YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

A REPUTED CHANGELING

Charlotte Yonge

A Reputed Changeling

Yonge C.

A Reputed Changeling / C. Yonge — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

Charlotte M. Yonge
A Reputed Changeling / Or Three Seventh Years Two Centuries Ago

PREFACE

I do not think I have here forced the hand of history except by giving Portchester to two imaginary Rectors, and by a little injustice to her whom Princess Anne termed 'the brick-bat woman.'

The trial is not according to present rules, but precedents for its irregularities are to be found in the doings of the seventeenth century, notably in the trial of Spencer Cowper by the same Judge Hatsel, and I have done my best to represent the habits of those country gentry who were not infected by the evils of the later Stewart reigns.

There is some doubt as to the proper spelling of Portchester, but, judging by analogy, the *t* ought not to be omitted.

C. M. YONGE. 2d May 1889.

CHAPTER I
The Experiences Of Goody Madge

"Dear Madam, think me not to blame;
Invisible the fairy came.
Your precious babe is hence conveyed,
And in its place a changeling laid.
Where are the father's mouth and nose,
The mother's eyes as black as sloes?
See here, a shocking awkward creature,
That speaks a fool in every feature."

GAY.

"He is an ugly ill-favoured boy—just like *Riquet à la Houppe*."

"That he is! Do you not know that he is a changeling?"

Such were the words of two little girls walking home from a school for young ladies kept, at the Cathedral city of Winchester, by two Frenchwomen of quality, refugees from the persecutions preluding the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and who enlivened the studies of their pupils with the *Contes de Commère L'Oie*.

The first speaker was Anne Jacobina Woodford, who had recently come with her mother, the widow of a brave naval officer, to live with her uncle, the Prebendary then in residence. The other was Lucy Archfield, daughter to a knight, whose home was a few miles from Portchester, Dr. Woodford's parish on the southern coast of Hampshire.

In the seventeenth century, when roads were mere ditches often impassable, and country-houses frequently became entirely isolated in the winter, it was usual with the wealthier county families to move into their local capital, where some owned mansions and others hired prebendal houses, or went into lodgings in the roomy dwellings of the superior tradesmen. For the elders this was the season of social intercourse, for the young people, of education.

The two girls, who were about eight years old, had struck up a rapid friendship, and were walking hand in hand to the Close attended by the nurse in charge of Mistress Lucy. This little lady wore a black silk hood and cape, trimmed with light brown fur, and lined with pink, while Anne Woodford, being still in mourning for her father, was wrapped in a black cloak, unrelieved except by the white border of her round cap, fringed by fair curls, contrasting with her brown eyes. She was taller and had a more upright bearing of head and neck, with more promise of beauty than her companion, who was much more countrified and would not have been taken for the child of higher station.

They had traversed the graveyard of the Cathedral, and were passing through a narrow archway known as the Slype, between the south-western angle of the Cathedral and a heavy mass of old masonry forming part of the garden wall of the present abode of the Archfield family, when suddenly both children stumbled and fell, while an elfish peal of laughter sounded behind them.

Lucy came down uppermost, and was scarcely hurt, but Anne had fallen prone, striking her chin on the ground, so as to make her bite her lip, and bruising knees and elbows severely. Nurse detected the cause of the fall so as to avoid it herself. It was a cord fastened across the archway, close to the ground, and another shout of derision greeted the discovery; while Lucy, regaining her feet, beheld for a moment a weird exulting grimace on a visage peeping over a neighbouring headstone.

"It is he! it is he! The wicked imp! There's no peace for him! I say," she screamed, "see if you don't get a sound flogging!" and she clenched her little fist as the provoking "Ho! ho! ho!" rang farther and farther off. "Don't cry, Anne dear; the Dean and Chapter shall take order with him, and he shall be soundly beaten. Are you hurt? O nurse, her mouth is all blood."

"I hope she has not broken a tooth," said nurse, who had been attending to the sobbing child. "Come in, my lamb, we will wash your face, and make you well."

Anne, blinded with tears, jarred, bruised, bleeding, and bewildered, submitted to be led by kind nurse the more willingly because she knew that her mother, together with all the quality, were at Sir Thomas Charnock's. They had dined at the fashionable hour of two, and were to stay till supper-time, the elders playing at Ombre, the juniors dancing. As a rule the ordinary clergy did not associate with the county families, but Dr. Woodford was of good birth and a royal chaplain, and his deceased brother had been a favourite officer of the Duke of York, and had been so severely wounded by his side in the battle of Southwold as to be permanently disabled. Indeed Anne Jacobina was godchild to the Duke and his first Duchess, whose favoured attendant her mother had been. Thus Mrs. Woodford was in great request, and though she had not hitherto gone into company since her widowhood, she had yielded to Lady Charnock's entreaty that she would come and show her how to deal with that strange new Chinese infusion, a costly packet of which had been brought to her from town by Sir Thomas, as the Queen's favourite beverage, wherewith the ladies of the place were to be regaled and astonished.

It had been already arranged that the two little girls should spend the evening together, and as they entered the garden before the house a rude voice exclaimed, "Holloa! London Nan whimpering. Has my fine lady met a spider or a cow?" and a big rough lad of twelve, in a college gown, spread out his arms, and danced up and down in the doorway to bar the entrance.

"Don't, Sedley," said a sturdy but more gentlemanlike lad of the same age, thrusting him aside. "Is she hurt? What is it?"

"That spiteful imp, Peregrine Oakshott," said Lucy passionately. "He had a cord across the Slype to trip us up. I heard him laughing like a hobgoblin, and saw him too, grinning over a tombstone like the malicious elf he is."

The college boy uttered a horse laugh, which made Lucy cry, "Cousin Sedley, you are as bad!" but the other boy was saying, "Don't cry, Anne None-so-pretty. I'll give it him well! Though I'm younger, I'm bigger, and I'll show him reason for not meddling with my little sweetheart."

"Have with you then!" shouted Sedley, ready for a fray on whatever pretext, and off they rushed, as nurse led little Anne up the broad shallow steps of the dark oak staircase, but Lucy stood laughing with exultation in the intended vengeance, as her brother took down her father's hunting-whip.

"He must be wellnigh a fiend to play such wicked pranks under the very Minster!" she said.

"And a rascal of a Whig, and that's worse," added Charles; "but I'll have it out of him!"

"Take care, Charley; if you offend him, and he does really belong to those—those creatures"—Lucy lowered her voice—"who knows what they might do to you?"

Charles laughed long and loud. "I'll take care of that," he said, swinging out at the door. "Elf or no elf, he shall learn what it is to play off his tricks on *my* sister and my little sweetheart."

Lucy betook herself to the nursery, where Anne was being comforted, her bleeding lip washed with essence, and repaired with a pinch of beaver from a hat, and her other bruises healed with lily leaves steeped in strong waters.

"Charley is gone to serve him out!" announced Lucy as the sovereign remedy.

