking, of beauty and use. All things were harmonious—all things reciprocal without.

Argemone felt herself needless, lonely, and out of tune with herself and nature.

She sat in the window, and listlessly read over to herself a fragment of her own poetry:—

SAPPHO

She lay among the myrtles on the cliff;
Above her glared the moon; beneath, the sea.
Upon the white horizon Athos' peak
Weltered in burning haze; all airs were dead;
The sicale slept among the tamarisk's hair;
The birds sat dumb and drooping. Far below
The lazy sea-weed glistened in the sun:
The lazy sea-fowl dried their steaming wings;
The lazy swell crept whispering up the ledge,
And sank again. Great Pan was laid to rest;
And mother Earth watched by him as he slept,
And hushed her myriad children for awhile.

She lay among the myrtles on the cliff;
And sighed for sleep, for sleep that would not hear,
But left her tossing still: for night and day
A mighty hunger yearned within her heart,
Till all her veins ran fever, and her cheek,
Her long thin hands, and ivory-channell'd feet,
Were wasted with the wasting of her soul.
Then peevishly she flung her on her face,
And hid her eyeballs from the blinding glare,
And fingered at the grass, and tried to cool
Her crisp hot lips against the crisp hot sward:
And then she raised her head, and upward cast
Wild looks from homeless eyes, whose liquid light
Gleamed out between deep folds of blue-black hair,
As gleam twin lakes between the purple peaks
Of deep Parnassus, at the mournful moon.
Beside her lay a lyre. She snatched the shell,
And waked wild music from its silver strings;
Then tossed it sadly by,—‘Ah, hush!’ she cries,
‘Dead offspring of the tortoise and the mine!
Why mock my discords with thine harmonies?
‘Although a thrice-Olympian lot be thine,
Only to echo back in every tone,
The moods of nobler natures than thine own.’

‘No!’ she said. ‘That soft and rounded rhyme suits ill with Sappho’s fitful and wayward agonies. She should burst out at once into wild passionate life-weariness, and disgust at that universe, with whose beauty she has filled her eyes in vain, to find it always a dead picture, unsatisfying, unloving—as I have found it.’

Sweet self-deceiver! had you no other reason for choosing as your heroine Sappho, the victim of the idolatry of intellect—trying in vain to fill her heart with the friendship of her own sex, and then sinking into mere passion for a handsome boy, and so down into self-contempt and suicide?

She was conscious, I do believe, of no other reason than that she gave; but consciousness is a dim candle—over a deep mine.

‘After all,’ she said pettishly, ‘people will call it a mere imitation of Shelley’s *Alastor*. And what harm if it is? Is there to be no female *Alastor*? Has not the woman as good a right as the man to long after ideal beauty—to pine and die if she cannot find it; and regenerate herself in its light?’

‘Yo-hoo-oo-oo! Youp, youp! Oh-hooo!’ arose doleful through the echoing shrubbery.

Argemone started and looked out. It was not a banshee, but a forgotten fox-hound puppy, sitting mournfully on the gravel-walk beneath, staring at the clear ghastly moon.

She laughed and blushed—there was a rebuke in it. She turned to go to rest; and as she knelt and prayed at her velvet faldstool, among all the nicknacks which now-a-days make a luxury of devotion, was it strange if, after she had prayed for the fate of nations and churches, and for those who, as she thought, were fighting at Oxford the cause of universal truth and reverend antiquity, she remembered in her petitions the poor godless youth, with his troubled and troubling eloquence? But it was strange that she blushed when she mentioned his name—why should she not pray for him as she prayed for others?

Perhaps she felt that she did not pray for him as she prayed for others.

She left the Æolian harp in the window, as a luxury if she should wake, and coiled herself up among lace pillows and eider blemos; and the hound coiled himself up on the gravel-walk, after a solemn vesper-ceremony of three turns round in his own length, looking vainly for a ‘soft stone.’

The finest of us are animals after all, and live by eating and sleeping: and, taken as animals, not so badly off either—unless we happen to be Dorsetshire labourers—or Spitalfields weavers—or colliery children—or marching soldiers—or, I am afraid, one half of English souls this day.

And Argemone dreamed;—that she was a fox, flying for her life through a churchyard—and Lancelot was a hound, yelling and leaping, in a red coat and white buckskins, close upon her—and she felt his hot breath, and saw his white teeth glare. . . . And then her father was there: and he was an Italian boy, and played the organ—and Lancelot was a dancing dog, and stood up and danced to the tune of ‘*C’est l’amour, l’amour, l’amour,*’ pitifully enough, in his red coat—and she stood up and danced too; but she found her fox-fur dress insufficient, and begged hard for a paper frill—which was denied her: whereat she cried bitterly and woke; and saw the Night peeping in with her bright diamond eyes, and blushed, and hid her beautiful face in the pillows, and fell asleep again.

What the little imp, who managed this puppet-show on Argemone’s brain-stage, may have intended to symbolise thereby, and whence he stole his actors and stage-properties, and whether he got up the interlude for his own private fun, or for that of a choir of brother Eulenspiegels, or, finally, for the edification of Argemone as to her own history, past, present, or future, are questions which we must leave unanswered, till physicians have become a little more of metaphysicians, and have given up their present plan of ignoring for nine hundred and ninety-nine pages that most awful and significant custom of dreaming, and then in the thousandth page talking the boldest materialist twaddle about it.

In the meantime, Lancelot, contrary to the colonel’s express commands, was sitting up to indite the following letter to his cousin, the Tractarian curate:—

‘You complain that I waste my time in field-sports: how do you know that I waste my time?’

I find within myself certain appetites; and I suppose that the God whom you say made me, made those appetites as a part of me. Why are they to be crushed any more than any other part of me? I am the whole of what I find in myself—am I to pick and choose myself out of myself? And besides, I feel that the exercise of freedom, activity, foresight, daring, independent self-determination, even in a few minutes’ burst across country, strengthens me in mind as well as in body. It might not do so to you; but you are of a different constitution, and, from all I see, the power of a man’s muscles, the excitability of his nerves, the shape and balance of his brain, make him what he is. Else what is the meaning of physiognomy? Every man’s destiny, as the Turks say, stands written on his forehead.

One does not need two glances at your face to know that you would not enjoy fox-hunting, that you would enjoy book-learning and “refined repose,” as they are pleased to call it. Every man carries his character in his brain. You all know that, and act upon it when you have to deal with a man for

sixpence; but your religious dogmas, which make out that everyman comes into the world equally brutish and fiendish, make you afraid to confess it. I don't quarrel with a "douce" man like you, with a large organ of veneration, for following your bent. But if I am fiery, with a huge cerebellum, why am I not to follow mine?—For that is what you do, after all—what you like best. It is all very easy for a man to talk of conquering his appetites, when he has none to conquer. Try and conquer your organ of veneration, or of benevolence, or of calculation—then I will call you an ascetic. Why not!—The same Power which made the front of one's head made the back, I suppose?