"Oh, but perhaps he did not mean it," Anne tried to say.

"Mean it? Small question of that, the cankered young slip! Nurse, do you think those he belongs to can do Charley any harm if he angers them?"

"I cannot say, missie. Only 'tis well we be not at home, or there might be elf knots in the horses' manes to-night. I doubt me whether *that sort* can do much hurt here, seeing as 'tis holy ground."

"But is he really a changeling? I thought there were no such things as—"

"Hist, hist, Missie Anne!" cried the dame; "'tis not good to name them."

"Oh, but we are on the Minster ground, nurse," said Lucy, trembling a little however, looking over her shoulder, and coming closer to the old servant.

"Why do they think so?" asked Anne. "Is it because he is so ugly and mischievous and rude? Not like boys in London."

"Prithee, nurse, tell her the tale," entreated Lucy, who had made large eyes over it many a time before.

"Ay, and who should tell you all about it save me, who had it all from Goody Madge Bulpett, as saw it all!"

"Goody Madge! It was she that came when poor little Kitty was born and died," suggested Lucy, as Anne, laying her aching head upon nurse's knees, prepared to listen to the story.

"Well, deary darlings, you see poor Madam Oakshott never had her health since the Great Fire in London, when she was biding with her kinsfolk to be near Major Oakshott, who had got into trouble about some of his nonconforming doings. The poor lady had a mortal fright before she could be got out of Gracechurch Street as was all of a blaze, and she was so afeard of her husband being burnt as he lay in Newgate that she could scarce be got away, and whether it was that, or that she caught cold lying out in a tent on Highgate Hill, she has never had a day's health since."

"And the gentleman—her husband?" asked Anne.

"They all broke prison, poor fellows, as they had need to do, and the Major's time was nearly up. He made himself busy in saving and helping the folk in the streets; and his brother, Sir Peregrine, who was thick with the King, and is in foreign parts now, took the chance to speak of the poor lady's plight and say it would be the death of her if he could not get his discharge, and his Majesty, bless his kind heart, gave the order at once. So they took madam home to the Chace, but she has been but an ailing body ever since."

"But the fairy, the fairy, how did she change the babe?" cried Anne.

"Hush, hush, dearie! name them not. I am coming to it all in good time. I was telling you how the poor lady failed and pined from that hour, and was like to die. My gossip Madge told me how when, next Midsummer, this unlucky babe was born they had to take him from her chamber at once because any sound of crying made her start in her sleep, and shriek that she heard a poor child wailing who had been left in a burning house. Moll Owens, the hind's wife, a comely lass, was to nurse him, and they had him at once to her in the nursery, where was the elder child, two years old, Master Oliver, as you know well, Mistress Lucy, a fine-grown, sturdy little Turk as ever was."

"Yes, I know him," answered Lucy; "and if his brother's a changeling, he is a bear! The Whig bear is what Charley calls him."

"Well, what does that child do but trot out of the nursery, and try to scramble down the stairs. —Never tell me but that they you wot of trained him out—not that they had power over a Christian child, but that they might work their will on the little one. So they must needs trip him up, so that he rolled down the stair hollering and squalling all the way enough to bring the house down, and his poor lady mother, she woke up in a fit. The womenfolk ran, Molly and all, she being but a slip of a girl herself and giddy-pated, and when they came back after quieting Master Oliver, the babe was changed."

"Then they didn't see the—"

"Hush, hush, missie! no one never sees 'em or they couldn't do nothing. They cannot, if a body is looking. But what had been as likely a child before as you would wish to handle was gone! The poor little mouth was all of a twist, and his eyelid drooped, and he never ceased mourn, mourn, mourn, wail, wail, wail, day and night, and whatever food he took he never was satisfied, but pined and peaked and dwined from day to day, so as his little legs was like knitting pins. The lady was nigh upon death as it seemed, so that no one took note of the child at first, but when Madge had

time to look at him, she saw how it was, as plain as plain could be, and told his father. But men are unbelieving, my dears, and always think they know better than them as has the best right, and Major Oakshott would hear of no such thing, only if the boy was like to die, he must be christened. Well, Madge knew that sometimes they flee at touch of holy water, but no; though the thing mourned and moaned enough to curdle your blood and screeched out when the water touched him, there he was the same puny little canker. So when madam was better, and began to fret over the child that was nigh upon three months old, and no bigger than a newborn babe, Madge up and told her how it was, and the way to get her own again."

"What was that, nurse?"

"There be different ways, my dear. Madge always held to breaking five and twenty eggs and have a pot boiling on a good sea-coal fire with the poker in it red hot, and then drop the shells in one by one, in sight of the creature in the cradle. Presently it will up and ask whatever you are about. Then you gets the poker in your hand as you says, "A-brewing of egg shells." Then it says, "I'm forty hundred years old and odd, and yet I never heard of a-brewing of egg shells." Then you ups with the poker and at him to thrust it down his ugly throat, and there's a hissing and a whirling, and he is snatched away, and the real darling, all plump and rosy, is put back in the cradle."

"And did they?"

"No, my dears. Madam was that soft-hearted she could not bring her mind to it, though they promised her not to touch him unless he spoke. But nigh on two years later, Master Robert was born, as fine and lusty and straight-limbed as a chrisom could be, while the other could not walk a step, but sat himself about on the floor, a-moaning and a-fretting with the legs of him for all the world like the drumsticks of a fowl, and his hands like claws, and his face wizened up like an old gaffer of a hundred, or the jackanapes that Martin Boats'n brought from Barbary. So after a while madam saw the rights of it, and gave consent that means should be taken as Madge and other wise folk would have it; but he was too old by that time for the egg shells, for he could talk, talk, and ask questions enough to drive you wild. So they took him out under the privet hedge, Madge and her gossip Deborah Clint, and had got his clothes off to flog him with nettles till they changed him, when the ill-favoured elf began to squall and shriek like a whole litter of pigs, and as ill luck would have it, the master was within hearing, though they had watched him safe off to one of his own 'venticles, but it seems there had been warning that the justices were on the look-out, so home he came. And behold, the thing that never knew the use of his feet before, ups and flies at him, and lays hold of his leg, hollering out, "Sir, father, don't let them," and what not. So then it was all over with them, as though that were not proof enow what manner of thing it was! Madge tried to put him off with washing with yarbs being good for the limbs, but when he saw that Deb was there, he saith, saith he, as grim as may be, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," which was hard, for she is but a white witch; and he stormed and raved at them with Bible texts, and then he vowed (men are so headstrong, my dears) that if ever he ketched them at it again, he would see Deb burnt for a witch at the stake, and Madge hung for the murder of the child, and he is well known to be a man of his word. So they had to leave him to abide by his bargain, and a sore handful he has of it."

Anne drew a long sigh and asked whether the real boy in fairyland would never come back.

"There's no telling, missie dear. Some say they are bound there for ever and a day, some that they as holds 'em are bound to bring them back for a night once in seven years, and in the old times if they was sprinkled with holy water, and crossed, they would stay, but there's no such thing as holy water now, save among the Papists, and if one knew the way to cross oneself, it would be as much as one's life was worth."

"If Peregrine was to die," suggested Lucy.

"Bless your heart, dearie, he'll never die! When the true one's time comes, you'll see, if so be you be alive to see it, as Heaven grant, he will go off like the flame of a candle and nothing be left in

his place but a bit of a withered sting nettle. But come, my sweetings, 'tis time I got your supper. I'll put some nice rosy-cheeked apples down to roast, to be soft for Mistress Woodford's sore mouth."

Before the apples were roasted, Charles Archfield and his cousin, the colleger Sedley Archfield, a big boy in a black cloth gown, came in with news of having—together with the other boys, including Oliver and Robert Oakshott—hunted Peregrine all round the Close, but he ran like a lapwing, and when they had pinned him up in the corner by Dr. Ken's house, he slipped through their fingers up the ivy, and grinned at them over the wall like the imp he was. Noll said it was always the way, he was no more to be caught than a bit of thistledown, but Sedley meant to call out all the college boys and hunt and bait him down like a badger on 'Hills.'

CHAPTER II
High Treason

"Whate'er it be that is within his reach,
The filching trick he doth his fingers teach."

Robin Badfellow.

There was often a considerable distance between children and their parents in the seventeenth century, but Anne Woodford, as the only child of her widowed mother, was as solace, comfort, and companion; and on her pillow in early morning the child poured forth in grave earnest the entire story of the changeling, asking whether he could not be "taken to good Dr. Ken, or the Dean, or the Bishop to be ex—ex—what is it, mother? Not whipped with nettles. Oh no! nor burnt with red hot pokers, but have holy words said so that the right one may come back."

"My dear child, did you really believe that old nurse's tale?"

"O madam, she *knew* it. The other old woman saw it! I always thought fairies and elves were only in tales, but Lucy's nurse knows it is true. And *he* is not a bit like other lads, mamma dear. He is lean and small, and his eyes are of different colours, look two ways at once, and his mouth goes awry when he speaks, and he laughs just like—like a fiend. Lucy and I call him *Riquet à la Houppe*, because he is just like the picture in Mademoiselle's book, with a great stubbly bunch of hair sticking out on one side, and though he walks a little lame, he can hop and skip like a grasshopper, faster than any of the boys, and leap up a wall in a moment, and grin—oh most frightfully. Have you ever seen him, mamma?"

"I think so. I saw a poor boy, who seemed to me to have had a stroke of some sort when he was an infant."

"But, madam, that would not make him so spiteful and malicious!"

"If every one is against him and treats him as a wicked mischievous elf, it is only too likely to make him bitter and spiteful. Nay, Anne, if you come back stuffed with old wives' tales, I shall not allow you to go home with Lucy Archfield."

The threat silenced Anne, who was a grave and rather silent little person, and when she mentioned it to her friend, the answer was, "Did you tell your mother? If I had told mine, I should have been whipped for repeating lying tales."

"Oh then you don't believe it!"

"It must be true, for Madge knew it. But that's the way always if one lets out that one knows more than they think."

"It is not the way with my mother," stoutly said Anne, drawing up her dignified little head. And she kept her resolution, for though a little excited by her first taste of lively youthful companionship, she was naturally a thoughtful reticent child, with a character advanced by companionship with her mother as an only child, through a great sorrow. Thus she was in every respect more developed than her contemporary Lucy, who regarded her with wonder as well as affection, and she was the object of the boyish devotion of Charley, who often defended her from his cousin Sedley's endeavours to put down what he considered upstart airs in a little nobody from London. Sedley teased and baited every weak thing in his way, and Lucy had been his chief butt till Anne Woodford's unconscious dignity and more cultivated manners excited his utmost spleen.

Lucy might be incredulous, but she was eager to tell that when her cousin Sedley Archfield was going back to 'chambers,' down from the Close gate came the imp on his shoulders in the twilight and twisted both legs round his neck, holding tight on in spite of plunges, pinches, and endeavours to

scrape him off against the wall, which were frustrated or retaliated by hair pulling, choking, till just ere entering the college gateway, where Sedley looked to get his revenge among his fellows, he found his shoulders free, and heard "Ho! ho! ho!" from the top of a wall close at hand. All the more was the young people's faith in the changeling story confirmed, and child-world was in those days even more impenetrable to their elders than at present.

Changeling or no, it was certain that Peregrine Oakshott was the plague of the Close, where his father, an ex-officer of the Parliamentary army, had unwillingly hired a house for the winter, for the sake of medical treatment for his wife, a sufferer from a complication of ailments. Oakwood, his home, was about five miles from Dr. Woodford's living of Portchester, and as the families would thus be country neighbours, Mrs. Woodford thought it well to begin the acquaintance at Winchester.

While knocking at the door of the house on the opposite side of the Close, she was aware of an elfish visage peering from an upper window. There was the queer mop of dark hair, the squinting light eyes, the contorted grin crooking the mouth, the odd sallow face, making her quite glad to get out of sight of the strange grimaces which grew every moment more hideous.

Mrs. Oakshott sat in an arm-chair beside a large fire in a wainscotted room, with a folding-screen shutting off the window. Her spinning-wheel was near, but it was only too plain that 'feeble was the hand, and silly the thread.' She bent her head in its wadded black velvet hood, but excused herself from rising, as she was crippled by rheumatic pains. She had evidently once been a pretty little person, innocent and inane, and her face had become like that of a withered baby, piteous in its expression of pain and weariness, but otherwise somewhat vacant. At first, indeed, there was a look of alarm. Perhaps she expected every visitor to come with a complaint of her unlucky Peregrine, but when Mrs. Woodford spoke cheerfully of being her neighbour in the country, she was evidently relieved and even gratified, prattling in a soft plaintive tone about her sufferings and the various remedies, ranging from woodlice rolled into natural pills, and grease off the church bells, to diamond dust and Goa stones, since, as she said, there was no cost to which Major Oakshott would not go for her benefit. He had even procured for her a pound of the Queen's new Chinese herb, and it certainly was as nauseous as could be wished, when boiled in milk, but she was told that was not the way it was taken at my Lady Charnock's. She was quite animated when Mrs. Woodford offered to show her how to prepare it.

Therewith the master of the house came in, and the aspect of affairs changed. He was a tall, dark, grave man, plainly though handsomely dressed, and in a gentlemanly way making it evident that visits to his wife were not welcome. He said that her health never permitted her to go abroad, and that his poor house contained nothing that could please a Court lady. Mrs. Oakshott shrank into herself, and became shy and silent, and Mrs. Woodford felt constrained to take leave, courteously conducted to the door by her unwilling host.

She had not taken many steps before she was startled by a sharp shower from a squirt coming sidelong like a blow on her cheek and surprising her into a low cry, which was heard by the Major, so that he hastened out, exclaiming, "Madam, I trust that you are not hurt."