'And, I tell you, hunting does me good. It awakens me out of my dreary mill-round of metaphysics. It sweeps away that infernal web of self-consciousness, and absorbs me in outward objects; and my red-hot Perillus's bull cools in proportion as my horse warms. I tell you, I never saw a man who could cut out his way across country who could not cut his way through better things when his turn came. The cleverest and noblest fellows are sure to be the best riders in the long run. And as for bad company and "the world," when you take to going in the first-class carriages for fear of meeting a swearing sailor in the second-class—when those who have "renounced the world" give up buying and selling in the funds—when my uncle, the pious banker, who will only "associate" with the truly religious, gives up dealing with any scoundrel or heathen who can "do business" with him—then you may quote pious people's opinions to me. In God's name, if the Stock Exchange, and railway staggings, and the advertisements in the Protestant Hue-and-Cry, and the frantic Mammon-hunting which has been for the last fifty years the peculiar pursuit of the majority of Quakers, Dissenters, and Religious Churchmen, are not *The World*, what is? I don't complain of them, though; Puritanism has interdicted to them all art, all excitement, all amusement—except money-making. It is their *dernier ressort*, poor souls!

'But you must explain to us naughty fox-hunters how all this agrees with the good book. We see plainly enough, in the meantime, how it agrees with "poor human nature." We see that the "religious world," like the "great world," and the "sporting world," and the "literary world,"

"Compounds for sins she is inclined to,
By damning those she has no mind to;"

and that because England is a money-making country, and money-making is an effeminate pursuit, therefore all sedentary and spoony sins, like covetousness, slander, bigotry, and self-conceit, are to be cockered and plastered over, while the more masculine vices, and no-vices also, are mercilessly hunted down by your cold-blooded, soft-handed religionists.

'This is a more quiet letter than usual from me, my dear coz, for many of your reproofs cut me home: they angered me at the time; but I deserve them. I am miserable, self-disgusted, self-helpless, craving for freedom, and yet crying aloud for some one to come and guide me, and teach me; and *who is there in these days who could teach a fast man, even if he would try?* Be sure, that as long as you and yours make piety a synonym for unmanliness, you will never convert either me or any other good sportsman.

'By the bye, my dear fellow, was I asleep or awake when I seemed to read in the postscript of your last letter, something about "being driven to Rome after all"? . . . Why thither, of all places in heaven or earth? You know, I have no party interest in the question. All creeds are very much alike to me just now. But allow me to ask, in a spirit of the most tolerant curiosity, what possible celestial bait, either of the useful or the agreeable kind, can the present excellent Pope, or his adherents, hold out to you in compensation for the solid earthly pudding which you would have to desert? . . . I daresay, though, that I shall not comprehend your answer when it comes. I am, you know, utterly deficient in that sixth sense of the angelic or supralunar beautiful, which fills your soul with ecstasy.

You, I know, expect and long to become an angel after death: I am under the strange hallucination that my body is part of me, and in spite of old Plotinus, look with horror at a disembodiment till

the giving of that new body, the great perfection of which, in your eyes, and those of every one else, seems to be, that it will be less, and not more of a body, than our present one. . . . Is this hope, to me at once inconceivable and contradictory, palpable and valuable enough to you to send you to that Italian Avernus, to get it made a little more certain? If so, I despair of your making your meaning intelligible to a poor fellow wallowing, like me, in the Hylic Borboros—or whatever else you may choose to call the unfortunate fact of being flesh and blood. . . . Still, write.’

CHAPTER III: NEW ACTORS, AND A NEW STAGE

When Argemone rose in the morning, her first thought was of Lancelot. His face haunted her. The wild brilliance of his intellect struggling through foul smoke-clouds, had haunted her still more. She had heard of his profligacy, his bursts of fierce Berserk-madness; and yet now these very faults, instead of repelling, seemed to attract her, and intensify her longing to save him. She would convert him; purify him; harmonise his discords. And that very wish gave her a peace she had never felt before. She had formed her idea; she had now a purpose for which to live, and she determined to concentrate herself for the work, and longed for the moment when she should meet Lancelot, and begin—how, she did not very clearly see.

It is an old jest—the fair devotee trying to convert the young rake. Men of the world laugh heartily at it; and so does the devil, no doubt. If any readers wish to be fellow-jesters with that personage, they may; but, as sure as old Saxon women-worship remains for ever a blessed and healing law of life, the devotee may yet convert the rake—and, perhaps, herself into the bargain.

Argemone looked almost angrily round at her beloved books and drawings; for they spoke a message to her which they had never spoken before, of self-centred ambition. ‘Yes,’ she said aloud to herself, ‘I have been selfish, utterly! Art, poetry, science—I believe, after all, that I have only loved them for my own sake, not for theirs, because they would make me something, feed my conceit of my own talents. How infinitely more glorious to find my work-field and my prize, not in dead forms and colours, or ink-and-paper theories, but in a living, immortal, human spirit! I will study no more, except the human heart, and only that to purify and ennoble it.’

True, Argemone; and yet, like all resolutions, somewhat less than the truth. That morning, indeed, her purpose was simple as God’s own light. She never dreamed of exciting Lancelot’s admiration, even his friendship for herself. She would have started as from a snake, from the issue which the reader very clearly foresees, that Lancelot would fall in love, not with Young Englandism, but with Argemone Lavington. But yet self is not eradicated even from a woman’s heart in one morning before breakfast. Besides, it is not ‘benevolence,’ but love—the real Cupid of flesh and blood, who can first

‘Touch the chord of self which, trembling,
Passes in music out of sight.’

But a time for all things; and it is now time for Argemone to go down to breakfast, having prepared some dozen imaginary dialogues between herself and Lancelot, in which, of course, her eloquence always had the victory. She had yet to learn, that it is better sometimes not to settle in one’s heart what we shall speak, for the Everlasting Will has good works ready prepared for us to walk in, by what we call fortunate accident; and it shall be given us in that day and that hour what we shall speak.

Lancelot, in the meantime, shrank from meeting Argemone; and was quite glad of the weakness which kept him upstairs. Whether he was afraid of her—whether he was ashamed of himself or of his crutches, I cannot tell, but I daresay, reader, you are getting tired of all this soul-dissecting. So we will have a bit of action again, for the sake of variety, if for nothing better.

Of all the species of lovely scenery which England holds, none, perhaps, is more exquisite than the banks of the chalk-rivers—the perfect limpidity of the water, the gay and luxuriant vegetation of the banks and ditches, the masses of noble wood embosoming the villages, the unique beauty of the water-meadows, living sheets of emerald and silver, tinkling and sparkling, cool under the fiercest sun, brilliant under the blackest clouds.—There, if anywhere, one would have expected to find Arcadia among fertility, loveliness, industry, and wealth. But, alas for the sad reality! the cool breath of those glittering water-meadows too often floats laden with poisonous miasma. Those picturesque

villages are generally the perennial hotbeds of fever and ague, of squalid penury, sottish profligacy, dull discontent too stale for words. There is luxury in the park, wealth in the huge farm-steadings, knowledge in the parsonage: but the poor? those by whose dull labour all that luxury and wealth, ay, even that knowledge, is made possible—what are they? We shall see, please God, ere the story's end.

But of all this Lancelot as yet thought nothing. He, too, had to be emancipated, as much as Argemone, from selfish dreams; to learn to work trustfully in the living Present, not to gloat sentimentally over the unreturning Past. But his time was not yet come; and little he thought of all the work which lay ready for him within a mile of the Priory, as he watched the ladies go out for the afternoon, and slipped down to the Nun's-pool on his crutches to smoke and fish, and build castles in the air.

The Priory, with its rambling courts and gardens, stood on an island in the river. The upper stream flowed in a straight artificial channel through the garden, still and broad, towards the Priory mill; while just above the Priory wall half the river fell over a high weir, with all its appendages of bucks and hatchways, and eel-baskets, into the Nun's-pool, and then swept round under the ivied walls, with their fantastic turrets and gables, and little loopholed windows, peering out over the stream, as it hurried down over the shallows to join the race below the mill. A postern door in the walls opened on an ornamental wooden bridge across the weir-head—a favourite haunt of all fishers and sketchers who were admitted to the dragon-guarded Elysium of Whitford Priors. Thither Lancelot went, congratulating himself, strange to say, in having escaped the only human being whom he loved on earth.