"Oh no, sir! It is nothing—not a stone—only water!" she said, wiping it with her handkerchief.

"I am grieved and ashamed at the evil pranks of my unhappy son, but he shall suffer for it."

"Nay, sir, I pray you. It was only childish mischief."

He had not waited to hear her pleadings, and before she was half across the Close he had overtaken her, dragging the cowering struggling boy in his powerful grasp.

"Now, Peregrine," he commanded, "let me instantly hear you ask the lady's pardon for your dastardly trick. Or—!" and his other hand was raised for a blow.

"I am sure he is sorry," said Mrs. Woodford, making a motion to ward off the stroke, and as the queer eyes glanced up at her in wondering inquiry, she laid her hand on the bony shoulder, saying, "I know you did not mean to hurt me. You are sorry, are you not?"

"Ay," the boy muttered, and she saw a look of surprise on his father's face.

"There," she said, "he has made his amends, and surely that may suffice."

"Nay, madam, it would be a weak and ungodly tenderness that would spare to drive forth the evil spirit which possesses the child by the use of the rod. I should fail in my duty alike to God and man," he added, in reply to a fresh gesture of intercession, "did I not teach him what it is to insult a lady at mine own door."

Mrs. Woodford could only go away, heartily sorry for the boy. From that time, however, both she and her little daughter were untouched by his tricks, though every one else had some complaint. Peas were shot from unknown recesses at venerable canons, mice darted out before shrieking ladies, frogs' clammy forms descended on the nape of their necks, hedgehogs were curled up on their chairs, and though Peregrine Oakshott was not often caught in the act, no mischief ever took place that was not attributed to him; and it was popularly believed in the Close that his father flogged him every morning for what he was about to do, and his tutor repeated the castigation every evening for what he had done, besides interludes at each detection.

Perhaps frequent usage had toughened his skin, or he had become expert in wriggling from the full force of the blow, or else, as many believed, the elfish nature was impervious; for he was as ready as ever for a trick the moment he was released, like, as his brother said, the dog Keeper, who, with a slaughtered chick hung round his neck in penance, rushed murderously upon the rest of the brood.

Yet Mrs. Woodford, on her way through the Cathedral nave, was aware of something leaning against one of the great columns, crouching together so that the dark head, supported on the arms, rested against the pillar which fluted the pier. The organ was pealing softly and plaintively, and the little gray coat seemed to heave as with a sob. She stood, impelled to offer to take him with her into the choir, but a verger, spying him, began rating him in a tone fit for expelling a dog, "Come, master, none of your pranks here! Be not you ashamed of yourself to be lying in wait for godly folk on their way to prayers? If I catch you here again the Dean shall hear of it, and you shall smart for it."

Mrs. Woodford began, "He was only hearkening to the music," but she caught such a look of malignity cast upon the verger as perfectly appalled her, and in another moment the boy had dashed, head over heels, out at the nearest door.

The next report that reached her related how a cloud of lime had suddenly descended from a broken arch of the cloister on the solemn verger, on his way to escort the Dean to the Minster, powdering his wig, whitening his black gown from collar to hem, and not a little endangering his eyesight.

The culprit eluded all pursuit on this occasion; but Mrs. Woodford soon after was told that the Major had caught Peregrine listening at the little south door of the choir, had collared him, and flogged him worse than ever, for being seduced by the sounds of the popish and idolatrous worship, and had told all his sons that the like chastisement awaited them if they presumed to cross the threshold of the steeple house.

Nevertheless the Senior Prefect of the college boys, when about to come out of the Cathedral on Sunday morning, found his gown pinned with a skewer so fast to the seat that he was only set free at the expense of a rent. Public opinion decided that the deed had been done by the imp of Oakshott, and accordingly the whole of the Wykeham scholars set on him with hue and cry the first time they saw him outside the Close, and hunted him as far as St. Cross, where he suddenly and utterly vanished from their sight.

Mrs. Woodford agreed with Anne that it was a very strange story. For how could he have been in the Cathedral at service time when it was well known that Major Oakshott had all his family together at his own form of worship in his house? Anne, who had been in hopes that her mother would be thus convinced of his supernatural powers, looked disappointed, but she had afterwards to confess that Charles Archfield had found out that it was his cousin Sedley Archfield who had played the audacious trick, in revenge for a well-merited tunding from the Prefect.

"And then saddled it on young Oakshott?" asked her mother.

"Charley says one such matter more or less makes no odds to the Whig ape; but I cannot endure Sedley Archfield, mamma."

"If he lets another lad bear the blame of his malice he cannot indeed be a good lad."

"So Charley and Lucy say," returned Anne. "We shall be glad to be away from Winchester, for while Peregrine Oakshott torments slyly, Sedley Archfield loves to frighten us openly, and to hurt us to see how much we can bear, and if Charley tries to stand up for us, Sedley calls him a puny wench, and a milksop, and knocks him down. But, dear madam, pray do not tell what I have said to her ladyship, for there is no knowing what Sedley would do to us."

"My little maid has not known before what boys can be!"

"No; but indeed Charles Archfield is quite different, almost as if he had been bred in London. He is a very gentleman. He never is rude to any girl, and he is courteous and gentle and kind. He gathered walnuts for us yesterday, and cracked all mine, and I am to make him a purse with two of the shells."

Mrs. Woodford smiled, but there was a short thrill of anxiety in her motherly heart as her glance brought up a deeper colour into Anne's cheeks. There was a reserve to bring that glow, for the child knew that if she durst say that Charles called her his little sweetheart and wife, and that the walnut-shell purse would be kept as a token, she should be laughed at as a silly child, perhaps forbidden to make it, or else her uncle might hear and make a joke of it. It was not exactly disingenuousness, but rather the first dawn of maidenly reserve and modesty that reddened her cheek in a manner her mother did not fail to observe.

Yet it was with more amusement than misgiving, for children played at courtship like other games in mimicry of being grown up, and a baronet's only son was in point of fact almost as much out of the reach of a sea captain's daughter and clergyman's niece as a prince of the blood royal; and Master Archfield would probably be contracted long before he could choose for himself, for his family were not likely to take into account that if Captain Woodford had not been too severely wounded to come forward after the battle of Southwold Bay he would have been knighted. On the strength of which Anne, as her companions sometimes said, gave herself in consequence more airs than Mistress Lucy ever did.

Sedley, a poor cousin, a destitute cavalier's orphan, who had been placed on the foundation at Winchester College in hopes that he might be provided for in the Church, would have been far more on her level, and indeed Lady Archfield, a notable matchmaker, had already hinted how suitable such a thing would be. However, the present school character of Master Sedley, as well as her own observations, by no means inclined Mrs. Woodford towards the boy, large limbed and comely faced, but with a bullying, scowling air that did not augur well for his wife or his parish.

Whether it were this lad's threats, or more likely, the fact that all the Close was on the alert, Peregrine's exploits were less frequent there, and began to extend to the outskirts of the city. There were some fine yew trees on the southern borders, towards the chalk down, with massive dark foliage upon stout ruddy branches, among which Peregrine, armed with a fishing-rod, line, and hook, sat perched, angling for what might be caught from unconscious passengers along a path which led beneath.

From a market-woman's basket he abstracted thus a fowl! His "Ho! ho! ho!" startled her into looking up, and seeing it apparently resuscitated, and hovering aloft. Full of dismay, she hurried shrieking away to tell the story of the bewitched chick at the market-cross among her gossips.

His next capture was a chop from a butcher boy's tray, but this involved more peril, for with a fierce oath that he would be revenged on the Whiggish imp, the lad darted at the tree, in vain, however, for Peregrine had dropped down on the other side, and crept unseen to another bush, where he lay *perdu*, under the thick green branches, rod and all, while the youth, swearing and growling, was shaking his former refuge.

As soon as the coast was clear he went back to his post, and presently was aware of three gentlemen advancing over the down, pointing, measuring, and surveying. One was small and slight, as simply dressed as a gentleman of the period could be; another was clad in a gay coat with a good deal of fluttering ribbon and rich lace; the third, a tall well-made man, had a plain walking suit, surmounted by a flowing periwig and plumed beaver. Coming close beneath Peregrine's tree, and standing with their backs to it, they eagerly conversed. "Such a cascade will drown the honours of the Versailles fountains, if only the water can be raised to such a height. Are you sure of it, Wren?"

"As certain as hydraulics can make me, sir," and the lesser man began drawing lines with his stick in the dust of the path in demonstration.

The opportunity was irresistible, and the hook from above deftly caught the band of the feathered hat of the taller man, slowly and steadily drawing it up, entirely unperceived by the owner, on whose wig it had rested, and who was bending over the dust-traced diagram in absorbed attention. Peregrine deferred his hobgoblin laughter, for success emboldened him farther. Detaching the hat from his hook, and depositing it safely in a fork of the tree, he next cautiously let down his line, and contrived to get a strong hold of one of the black locks on the top of the wig, just as the wearer was observing, "Oliver's Battery, eh? A cupola with a light to be seen out at sea? Our sailors will make another St. Christopher of you! Ha! what's this'"

For feeling as if a branch were touching the structure on his head, he had stepped forward, thus favouring Peregrine's manœuvres so that the wig dangled in the air, suddenly disclosing the bare skull of a very dark man, with such marked features that it needed not the gentlemen's outcry to show the boy who was the victim of his mischief.

"What imp is there?" cried the King, spying up into the tree, while his attendant drew his sword, "How now?" as Peregrine half climbed, half tumbled down, bringing hat and wig with him, and, whether by design or accident, fell at his feet. "Will nothing content you but royal game?" he continued laughing, as Sir Christopher Wren helped him to resume his wig. "Why, what a shrimp it is! a mere goblin sprite! What's thy name, master wag?"

"Peregrine Oakshott, so please you," the boy answered, raising himself with a face scared indeed, but retaining its queer impishness. "Sir, I never guessed—"

"Young rogue! have you our licence to waylay our loyal subjects?" demanded the King, with an affected fierceness. "Know you not 'tis rank treason to discrown our sacred Majesty, far more to dishevel or destroy our locks? Why! I might behead you on the spot." To his great amazement the boy, with an eager face and clasped hands, exclaimed, "O sir! Oh, please your Majesty, do so."

"Do so!" exclaimed the King astounded. "Didst hear what I said?"

"Yes, sir! You said it was a beheading matter, and I'm willing, sir."

"Of all the petitions that ever were made to me, this is the strangest!" exclaimed Charles. "An urchin like this weary of life! What next? So," with a wink to his companions, "Peregrine Oakshott, we condemn thee for high treason against our most sacred Majesty's beaver and periwig, and sentence thee to die by having thine head severed from thy body. Kneel down, open thy collar, bare thy neck. Ay, so, lay thy neck across that bough. Killigrew, do thy duty."

To the general surprise, the boy complied with all these directions, never flinching nor showing sign of fear, except that his lips were set and his cheek whitened. As he knelt, with closed eyes, the flat cold blade descended on his neck, the tension relaxed, and he sank!

"Hold!" cried the King. "It is gone too far! He has surely not carried out the jest by dying on our hands."

"No, no, sir," said Wren, after a moment's alarm, "he has only swooned. Has any one here a flask of wine to revive him?"

Several gentlemen had come up, and as Peregrine stirred, some wine was held to his lips, and he presently asked in a faint voice, "Is this fairyland?"

"Not yet, my lad," said Charles, "whatever it may be when Wren's work is done."

The boy opened his eyes, and as he beheld the same face, and the too familiar sky and trees, he sighed heavily, and said, “Then it is all the same! O sir, would you but have cut off my head in good earnest, I might be at home again!”

“Home! what means the elf?”

“An elf! That is what they say I am—changed in the cradle,” said Peregrine, incited to confidence by the good-natured eyes, “and I thought if I were close on death mine own people might take me home, and bring back the right one.”

“He really believes it!” exclaimed Charles much diverted. “Tell me, good Master Elf, who is thy father, I mean not my brother Oberon, but him of the right one, as thou sayst.”

“Mr. Robert Oakshott of Oakwood, sir,” said Peregrine.

“A sturdy squire of the country party,” said the King. “I am much minded to secure the lad for an elfin page,” he added aside to Killigrew. “There’s a fund of excellent humour and drollery in those queer eyes of his! So, Sir Hobgoblin, if you are proof against cold steel, I know not what is to be done with you. Get you back, and devise some other mode of finding your way home to fairyland.”

Peregrine said not a word of his adventure, so that the surprise of his family was the greater when overtures were made through Sir Christopher Wren for his appointment as a royal page.

“I would as soon send my son at once to be a page to Beelzebub,” returned Major Oakshott.

And though Sir Christopher did not return the answer exactly in those terms, he would not say that the Puritan Major did not judge rightly.

CHAPTER III
The Fairy King

"She's turned her right and round about,
And thrice she blew on a grass-green horn,
And she sware by the moon and the stars above
That she'd gar me rue the day I was born."

Old Ballad of Alison Cross.

Dr. Woodford's parish was Portchester, where stood the fine old royal castle at present ungarrisoned, and partly dismantled in the recent troubles, on a chalk peninsula, a spur from Portsdown, projecting above the alluvial flats, and even into the harbour, whose waves at high tide laved the walls. The church and churchyard were within the ample circuit of the fortifications, about two furlongs distant from the main building, where rose the mighty Norman keep, above the inner court, with a gate tower at this date, only inhabited by an old soldier as porter with his family. A massive square tower at each angle of the huge wall likewise defied decay.

It was on Midsummer eve, that nearly about sundown, Dr. Woodford was summoned by the severe illness of the gatekeeper's old father, and his sister-in-law went with him to attempt what her skill could accomplish for the old man's relief.