He found on the weir-bridge two of the keepers. The younger one, Tregarva, was a stately, thoughtful-looking Cornishman, some six feet three in height, with thews and sinews in proportion.

He was sitting on the bridge looking over a basket of eel-lines, and listening silently to the chat of his companion.

Old Harry Verney, the other keeper, was a character in his way, and a very bad character too, though he was a patriarch among all the gamekeepers of the vale. He was a short, wiry, bandy-legged, ferret-visaged old man, with grizzled hair, and a wizened face tanned brown and purple by constant exposure. Between rheumatism and constant handling the rod and gun, his fingers were crooked like a hawk's claws. He kept his left eye always shut, apparently to save trouble in shooting; and squinted, and sniffed, and peered, with a stooping back and protruded chin, as if he were perpetually on the watch for fish, flesh, and fowl, vermin and Christian. The friendship between himself and the Scotch terrier at his heels would have been easily explained by Lessing, for in the transmigration of souls the spirit of Harry Verney had evidently once animated a dog of that breed. He was dressed in a huge thick fustian jacket, scratched, stained, and patched, with bulging, greasy pockets; a cast of flies round a battered hat, riddled with shot-holes, a dog-whistle at his button-hole, and an old gun cut short over his arm, bespoke his business.

'I seed that 'ere Crawy against Ashy Down Plantations last night, I'll be sworn,' said he, in a squeaking, sneaking tone.

'Well, what harm was the man doing?'

'Oh, ay, that's the way you young 'uns talk. If he warn't doing mischief, he'd a been glad to have been doing it, I'll warrant. If I'd been as young as you, I'd have picked a quarrel with him soon enough, and found a cause for tackling him. It's worth a brace of sovereigns with the squire to haul him up. Eh? eh? Ain't old Harry right now?'

'Humph!' growled the younger man.

'There, then, you get me a snare and a hare by to-morrow night,' went on old Harry, 'and see if I don't nab him. It won't lay long under the plantation afore he picks it up. You mind to snare me a hare to-night, now!'

'I'll do no such thing, nor help to bring fake accusations against any man!'

‘False accusations!’ answered Harry, in his cringing way. ‘Look at that now, for a keeper to say! Why, if he don’t happen to have a snare just there, he has somewhere else, you know. Eh? Ain’t old Harry right now, eh?’

‘Maybe.’

‘There, don’t say I don’t know nothing then. Eh? What matter who put the snare down, or the hare in, perwided he takes it up, man? If ’twas his’n he’d be all the better pleased. The most notoriousst poacher as walks unhung!’ And old Harry lifted up his crooked hands in pious indignation.

‘I’ll have no more gamekeeping, Harry. What with hunting down Christians as if they were vermin, all night, and being cursed by the squire all day, I’d sooner be a sheriff’s runner, or a negro slave.’

‘Ay, ay! that’s the way the young dogs always bark afore they’re broke in, and gets to like it, as the eels does skinning. Haven’t I bounced pretty near out of my skin many a time afore now, on this here very bridge, with “Harry, jump in, you stupid hound!” and “Harry, get out, you one-eyed tailor!” And then, if one of the gentlemen lost a fish with their clumsiness—Oh, Father! to hear ’em let out at me and my landing-net, and curse fit to fright the devil! Dash their sarcy tongues! Eh! Don’t old Harry know their ways? Don’t he know ’em, now?’

‘Ay,’ said the young man, bitterly. ‘We break the dogs, and we load the guns, and we find the game, and mark the game,—and then they call themselves sportsmen; we choose the flies, and we bait the spinning-hooks, and we show them where the fish lie, and then when they’ve hooked them, they can’t get them out without us and the spoonnet; and then they go home to the ladies and boast of the lot of fish they killed—and who thinks of the keeper?’

‘Oh! ah! Then don’t say old Harry knows nothing, then. How nicely, now, you and I might get a living off this ’ere manor, if the landlords was served like the French ones was. Eh, Paul?’ chuckled old Harry. ‘Wouldn’t we pay our taxes with pheasants and grayling, that’s all, eh? Ain’t old Harry right now, eh?’

The old fox was fishing for an assent, not for its own sake, for he was a fierce Tory, and would have stood up to be shot at any day, not only for his master’s sake, but for the sake of a single pheasant of his master’s; but he hated Tregarva for many reasons, and was daily on the watch to entrap him on some of his peculiar points, whereof he had, as we shall find, a good many.

What would have been Tregarva’s answer, I cannot tell; but Lancelot, who had unintentionally overheard the greater part of the conversation, disliked being any longer a listener, and came close to them.

‘Here’s your gudgeons and minnows, sir, as you bespoke,’ quoth Harry; ‘and here’s that paternoster as you gave me to rig up. Beautiful minnows, sir, white as a silver spoon.—They’re the ones now, ain’t they, sir, eh?’

‘They’ll do!’

‘Well, then, don’t say old Harry don’t know nothing, that’s all, eh?’ and the old fellow toddled off, peering and twisting his head about like a starling.

‘An odd old fellow that, Tregarva,’ said Lancelot.

‘Very, sir, considering who made him,’ answered the Cornishman, touching his hat, and then thrusting his nose deeper than ever into the eel-basket.

‘Beautiful stream this,’ said Lancelot, who had a continual longing—right or wrong—to chat with his inferiors; and was proportionately sulky and reserved to his superiors.

‘Beautiful enough, sir,’ said the keeper, with an emphasis on the first word.

‘Why, has it any other fault?’

‘Not so wholesome as pretty, sir.’

‘What harm does it do?’

‘Fever, and ague, and rheumatism, sir.’

‘Where?’ asked Lancelot, a little amused by the man’s laconic answers.

‘Wherever the white fog spreads, sir.’

‘Where’s that?’

‘Everywhere, sir.’

‘And when?’

‘Always, sir.’

Lancelot burst out laughing. The man looked up at him slowly and seriously.

‘You wouldn’t laugh, sir, if you’d seen much of the inside of these cottages round.’

‘Really,’ said Lancelot, ‘I was only laughing at our making such very short work of such a long and serious story. Do you mean that the unhealthiness of this country is wholly caused by the river?’

‘No, sir. The river-damps are God’s sending; and so they are not too bad to bear. But there’s more of man’s sending, that is too bad to bear.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Are men likely to be healthy when they are worse housed than a pig?’

‘No.’

‘And worse fed than a hound?’

‘Good heavens! No!’

‘Or packed together to sleep, like pilchards in a barrel?’

‘But, my good fellow, do you mean that the labourers here are in that state?’

‘It isn’t far to walk, sir. Perhaps some day, when the May-fly is gone off, and the fish won’t rise awhile, you could walk down and see. I beg your pardon, sir, though, for thinking of such a thing. They are not places fit for gentlemen, that’s certain.’ There was a staid irony in his tone, which Lancelot felt.

‘But the clergyman goes?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘And Miss Honoria goes?’

‘Yes, God Almighty bless her!’

‘And do not they see that all goes right?’

The giant twisted his huge limbs, as if trying to avoid an answer, and yet not daring to do so.

‘Do clergymen go about among the poor much, sir, at college, before they are ordained?’

Lancelot smiled, and shook his head.

‘I thought so, sir. Our good vicar is like the rest hereabouts. God knows, he stints neither time nor money—the souls of the poor are well looked after, and their bodies too—as far as his purse will go; but that’s not far.’

‘Is he ill-off, then?’

‘The living’s worth some forty pounds a year. The great tithes, they say, are worth better than twelve hundred; but Squire Lavington has them.’

‘Oh, I see!’ said Lancelot.

‘I’m glad you do, sir, for I don’t,’ meekly answered Tregarva. ‘But the vicar, sir, he is a kind man, and a good; but the poor don’t understand him, nor he them. He is too learned, sir, and, saving your presence, too fond of his prayer-book.’

‘One can’t be too fond of a good thing.’

‘Not unless you make an idol of it, sir, and fancy that men’s souls were made for the prayer-book, and not the prayer-book for them.’

‘But cannot he expose and redress these evils, if they exist?’

Tregarva twisted about again.

‘I do not say that I think it, sir; but this I know, that every poor man in the vale thinks it—that the parsons are afraid of the landlords. They must see these things, for they are not blind; and they try to plaster them up out of their own pockets.’

‘But why, in God’s name, don’t they strike at the root of the matter, and go straight to the landlords and tell them the truth?’ asked Lancelot.

‘So people say, sir. I see no reason for it except the one which I gave you. Besides, sir, you must remember, that a man can’t quarrel with his own kin; and so many of them are their squire’s brothers, or sons, or nephews.’

‘Or good friends with him, at least.’

‘Ay, sir, and, to do them justice, they had need, for the poor’s sake, to keep good friends with the squire. How else are they to get a farthing for schools, or coal-subscriptions, or lying-in societies, or lending libraries, or penny clubs? If they spoke their minds to the great ones, sir, how could they keep the parish together?’

‘You seem to see both sides of a question, certainly. But what a miserable state of things, that the labouring man should require all these societies, and charities, and helps from the rich!—that an industrious freeman cannot live without alms!’

‘So I have thought this long time,’ quietly answered Tregarva.

‘But Miss Honoria,—she is not afraid to tell her father the truth?’

‘Suppose, sir, when Adam and Eve were in the garden, that all the devils had come up and played their fiends’ tricks before them,—do you think they’d have seen any shame in it?’

‘I really cannot tell,’ said Lancelot, smiling.

‘Then I can, sir. They’d have seen no more harm in it than there was harm already in themselves; and that was none. A man’s eyes can only see what they’ve learnt to see.’

Lancelot started: it was a favourite dictum of his in Carlyle’s works.

‘Where did you get that thought, my friend?’

‘By seeing, sir.’

‘But what has that to do with Miss Honoria?’

‘She is an angel of holiness herself, sir; and, therefore, she goes on without blushing or suspecting, where our blood would boil again. She sees people in want, and thinks it must be so, and pities them and relieves them. But she don’t know want herself; and, therefore, she don’t know that it makes men beasts and devils. She’s as pure as God’s light herself; and, therefore, she fancies every one is as spotless as she is. And there’s another mistake in your charitable great people, sir. When they see poor folk sick or hungry before their eyes, they pull out their purses fast enough, God bless them; for they wouldn’t like to be so themselves. But the oppression that goes on all the year round, and the want that goes on all the year round, and the filth, and the lying, and the swearing, and the profligacy, that go on all the year round, and the sickening weight of debt, and the miserable grinding anxiety from rent-day to rent-day, and Saturday night to Saturday night, that crushes a man’s soul down, and drives every thought out of his head but how he is to fill his stomach and warm his back, and keep a house over his head, till he daren’t for his life take his thoughts one moment off the meat that perisheth—oh, sir, they never felt this; and, therefore, they never dream that there are thousands who pass them in their daily walks who feel this, and feel nothing else!’

This outburst was uttered with an earnestness and majesty which astonished Lancelot. He forgot the subject in the speaker.

‘You are a very extraordinary gamekeeper!’ said he.

‘When the Lord shows a man a thing, he can’t well help seeing it,’ answered Tregarva, in his usual staid tone.

There was a pause. The keeper looked at him with a glance, before which Lancelot’s eyes fell.

‘Hell is paved with hearsays, sir, and as all this talk of mine is hearsay, if you are in earnest, sir, go and see for yourself. I know you have a kind heart, and they tell me that you are a great scholar, which would to God I was! so you ought not to condescend to take my word for anything which you can look into yourself;’ with which sound piece of common-sense Tregarva returned busily to his eel-lines.

‘Hand me the rod and can, and help me out along the buck-stage,’ said Lancelot; ‘I must have some more talk with you, my fine fellow.’

‘Amen,’ answered Tregarva, as he assisted our lame hero along a huge beam which stretched out into the pool; and having settled him there, returned mechanically to his work, humming a Wesleyan hymn-tune.

Lancelot sat and tried to catch perch, but Tregarva’s words haunted him. He lighted his cigar, and tried to think earnestly over the matter, but he had got into the wrong place for thinking. All his thoughts, all his sympathies, were drowned in the rush and whirl of the water. He forgot everything else in the mere animal enjoyment of sight and sound. Like many young men at his crisis of life, he had given himself up to the mere contemplation of Nature till he had become her slave; and now a luscious scene, a singing bird, were enough to allure his mind away from the most earnest and awful thoughts. He tried to think, but the river would not let him. It thundered and spouted out behind him from the hatches, and leapt madly past him, and caught his eyes in spite of him, and swept them away down its dancing waves, and let them go again only to sweep them down again and again, till his brain felt a delicious dizziness from the everlasting rush and the everlasting roar. And then below, how it spread, and writhed, and whirled into transparent fans, hissing and twining snakes, polished glass-wreaths, huge crystal bells, which boiled up from the bottom, and dived again beneath long threads of creamy foam, and swung round posts and roots, and rushed blackening under dark weed-fringed boughs, and gnawed at the marly banks, and shook the ever-restless bulrushes, till it was swept away and down over the white pebbles and olive weeds, in one broad rippling sheet of molten silver, towards the distant sea. Downwards it fleeted ever, and bore his thoughts floating on its oily stream; and the great trout, with their yellow sides and peacock backs, lounged among the eddies, and the silver grayling dimpled and wandered upon the shallows, and the may-flies flickered and rustled round him like water fairies, with their green gauzy wings; the coot clanked musically among the reeds; the frogs hummed their ceaseless vesper-monotone; the kingfisher darted from his hole in the bank like a blue spark of electric light; the swallows’ bills snapped as they twined and hawked above the pool; the swift’s wings whirred like musket-balls, as they rushed screaming past his head; and ever the river fleeted by, bearing his eyes away down the current, till its wild eddies began to glow with crimson beneath the setting sun. The complex harmony of sights and sounds slid softly over his soul, and he sank away into a still daydream, too passive for imagination, too deep for meditation, and

‘Beauty born of murmuring sound,
Did pass into his face.’

Blame him not. There are more things in a man’s heart than ever get in through his thoughts. On a sudden, a soft voice behind him startled him.

‘Can a poor cockney artist venture himself along this timber without falling in?’

Lancelot turned.

‘Come out to me, and if you stumble, the naiads will rise out of their depths, and “hold up their pearly wrists” to save their favourite.’

The artist walked timidly out along the beams, and sat down beside Lancelot, who shook him warmly by the hand.

‘Welcome, Claude Mellot, and all lovely enthusiasms and symbolisms! Expound to me, now, the meaning of that water-lily leaf and its grand simple curve, as it lies sleeping there in the back eddy.’