They were detained there till the sun had long set, though the air, saturated with his redness, was full of soft twilight, while the moon, scarcely past the full, was just high enough to silver the quiet sea, and throw the shadow of the battlements and towers on the sward whitened with dew.

After the close atmosphere of the sickroom the freshness was welcome, and Mrs. Woodford, once a friend of Katherine Phillips, 'the Matchless Orinda,' had an eye and a soul to appreciate the beauty, and she even murmured the lines of *Il Penseroso* as she leant on the arm of her brother-in-law, who, in his turn, thought of Homer.

Suddenly, as they stood in the shadow, they were aware of a small, slight, fantastic figure in the midst of the grass-grown court, where there was a large green mushroom circle or fairy ring. On the borders of this ring it paused with an air of disappointment. Then entering it stood still, took off the hat, whose lopsided appearance had given so strange an outline, and bowed four times in opposite directions, when, as the face was turned towards the spectators, invisible in the dark shadow, the lady recognised Peregrine Oakshott. She pressed the Doctor's arm, and they both stood still watching the boy bathing his hand in the dew, and washing his face with it, then kneeling on one knee, and clasping his hands, as he cried aloud in a piteous chant—

"Fairy mother, fairy mother! Oh, come, come and take me home! My very life is sore to me. They all hate me! My brothers and the servants, every one of them. And my father and tutor say I am possessed with an evil spirit, and I am beaten daily, and more than daily. I can never, never get a good word from living soul! This is the second seven years, and Midsummer night! Oh, bring the other back again! I'm weary, I'm weary! Good elves, good elves, take me home. Fairy mother! Come, come, come!" Shutting his eyes he seemed to be in a state of intense expectation. Tears filled Mrs. Woodford's eyes. The Doctor moved forward, but no sooner did the boy become conscious of human presence than he started up, and fled wildly towards a postern door, but no sooner had he disappeared in the shadow than there was a cry and a fall.

"Poor child!" exclaimed Dr. Woodford, "he has fallen down the steps to the vault. It is a dangerous pitfall."

They both hurried to the place, and found the boy lying on the steps leading down to the vault, but motionless, and when they succeeded in lifting him up, he was quite unconscious, having evidently struck his head against the mouth of the vault.

"We must carry him home between us," said Mrs. Woodford. "That will be better than rousing Miles Gateward, and making a coil."

Dr. Woodford, however, took the entire weight, which he declared to be very slight. "No one would think the poor child fourteen years old," he observed, "yet did he not speak of a second seven?"

"True," said Mrs. Woodford, "he was born after the Great Fire of London, which, as I have good cause to know, was in the year '66."

There was still little sign of revival about the boy when he had been carried into the Parsonage, undressed and laid in the Doctor's own bed, only a few moans when he was handled, and on his thin, sharp features there was a piteous look of sadness entirely unlike his ordinary expression of malignant fun, and which went to the kind hearts of the Doctor and Mrs. Woodford. After exhausting their own remedies, as soon as the early daylight was available Dr. Woodford called up a couple of servants, and sent one into Portsmouth for a surgeon, and another to Oakwood to the parents.

The doctor was the first to arrive, though not till the morning was well advanced. He found that three ribs were broken against the edge of the stone step, and the head severely injured, and having had sufficient experience in the navy to be a reasonably safe practitioner, he did nothing worse than bleed the patient, and declared that absolute rest was the only hope of recovery.

He was being regaled with cold roast pig and ale when Major Oakshott rode up to the door. Four horses were dragging the great lumbering coach over Portsdown hill, but he had gone on before, to thank Dr. and Mrs. Woodford for their care of his unfortunate son, and to make preparations for his transport home under the care of his wife's own woman, who was coming in the coach in the stead of the invalid lady.

"Nay, sir. Master Brent here has a word to say to that matter," replied the Doctor.

"Truly, sir, I have," said the surgeon; "in his present state it is as much as your son's life is worth to move him."

"Be that as it may seem to man, he is in the hand of Heaven, and he ought to be at home, whether for life or death."

"For death it will assuredly be, sir, if he be jolted and shaken along the Portsdown roads—yea, I question whether you would get him to Oakwood alive," said Brent, with naval roughness.

"Indeed, sir," added Mrs. Woodford, "Mrs. Oakshott may be assured of my giving him as tender care as though he were mine own son."

"I am beholden to you, madam," said the Major; "I know your kindliness of heart; but in good sooth, the unhappy and rebellious lad merits chastisement rather than pity, since what should he be doing at this distance from home, where he was shut up for his misdemeanours, save fleeing like the Prodigal of the parable, or else planning another of his malicious pranks, as I greatly fear, on you or your daughter, madam. If so, he hath fallen into the pit that he made for others."

The impulse was to tell what had occurred, but the surgeon's presence, and the dread of making all worse for the poor boy checked both the hosts, and Mrs. Woodford only declared that since the day of the apology he had never molested her or her little girl.

"Still," said the Major, "it is not possible to leave him in a stranger's house, where at any moment the evil spirit that is in him may break forth."

"Come and see him, and judge," said Dr. Woodford.

When the father beheld the deathly face and motionless form, stern as he was, he was greatly shocked. His heavy tread caused a moan, and when he said "What, Perry, how now?" there was a painful shrinking and twitching, which the surgeon greeted as evidence of returning animation, but which made him almost drag the Major out of the room for fear of immediate consequences.

Major Oakshott, and still more the servant, who had arrived in the coach and come upstairs, could not but be convinced that removal was not to be thought of. The maid was, moreover, too necessary to her mistress to be left to undertake the nursing, much to her master's regret, but to the joy of Mrs. Woodford, who felt certain that by far the best chance for the poor boy was in his entire separation from all associations with the home where he had evidently suffered so much.

There was, perhaps, nothing except the pageship at Court that could have gone more against Major Oakshott's principles than to leave his son in the house of a prelatical minister, but alternative there was none, and he could only express how much he was beholden to the Dr. and Mrs. Woodford.

All their desire was that he would remain at a distance, for during the long and weary watch they had to keep over the half-conscious lad, the sound of a voice or even a horse's tread from Oakwood occasioned moans and restlessness. The Major rode over, or sent his sons, or a servant daily to inquire during the first fortnight, except on the Sundays, and on each of these the patient made a step towards improvement.

At first he lay in a dull, death-like stupor, only groaning if disturbed, but by and by there was a babbling murmur of words, and soon the sound of his brother's loud voice at the door, demanding from the saddle how it went to-day with Peregrine, caused a shriek of terror and such a fit of trembling that Mrs. Woodford had to go out and make a personal request that Oliver would never again speak under the window. To her great relief, when the balance between life and death had decidedly turned, the inquiries became less frequent, and could often be forestalled by sending messengers to Oakwood.