‘Oh, I am too amused to philosophise. The fair Argemone has just been treating me to her three hundred and sixty-fifth philippic against my unoffending beard.’

‘Why, what fault can she find with such a graceful and natural ornament?’

‘Just this, my dear fellow, that it is natural. As it is, she considers me only “intelligent-looking.” If the beard were away, my face, she says, would be “so refined!” And, I suppose, if I was just a little

more effeminate and pale, with a nice retreating under-jaw and a drooping lip, and a meek, peaking simper, like your starved Romish saints, I should be “so spiritual!” And if, again, to complete the climax, I did but shave my head like a Chinese, I should be a model for St. Francis himself!

‘But really, after all, why make yourself so singular by this said beard?’

‘I wear it for a testimony and a sign that a man has no right to be ashamed of the mark of manhood. Oh, that one or two of your Protestant clergymen, who ought to be perfect ideal men, would have the courage to get up into the pulpit in a long beard, and testify that the very essential idea of Protestantism is the dignity and divinity of man as God made him! Our forefathers were not ashamed of their beards; but now even the soldier is only allowed to keep his moustache, while our quill-driving masses shave themselves as close as they can; and in proportion to a man’s piety he wears less hair, from the young curate who shaves off his whiskers, to the Popish priest who shaves his crown!’

‘What do you say, then, to cutting off nuns’ hair?’

‘I say, that extremes meet, and prudish Manichæism always ends in sheer indecency. Those Papists have forgotten what woman was made for, and therefore, they have forgotten that a woman’s hair is her glory, for it was given to her for a covering: as says your friend, Paul the Hebrew, who, by the bye, had as fine theories of art as he had of society, if he had only lived fifteen hundred years later, and had a chance of working them out.’

‘How remarkably orthodox you are!’ said Lancelot, smiling.

‘How do you know that I am not? You never heard me deny the old creed. But what if an artist ought to be of all creeds at once? My business is to represent the beautiful, and therefore to accept it wherever I find it. Yours is to be a philosopher, and find the true.’

‘But the beautiful must be truly beautiful to be worth anything; and so you, too, must search for the true.’

‘Yes; truth of form, colour, chiaroscuro. They are worthy to occupy me a life; for they are eternal—or at least that which they express: and if I am to get at the symbolised unseen, it must be through the beauty of the symbolising phenomenon. If I, who live by art, for art, in art, or you either, who seem as much a born artist as myself, am to have a religion, it must be a worship of the fountain of art—of the

“Spirit of beauty, who doth consecrate
With his own hues whate’er he shines upon.”

‘As poor Shelley has it; and much peace of mind it gave him!’ answered Lancelot. ‘I have grown sick lately of such dreary tinsel abstractions. When you look through the glitter of the words, your “spirit of beauty” simply means certain shapes and colours which please you in beautiful things and in beautiful people.’

‘Vile nominalist! renegade from the ideal and all its glories!’ said Claude, laughing.

‘I don’t care sixpence now for the ideal! I want not beauty, but some beautiful thing—a woman perhaps,’ and he sighed. ‘But at least a person—a living, loving person—all lovely itself, and giving loveliness to all things! If I must have an ideal, let it be, for mercy’s sake, a realised one.’

Claude opened his sketch-book.

‘We shall get swamped in these metaphysical oceans, my dear dreamer. But lo, here come a couple, as near ideals as any in these degenerate days—the two poles of beauty: the *milieu* of which would be Venus with us Pagans, or the Virgin Mary with the Catholics. Look at them! Honoria the dark—symbolic of passionate depth; Argemone the fair, type of intellectual light! Oh, that I were a Zeuxis to unite them instead of having to paint them in two separate pictures, and split perfection in half, as everything is split in this piecemeal world!’

‘You will have the honour of a sitting this afternoon, I suppose, from both beauties?’

‘I hope so, for my own sake. There is no path left to immortality, or bread either, now for us poor artists but portrait-painting.’

‘I envy you your path, when it leads through such Elysiums,’ said Lancelot.

‘Come here, gentlemen both!’ cried Argemone from the bridge.

‘Fairly caught!’ grumbled Lancelot. ‘You must go, at least; my lameness will excuse me, I hope.’

The two ladies were accompanied by Bracebridge, a gazelle which he had given Argemone, and a certain miserable cur of Honoria’s adopting, who plays an important part in this story, and, therefore, deserves a little notice. Honoria had rescued him from a watery death in the village pond, by means of the colonel, who had revenged himself for a pair of wet feet by utterly corrupting the dog’s morals, and teaching him every week to answer to some fresh scandalous name.

But Lancelot was not to escape. Instead of moving on, as he had hoped, the party stood looking over the bridge, and talking—he took for granted, poor thin-skinned fellow—of him. And for once his suspicions were right; for he overheard Argemone say—

‘I wonder how Mr. Smith can be so rude as to sit there in my presence over his stupid perch! Smoking those horrid cigars, too! How selfish those field-sports do make men!’

‘Thank you!’ said the colonel, with a low bow. Lancelot rose.

‘If a country girl, now, had spoken in that tone,’ said he to himself, ‘it would have been called at least “saucy”—but Mammon’s elect ones may do anything. Well—here I come, limping to my new tyrant’s feet, like Goethe’s bear to Lili’s.’

She drew him away, as women only know how, from the rest of the party, who were chatting and laughing with Claude. She had shown off her fancied indifference to Lancelot before them, and now began in a softer voice—

‘Why will you be so shy and lonely, Mr. Smith?’

‘Because I am not fit for your society.’

‘Who tells you so? Why will you not become so?’

Lancelot hung down his head.

‘As long as fish and game are your only society, you will become more and more *morne* and self-absorbed.’

‘Really fish were the last things of which I was thinking when you came. My whole heart was filled with the beauty of nature, and nothing else.’

There was an opening for one of Argemone’s preconcerted orations.

‘Had you no better occupation,’ she said gently, ‘than nature, the first day of returning to the open air after so frightful and dangerous an accident? Were there no thanks due to One above?’

Lancelot understood her.

‘How do you know that I was not even then showing my thankfulness?’

‘What! with a cigar and a fishing-rod?’

‘Certainly. Why not?’

Argemone really could not tell at the moment. The answer upset her scheme entirely.

‘Might not that very admiration of nature have been an act of worship?’ continued our hero.

‘How can we better glorify the worker than by delighting in his work?’

‘Ah!’ sighed the lady, ‘why trust to these self-willed methods, and neglect the noble and exquisite forms which the Church has prepared for us as embodiments for every feeling of our hearts?’

‘Every feeling, Miss Lavington?’

Argemone hesitated. She had made the good old stock assertion, as in duty bound; but she could not help recollecting that there were several Popish books of devotion at that moment on her table, which seemed to her to patch a gap or two in the Prayer-book.

‘My temple as yet,’ said Lancelot, ‘is only the heaven and the earth; my church-music I can hear all day long, whenever I have the sense to be silent, and “hear my mother sing;” my priests and preachers are every bird and bee, every flower and cloud. Am I not well enough furnished? Do you

want to reduce my circular infinite chapel to an oblong hundred-foot one? My sphere harmonies to the Gregorian tones in four parts? My world-wide priesthood, with their endless variety of costume, to one not over-educated gentleman in a white sheet? And my dreams of naiads and flower-fairies, and the blue-bells ringing God's praises, as they do in "The story without an End," for the gross reality of naughty charity children, with their pockets full of apples, bawling out Hebrew psalms of which they neither feel nor understand a word?

Argemone tried to look very much shocked at this piece of bombast. Lancelot evidently meant it as such, but he eyed her all the while as if there was solemn earnest under the surface.

'Oh, Mr. Smith!' she said, 'how can you dare talk so of a liturgy compiled by the wisest and holiest of all countries and ages! You revile that of whose beauty you are not qualified to judge!'

'There must be a beauty in it all, or such as you are would not love it.'

'Oh,' she said hopefully, 'that you would but try the Church system! How you would find it harmonise and methodise every day, every thought for you! But I cannot explain myself. Why not go to our vicar and open your doubts to him?'

'Pardon, but you must excuse me.'

'Why? He is one of the saintliest of men!'

'To tell the truth, I have been to him already.'

'You do not mean it! And what did he tell you?'

'What the rest of the world does—hearsays.'

'But did you not find him most kind?'

'I went to him to be comforted and guided. He received me as a criminal. He told me that my first duty was penitence; that as long as I lived the life I did, he could not dare to cast his pearls before swine by answering my doubts; that I was in a state incapable of appreciating spiritual truths; and, therefore, he had no right to tell me any.'

'And what did he tell you?'

'Several spiritual lies instead, I thought. He told me, hearing me quote Schiller, to beware of the Germans, for they were all Pantheists at heart. I asked him whether he included Lange and Bunsen, and it appeared that he had never read a German book in his life. He then flew furiously at Mr. Carlyle, and I found that all he knew of him was from a certain review in the *Quarterly*. He called Boehmen a theosophic Atheist. I should have burst out at that, had I not read the very words in a High Church review the day before, and hoped that he was not aware of the impudent falsehood which he was retailing. Whenever I feebly interposed an objection to anything he said (for, after all, he talked on), he told me to hear the Catholic Church. I asked him which Catholic Church? He said the English. I asked him whether it was to be the Church of the sixth century, or the thirteenth, or the seventeenth or the eighteenth? He told me the one and eternal Church which belonged as much to the nineteenth century as to the first. I begged to know whether, then, I was to hear the Church according to Simeon, or according to Newman, or according to St. Paul; for they seemed to me a little at variance? He told me, austere enough, that the mind of the Church was embodied in her Liturgy and Articles. To which I answered, that the mind of the episcopal clergy might, perhaps, be; but, then, how happened it that they were always quarrelling and calling hard names about the sense of those very documents? And so I left him, assuring him that, living in the nineteenth century, I wanted to hear the Church of the nineteenth century, and no other; and should be most happy to listen to her, as soon as she had made up her mind what to say.'

Argemone was angry and disappointed. She felt she could not cope with Lancelot's quaint logic, which, however unsound, cut deeper into questions than she had yet looked for herself. Somehow, too, she was tongue-tied before him just when she wanted to be most eloquent in behalf of her principles; and that fretted her still more. But his manner puzzled her most of all. First he would run on with his face turned away, as if soliloquising out into the air, and then suddenly look round at her with most fascinating humility; and, then, in a moment, a dark shade would pass over his countenance,

and he would look like one possessed, and his lips wreathed in a sinister artificial smile, and his wild eyes glare through and through her with such cunning understanding of himself and her, that, for the first time in her life, she quailed and felt frightened, as if in the power of a madman. She turned hastily away to shake off the spell.

He sprang after her, almost on his knees, and looked up into her beautiful face with an imploring cry.

‘What, do you, too, throw me off? Will you, too, treat the poor wild uneducated sportsman as a Pariah and an outcast, because he is not ashamed to be a man?—because he cannot stuff his soul’s hunger with cut-and-dried hearsays, but dares to think for himself?—because he wants to believe things, and dare not be satisfied with only believing that he ought to believe them?’

She paused, astonished.

‘Ah, yes,’ he went on, ‘I hoped too much! What right had I to expect that you would understand me? What right, still more, to expect that you would stoop, any more than the rest of the world, to speak to me, as if I could become anything better than the wild hog I seem? Oh yes!—the chrysalis has no butterfly in it, of course! Stamp on the ugly motionless thing! And yet—you look so beautiful and good!—are all my dreams to perish, about the Alrunen and prophet-maidens, how they charmed our old fighting, hunting forefathers into purity and sweet obedience among their Saxon forests? Has woman forgotten her mission—to look at the heart and have mercy, while cold man looks at the act and condemns? Do you, too, like the rest of mankind, think no-belief better than misbelief; and smile on hypocrisy, lip-assent, practical Atheism, sooner than on the unpardonable sin of making a mistake? Will you, like the rest of this wise world, let a man’s spirit rot asleep into the pit, if he will only lie quiet and not disturb your smooth respectabilities; but if he dares, in waking, to yawn in an unorthodox manner, knock him on the head at once, and “break the bruised reed,” and “quench the smoking flax”? And yet you churchgoers have “renounced the world”!’

‘What do you want, in Heaven’s name?’ asked Argemone, half terrified.

‘I want *you* to tell me that. Here I am, with youth, health, strength, money, every blessing of life but one; and I am utterly miserable. I want some one to tell me what I want.’

‘Is it not that you want—religion?’

‘I see hundreds who have what you call religion, with whom I should scorn to change my irreligion.’

‘But, Mr. Smith, are you not—are you not wicked?—They tell me so,’ said Argemone, with an effort, ‘And is that not the cause of your disease?’

Lancelot laughed.

‘No, fairest prophetess, it is the disease itself. “Why am I what I am, when I know more and more daily what I could be?”—That is the mystery; and my sins are the fruit, and not the root of it.

Who will explain that?’

Argemone began,—

‘The Church—’

‘Oh, Miss Lavington,’ cried he, impatiently, ‘will you, too, send me back to that cold abstraction? I came to you, however presumptuous, for living, human advice to a living, human heart; and will you pass off on me that Proteus-dream the Church, which in every man’s mouth has a different meaning? In one book, meaning a method of education, only it has never been carried out; in another, a system of polity,—only it has never been realised;—now a set of words written in books, on whose meaning all are divided; now a body of men who are daily excommunicating each other as heretics and apostates; now a universal idea; now the narrowest and most exclusive of all parties.

Really, before you ask me to hear the Church, I have a right to ask you to define what the Church is.’

‘Our Articles define it,’ said Argemone drily.

‘The “Visible Church,” at least, it defines as “a company of faithful men, in which,” etc. But how does it define the “Invisible” one? And what does “faithful” mean? What if I thought Cromwell

and Pierre Leroux infinitely more faithful men in their way, and better members of the “Invisible Church,” than the torturer-pedant Laud, or the facing bothways Protestant-Manichee Taylor?”

It was lucky for the life of young Love that the discussion went no further: Argemone was becoming scandalised beyond all measure. But, happily, the colonel interposed,—

‘Look here; tell me if you know for whom this sketch is meant?’

‘Tregarva, the keeper: who can doubt?’ answered they both at once.

‘Has not Mellot succeeded perfectly?’

‘Yes,’ said Lancelot. ‘But what wonder, with such a noble subject! What a grand benevolence is enthroned on that lofty forehead!’

‘Oh, you would say so, indeed,’ interposed Honoria, ‘if you knew him! The stories that I could tell you about him! How he would go into cottages, read to sick people by the hour, dress the children, cook the food for them, as tenderly as any woman! I found out, last winter, if you will believe it, that he lived on bread and water, to give out of his own wages—which are barely twelve shillings a week—five shillings a week for more than two months to a poor labouring man, to prevent his going to the workhouse, and being parted from his wife and children.’