The boy usually lay still all day in the darkened room, only showing pain at light or noise, but at night he often talked and rambled a good deal. Sometimes it was Greek or Latin, sometimes whole chapters of Scripture, either denunciating portions or genealogies from the First Book of Chronicles, the polysyllabic names pouring from his mouth whenever he was particularly oppressed or suffering, so that when Mrs. Woodford had with some difficulty made out what they were, she concluded that they had been set as tasks of penance.

At other times Peregrine talked as if he absolutely believed himself in fairyland, accepting a strawberry or cherry as elfin food, promising a tester in Anne's shoe when she helped to change his pillow, or conversing in the style of Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, on intended pranks. Often he fancied himself the lubber fiend resting at the fire his hairy strength, and watching for cock-crow as the signal for flinging out-of-doors. It was wonderful how in the grim and strict Puritanical household he could have imbibed so much fairy lore, but he must have eagerly assimilated and recollected whatever he heard, holding them as tidings from his true kith and kin; and, indeed, when he was running on thus, Mrs. Woodford sometimes felt a certain awe and chill, as of the preternatural, and could hardly believe that he belonged to ordinary human nature. Either she or the Doctor always took the night-watch after the talking mood set in, for they could not judge of the effect it might have on any of the servants. Indeed they sometimes doubted whether this were not the beginning of permanent insanity, as the delusion seemed to strengthen with symptoms of recovery.

"Then," said Dr. Woodford, "Heaven help the poor lad!"

For sad indeed was the lot in those days of even the most harmless lunatic.

"Yet," said the lady, "I scarcely think anything can be worse than what he undergoes at home. When I hear the terror and misery of his voice, I doubt whether we did him any true kindness by hindering his father from killing him outright by the shaking of his old coach."

"Nay, sister, we strove to do our duty, though it may be we have taken on ourselves a further charge."

CHAPTER IV
Imp Or No Imp

"But wist I of a woman bold
Who thrice my brow durst sign,
I might regain my mortal mould,
As fair a form as thine."

SCOTT.

At last came a wakening with intelligence in the eyes. In the summer morning light that streamed through the chinks of the shutters Mrs. Woodford perceived the glance of inquiry, and when she brought some cool drink, a rational though feeble voice asked those first questions, "Who? and where?"

"I am Mrs. Woodford, my dear child. You remember me at Winchester. You are at Portchester. You fell down and hurt yourself, but you are getting better."

She was grieved to see the look of utter disappointment and weariness that overspread the features, and the boy hardly spoke again all day. There was much drowsiness, but also depression, and more than once Mrs. Woodford detected tears, but at other times he received her attentions with smiles and looks of wondering gratitude, as though ordinary kindness and solicitude were so new to him that he did not know what to make of them, and perhaps was afraid of breaking a happy dream by saying too much.

The surgeon saw him, and declared him so much better that he might soon be taken home, recommending his sitting up for a little while as a first stage. Peregrine, however, seemed far from being cheered, and showed himself so unwilling to undergo the fatigue of being dressed, even when good Dr. Woodford had brought up his own large chair—the only approach to an easy one in the house—that the proposal was dropped, and he was left in peace for the rest of the day.

In the evening Mrs. Woodford was sitting by the window, letting her needlework drop as the light faded, and just beginning to doze, when her repose was broken by a voice saying "Madam."

"Yes, Peregrine."

"Come near, I pray. Will you tell no one?"

"No; what is it?"

In so low a tone that she had to bend over him: "Do you know how the Papists cross themselves?"

"Yes, I have seen the Queen's confessor and some of the ladies make the sign."

"Dear lady, you have been very good to me! If you would only cross me thrice, and not be afraid! They could not hurt you!"

"Who? What do you mean?" she asked, for fairy lore had not become a popular study, but comprehension came when he said in an awe-stricken voice, "You know what I am."

"I know there have been old wives' tales about you, my poor boy, but surely you do not believe them yourself."

"Ah! if you will not believe them, there is no hope. I might have known. You were so good to me;" and he hid his face.

She took his unwilling hand and said, "Be you what you will, my poor child, I am sorry for you, for I see you are very unhappy. Come, tell me all."

"Nay, then you would be like the rest," said Peregrine, "and I could not bear that," and he wrung her hand.

"Perhaps not," she said gently, "for I know that a story is afloat that you were changed in your cradle, and that there are folk ignorant enough to believe it."

"They all *know* it," he said impressively. "My mother and brothers and all the servants. Every soul knows it except my father and Mr. Horncastle, and they will never hear a word, but will have it that I am possessed with a spirit of evil that is to be flogged out of me. Goody Madge and Moll Owens, they knew how it was at the first, and would fain have forced them—mine own people—to take me home, and bring the other back, but my father found it out and hindered them."

"To save your life."

"Much good does my life do me! Every one hates or fears me. No one has a word for me. Every mischance is laid on me. When the kitchen wench broke a crock, it was because I looked at it. If the keeper misses a deer, he swears at Master Perry! Oliver and Robert will not let me touch a thing of theirs; they bait me for a moon-calf, and grin when I am beaten for their doings. Even my mother quakes and trembles when I come near, and thinks I give her the creeps. As to my father and tutor, it is ever the rod with them, though I can learn my tasks far better than those jolter-heads Noll and Robin. I never heard so many kind words in all my life as you have given me since I have been lying here!"

He stopped in a sort of awe, for tears fell from her eyes, and she kissed his forehead.

"Will you not help me, good madam?" he entreated. "I went down to Goody Madge, and she said there was a chance for me every seven years. The first went by, but this is my fourteenth year. I had a hope when the King spoke of beheading me, but he was only in jest, as I might have known. Then methought I would try what Midsummer night in the fairy ring would do, but that was in vain; and now you, who could cross me if you would, will not believe. Oh, will you not make the trial?"

"Alas! Peregrine, supposing I could do it in good faith, would you become a mere tricksy sprite, a thing of the elements, and yield up your hopes as a Christian soul, a child of God and heir of Heaven?"

"My father says I am an heir of hell."

"No, no, never," she cried, shuddering at his quiet way of saying it. "You are flesh and blood, christened, and with the hope set before you."

"The christening came too late," he said. "O lady, you who are so good and pitiful, let my mother get back her true Peregrine—a straight-limbed, comely dullard, such as would be welcome to her. She would bless and thank you, and for me, to be a Will-of-the-wisp, or what not, would be far better than the life I lead. Never did I know what my mother calls peace till I lay here."

"Ah, Peregrine, poor lad, your value for peace and for my poor kindness proves that you have a human heart and are no elf."

"Indeed, I meant to flit about and give you good dreams, and keep off all that could hurt or frighten you," he said earnestly.

"Only the human soul could feel so, dear boy," she answered tenderly.

"And you *really* disbelieve—the other," he said wistfully.

"This is what I verily believe, my child: that there were causes to make you weakly, and that you may have had some palsy stroke or convulsive fit perhaps at the moment you were left alone. Such would explain much of your oddness of face, which made the ignorant nurses deem you changed; and thus it was only your father who, by God's mercy, saved you from a miserable death, to become, as I trust, a good and true man, and servant of God." Then answering a hopeless groan, she added, "Yes, it is harder for you than for many. I see that these silly servants have so nurtured you in this belief that you have never even thought it worth while to strive for goodness, but supposed tricksomeness and waywardness a part of your nature."