‘Noble, indeed!’ said Lancelot. ‘I do not wonder now at the effect his conversation just now had on me.’

‘Has he been talking to you?’ said Honoria eagerly. ‘He seldom speaks to any one.’

‘He has to me; and so well, that were I sure that the poor were as ill off as he says, and that I had the power of altering the system a hair, I could find it in my heart to excuse all political grievance-mongers, and turn one myself.’

Claude Mellot clapped his white woman-like hands.

‘Bravo! bravo! O wonderful conversion! Lancelot has at last discovered that, besides the “glorious Past,” there is a Present worthy of his sublime notice! We may now hope, in time, that he will discover the existence of a Future!’

‘But, Mr. Mellot,’ said Honoria, ‘why have you been so unfaithful to your original? why have you, like all artists, been trying to soften and refine on your model?’

‘Because, my dear lady, we are bound to see everything in its ideal—not as it is, but as it ought to be, and will be, when the vices of this pitiful civilised world are exploded, and sanitary reform, and a variety of occupation, and harmonious education, let each man fulfil in body and soul the ideal which God embodied in him.’

‘Fourierist!’ cried Lancelot, laughing. ‘But surely you never saw a face which had lost by wear less of the divine image? How thoroughly it exemplifies your great law of Protestant art, that “the Ideal is best manifested in the Peculiar.” How classic, how independent of clime or race, is its bland, majestic self-possession! how thoroughly Norse its massive squareness!’

‘And yet, as a Cornishman, he should be no Norseman.’

‘I beg your pardon! Like all noble races, the Cornish owe their nobleness to the impurity of their blood—to its perpetual loans from foreign veins. See how the serpentine curve of his nose, his long nostril, and protruding, sharp-cut lips, mark his share of Phœnician or Jewish blood! how Norse, again, that dome-shaped forehead! how Celtic those dark curls, that restless gray eye, with its “swinden blicken,” like Von Troneg Hagen’s in the *Niebelungen Lied*!’

He turned: Honoria was devouring his words. He saw it, for he was in love, and young love makes man’s senses as keen as woman’s.

‘Look! look at him now!’ said Claude, in a low voice. ‘How he sits, with his hands on his knees, the enormous size of his limbs quite concealed by the careless grace, with his Egyptian face, like some dumb granite Memnon!’

‘Only waiting,’ said Lancelot, ‘for the day-star to arise on him and awake him into voice.’

He looked at Honoria as he spoke. She blushed angrily; and yet a sort of sympathy arose from that moment between Lancelot and herself.

Our hero feared he had gone too far, and tried to turn the subject off.

The smooth mill-head was alive with rising trout.

‘What a huge fish leapt then!’ said Lancelot carelessly; ‘and close to the bridge, too!’

Honorina looked round, and uttered a piercing scream.

‘Oh, my dog! my dog! Mops is in the river! That horrid gazelle has butted him in, and he’ll be drowned!’

Alas! it was too true. There, a yard above the one open hatchway, through which the whole force of the stream was rushing, was the unhappy Mops, *alias* Scratch, *alias* Dirty Dick, *alias* Jack Sheppard, paddling, and sneezing, and winking, his little bald muzzle turned piteously upward to the sky.

‘He will be drowned!’ quoth the colonel.

There was no doubt of it; and so Mops thought, as, shivering and whining, he plied every leg, while the glassy current dragged him back and back, and Honorina sobbed like a child.

The colonel lay down on the bridge, and caught at him: his arm was a foot too short. In a moment the huge form of Tregarva plunged solemnly into the water, with a splash like seven salmon, and Mops was jerked out over the colonel’s head high and dry on to the bridge.

‘You’ll be drowned, at least!’ shouted the colonel, with an oath of Uncle Toby’s own.

Tregarva saw his danger, made one desperate bound upward, and missed the bridge. The colonel caught at him, tore off a piece of his collar—the calm, solemn face of the keeper flashed past beneath him, and disappeared through the roaring gate.

They rushed to the other side of the bridge—caught one glimpse of a dark body fleeting and roaring down the foam-way. The colonel leapt the bridge-rail like a deer, rushed out along the buck-stage, tore off his coat, and sprung headlong into the boiling pool, ‘rejoicing in his might,’ as old Homer would say.

Lancelot, forgetting his crutches, was dashing after him, when he felt a soft hand clutching at his arm.

‘Lancelot! Mr. Smith!’ cried Argemone. ‘You shall not go! You are too ill—weak—’

‘A fellow-creature’s life!’

‘What is his life to yours?’ she cried, in a tone of deep passion. And then, imperiously, ‘Stay here, I command you!’

The magnetic touch of her hand thrilled through his whole frame. She had called him Lancelot! He shrank down, and stood spell-bound.

‘Good heavens!’ she cried; ‘look at my sister!’

Out on the extremity of the buck-stage (how she got there neither they nor she ever knew) crouched Honorina, her face idiotic with terror, while she stared with bursting eyes into the foam.

A shriek of disappointment rose from her lips, as in a moment the colonel’s weather-worn head reappeared above, looking for all the world like an old gray shiny-painted seal.

‘Poof! tally-ho! Poof! poof! Heave me a piece of wood, Lancelot, my boy!’ And he disappeared again.

They looked round, there was not a loose bit near. Claude ran off towards the house. Lancelot, desperate, seized the bridge-rail, tore it off by sheer strength, and hurled it far into the pool.

Argemone saw it, and remembered it, like a true woman. Ay, be as Manichæan-sentimental as you will, fair ladies, physical prowess, that Eden-right of manhood, is sure to tell upon your hearts!

Again the colonel’s grizzled head reappeared,—and, oh joy! beneath it a dragged knot of black curls. In another instant he had hold of the rail, and quietly floating down to the shallow, dragged the lifeless giant high and dry on a patch of gravel.

Honorina never spoke. She rose, walked quietly back along the beam, passed Argemone and Lancelot without seeing them, and firmly but hurriedly led the way round the pool-side.

Before they arrived at the bank, the colonel had carried Tregarva to it. Lancelot and two or three workmen, whom his cries had attracted, lifted the body on to the meadow.

Honorina knelt quietly down on the grass, and watched, silent and motionless, the dead face, with her wide, awestruck eyes.

‘God bless her for a kind soul!’ whispered the wan weather-beaten field drudges, as they crowded round the body.

‘Get out of the way, my men!’ quoth the colonel. ‘Too many cooks spoil the broth.’ And he packed off one here and another there for necessaries, and commenced trying every restorative means with the ready coolness of a practised surgeon; while Lancelot, whom he ordered about like a baby, gulped down a great choking lump of envy, and then tasted the rich delight of forgetting himself in admiring obedience to a real superior.

But there Tregarva lay lifeless, with folded hands, and a quiet satisfied smile, while Honorina watched and watched with parted lips, unconscious of the presence of every one.

Five minutes!—ten!

‘Carry him to the house,’ said the colonel, in a despairing tone, after another attempt.

‘He moves!’ ‘No!’ ‘He does!’ ‘He breathes!’ ‘Look at his eyelids!’

Slowly his eyes opened.

‘Where am I? All gone? Sweet dreams—blessed dreams!’

His eye met Honorina’s. One big deep sigh swelled to his lips and burst. She seemed to recollect herself, rose, passed her arm through Argemone’s, and walked slowly away.

CHAPTER IV: AN 'INGLORIOUS MILTON'

Argemone, sweet prude, thought herself bound to read Honoria a lecture that night, on her reckless exhibition of feeling; but it profited little. The most consummate cunning could not have baffled Argemone's suspicions more completely than her sister's utter simplicity. She cried just as bitterly about Mops's danger as about the keeper's, and then laughed heartily at Argemone's solemnity; till at last, when pushed a little too hard, she broke out into something very like a passion, and told her sister, bitterly enough, that 'she was not accustomed to see men drowned every day, and begged to hear no more about the subject.' Whereat Argemone prudently held her tongue, knowing that under all Honoria's tenderness lay a volcano of passionate determination, which was generally kept down by her affections, but was just as likely to be maddened by them. And so this conversation only went to increase the unconscious estrangement between them, though they continued, as sisters will do, to lavish upon each other the most extravagant protestations of affection—vowing to live and die only for each other—and believing honestly, sweet souls, that they felt all they said; till real imperious Love came in, in one case of the two at least, shouldering all other affections right and left; and then the two beauties discovered, as others do, that it is not so possible or reasonable as they thought for a woman to sacrifice herself and her lover for the sake of her sister or her friend. Next morning Lancelot and the colonel started out to Tregarva's cottage, on a mission of inquiry. They found the giant propped up in bed with pillows, his magnificent features looking in their paleness more than ever like a granite Memnon. Before him lay an open *Pilgrim's Progress*, and a drawer filled with feathers and furs, which he was busily manufacturing into trout flies, reading as he worked. The room was filled with nets, guns, and keepers' tackle, while a well-filled shelf of books hung by the wall.

'Excuse my rising, gentlemen,' he said, in his slow, staid voice, 'but I am very weak, in spite of the Lord's goodness to me. You are very kind to think of coming to my poor cottage,'

'Well, my man,' said the colonel, 'and how are you after your cold bath? You are the heaviest fish I ever landed!'

'Pretty well, thank God, and you, sir. I am in your debt, sir, for the dear life. How shall I ever repay you?'

'Repay, my good fellow? You would have done as much for me.'

'May be; but you did not think of that when you jumped in; and no more must I in thanking you. God knows how a poor miner's son will ever reward you; but the mouse repaid the lion, says the story, and, at all events, I can pray for you. By the bye, gentlemen, I hope you have brought up some trolling-tackle?'

'We came up to see you, and not to fish,' said Lancelot, charmed with the stately courtesy of the man.

'Many thanks, gentlemen; but old Harry Verney was in here just now, and had seen a great jack strike, at the tail of the lower reeds. With this fresh wind he will run till noon; and you are sure of him with a dace. After that, he will not be up again on the shallows till sunset. He works the works of darkness, and comes not to the light, because his deeds are evil.'

Lancelot laughed. 'He does but follow his kind, poor fellow.'

'No doubt, sir, no doubt; all the Lord's works are good: but it is a wonder why He should have made wasps, now, and blights, and vermin, and jack, and such evil-featured things, that carry spite and cruelty in their very faces—a great wonder. Do you think, sir, all those creatures were in the Garden of Eden?'

'You are getting too deep for me,' said Lancelot. 'But why trouble your head about fishing?'

'I beg your pardon for preaching to you, sir. I'm sure I forgot myself. If you will let me, I'll get up and get you a couple of bait from the stew. You'll do us keepers a kindness, and prevent sin,

sir, if you'll catch him. The squire will swear sadly—the Lord forgive him—if he hears of a pike in the trout-runs. I'll get up, if I may trouble you to go into the next room a minute.'

'Lie still, for Heaven's sake. Why bother your head about pike now?'

'It is my business, sir, and I am paid for it, and I must do it thoroughly;—and abide in the calling wherein I am called,' he added, in a sadder tone.

'You seem to be fond enough of it, and to know enough about it, at all events,' said the colonel, 'tying flies here on a sick-bed.'

'As for being fond of it, sir—those creatures of the water teach a man many lessons; and when I tie flies, I earn books.'

'How then?'

'I send my flies all over the country, sir, to Salisbury and Hungerford, and up to Winchester, even; and the money buys me many a wise book—all my delight is in reading; perhaps so much the worse for me.'

'So much the better, say,' answered Lancelot warmly. 'I'll give you an order for a couple of pounds' worth of flies at once.'

'The Lord reward you, sir,' answered the giant.

'And you shall make me the same quantity,' said the colonel. 'You can make salmon-flies?'

'I made a lot by pattern for an Irish gent, sir.'

'Well, then, we'll send you some Norway patterns, and some golden pheasant and parrot feathers. We're going to Norway this summer, you know, Lancelot—'

Tregarva looked up with a quaint, solemn hesitation.

'If you please, gentlemen, you'll forgive a man's conscience.'

'Well?'

'But I'd not like to be a party to the making of Norway flies.'

'Here's a Protectionist, with a vengeance!' laughed the colonel. 'Do you want to keep all us fishermen in England? eh? to fee English keepers?'

'No, sir. There's pretty fishing in Norway, I hear, and poor folk that want money more than we keepers. God knows we get too much—we that hang about great houses and serve great folks' pleasure—you toss the money down our throats, without our deserving it; and we spend it as we get it—a deal too fast—while hard-working labourers are starving.'

'And yet you would keep us in England?'

'Would God I could!'

'Why then, my good fellow?' asked Lancelot, who was getting intensely interested with the calm, self-possessed earnestness of the man, and longed to draw him out.

The colonel yawned.

'Well, I'll go and get myself a couple of bait. Don't you stir, my good parson-keeper. Down charge, I say! Odd if I don't find a bait-net, and a rod for myself, under the verandah.'

'You will, colonel. I remember, now, I set it there last morning; but the water washed many things out of my brains, and some things into them—and I forgot it like a goose.'

'Well, good-bye, and lie still. I know what a drowning is, and more than one. A day and a night have I been in the deep, like the man in the good book; and bed is the best of medicine for a ducking;' and the colonel shook him kindly by the hand and disappeared.

Lancelot sat down by the keeper's bed.

'You'll get those fish-hooks into your trousers, sir; and this is a poor place to sit down in.'

'I want you to say your say out, friend, fish-hooks or none.'

The keeper looked warily at the door, and when the colonel had passed the window, balancing the trolling-rod on his chin, and whistling merrily, he began,—

“A day and a night have I been in the deep!”—and brought back no more from it! And yet the Psalms say how they that go down to the sea in ships see the works of the Lord!—If the Lord has opened their eyes to see them, that must mean—’

Lancelot waited.

‘What a gallant gentleman that is, and a valiant man of war, I’ll warrant,—and to have seen all the wonders he has, and yet to be wasting his span of life like that!’

Lancelot’s heart smote him.

‘One would think, sir,—You’ll pardon me for speaking out.’ And the noble face worked, as he murmured to himself, ‘When ye are brought before kings and princes for my name’s sake.—I dare not hold my tongue, sir. I am as one risen from the dead,’—and his face flashed up into sudden enthusiasm—‘and woe to me if I speak not. Oh, why, why are you gentlemen running off to Norway, and foreign parts, whither God has not called you! Are there no graves in Egypt, that you must go out to die in the wilderness!’

Lancelot, quite unaccustomed to the language of the Dissenting poor, felt keenly the bad taste of the allusion.

‘What can you mean?’ he asked.

‘Pardon me, sir, if I cannot speak plainly; but are there not temptations enough here in England that you must go to waste all your gifts, your scholarship, and your rank, far away there out of the sound of a church-going bell? I don’t deny it’s a great temptation. I have read of Norway wonders in a book of one Miss Martineau, with a strange name.’

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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