"The only pleasure in life is paying folk off," said Peregrine, with a glitter in his eye. "It serves them right."

"And thus," she said sadly, "you have gone on hating and spiting, deeming yourself a goblin without hope or aim; but now you feel that you have a Christian soul you will strive with evil, you will so love as to win love, you will pray and conquer."

"My father and Mr. Horncastle pray," said Peregrine bitterly. "I hate it! They go on for ever, past all bearing; I *must* do something—stand on my head, pluck some one's stool away, or tickle Robin with a straw, if I am birched the next moment. That's the goblin."

"Yet you love the Minster music."

"Ay! Father calls it rank Popery. I listened many a time he never guessed, hid away in the Holy Hole, or within old Bishop Wykeham's little house."

"Ah, Peregrine, could an imp of evil brook to lie hidden in the Holy Hole behind the very altar?" said Mrs. Woodford. "But I hear Nick bringing in supper, and I must leave you for the present. God in His mercy bless you, His poor child, and lead you in His ways."

As she went Peregrine muttered, "Is that a prayer? It is not like father's."

She was anxious to consult her brother-in-law on the strange mood of her patient. She found that he had heard more than he had told her of what Major Oakshott deemed the hopeless wickedness of his son, the antics at prayers, the hatred of everything good, the spiteful tricks that were the family torment. No doubt much was due to the boy's entire belief in his own elfship, and these two good people seriously considered how to save him from himself.

"If we could only keep him here," said Mrs. Woodford, "I think we might bring him to have some faith and love in God and man."

"You could, dear sister," said the Doctor, smiling affectionately; "but Major Oakshott would never leave his son in our house. He abhors our principles too much, and besides, it is too near home. All the servants have heard rumours of this cruel fable, and would ascribe the least misadventure to his goblin origin. I must ride over to Oakwood and endeavour to induce his father to remove him to safe and judicious keeping."

Some days, however, elapsed before Dr. Woodford could do this, and in the meantime the good lady did her best to infuse into her poor young guest the sense that he had a human soul, responsible for his actions, and with hope set before him, and that he was not a mere frolicsome and malicious sprite, the creature of unreasoning impulse.

It was a matter only to be attempted by gentle hints, for though reared in a strictly religious household, Peregrine's ears seemed to have been absolutely closed, partly by nursery ideas of his own exclusion from the pale of humanity, partly by the harsh treatment that he was continually bringing on himself. Preachings and prayers to him only meant a time of intolerable restraint, usually ending in disgrace and punishment; Scripture and the Westminster Catechism contained a collection of tasks more tedious and irksome than the Latin and Greek Grammar; Sunday was his worst day of the week, and these repugnances, as he had been taught to believe, were so many proofs that he was a being beyond the power of grace.

Mrs. Woodford scrupled to leave him to any one else on this first Sunday of his recovered consciousness, and in hopes of keeping him quiet through fatigue, she contrived that it should be the first day of his being dressed, and seated in the arm-chair, resting against cushions beside the open window, whence he could watch the church-goers, Anne in her little white cap, with her book in one hand, and a posy in the other, tripping demurely beside her uncle, stately in gown, cassock, and scarlet hood.

Peregrine could not refrain from boasting to his hostess how he had once grimaced from outside the church window at Havant, and at the women shrieking that the fiend was there. She would not smile, and shook her head sadly, so that he said, "I would never do so here."

"Nor anywhere, I hope."

Whereupon, thinking better to please the churchwoman, he related how, when imprisoned for popping a toad into the soup, he had escaped over the leads, and had beaten a drum outside the barn,

during a discourse of the godly tinker, John Bunyan, tramping and rattling so that all thought the troopers were come, and rushed out, tumbling one over the other, while he yelled out his "Ho! ho! ho!" from the haystack where he had hidden.

"When you feel how kind and loving God is," said Mrs. Woodford gravely, "you will not like to disturb those who are doing Him honour."

"Is He kind?" asked Peregrine. "I thought He was all wrath and anger."

She replied, "The Lord is loving unto every man, and His mercy is over all His works."

He made no answer. If he were sullen, this subsided into sleepiness, and when he awoke he found the lady on her knees going through the service with her Prayer-book. She encountered his wistful eyes, but no remark was made, though on her return from fetching him some broth, she found him peeping into her book, which he laid down hastily, as though afraid of detection.

She had to go down to the Sunday dinner, where, according to good old custom, half a dozen of the poor and aged were regaled with the parish priest and his household. There she heard inquiries and remarks showing how widely spread and deeply rooted was the notion of Peregrine's elfish extraction. If Daddy Hoskins did ask after the poor young gentleman as if he were a human being, the three old dames present shook their heads, and while the more bashful only groaned, Granny Perkins demanded, "Well, now, my lady, do he eat and sleep like other folk?"

"Exactly, granny, now that he's mending in health."

"And don't he turn and writhe when there's prayers?"

Mrs. Woodford deposed to having observed no such demonstrations.

"Think of that now! Lauk-a-daisy! I've heard tell by my nevvy Davy, as is turnspit at Oak'ood, as how when there's prayers and expounding by Master Horncastle, as is a godly man, saving his Reverence's presence, he have seen him, have Davy—Master Perry, as they calls him, a-twisted round with his heels on the chair, and his head where his heels should be, and a grin on his face enough to give one a turn."

"Did Davy never see a mischievous boy fidgeting at prayers?" asked the Doctor, who was nearer than she thought. "If so, he has been luckier than I have been."

There was a laugh, out of deference to the clergyman, but the old woman held to her point. "Begging your Reverence's pardon, sir, there be more in this than we knows. They says up at Oakwood, there's no peace in the place for the spite of him, and when they thinks he is safe locked into his chamber, there he be a-clogging of the spit, or changing sugar into pepper, or making the stool break down under one. Oh, he be a strange one, sir, or summat worse. I have heerd him myself hollaing 'Ho! ho! ho!' on the downs enough to make one's flesh creep."

"I will tell you what he is, dame," said the Doctor gravely. "He is a poor child who had a fit in his cradle, and whom all around have joined in driving to folly, evil, and despair through your foolish superstitions. He is my guest, and I will have no more said against him at my table."

The village gossips might be silenced by awe of the parson, but their opinion was unshaken; and Silas Hewlett, a weather-beaten sailor with a wooden leg, was bold enough to answer, "Ay, ay, sir, you parsons and gentlefolk don't believe naught; but you've not seen what I have with my own two bodily eyes—" and this of course was the prelude to the history of an encounter with a mermaid, which alternated with the Flying Dutchman and a combat with the Moors, as regular entertainment at the Sunday meal.

When Mrs. Woodford went upstairs she was met by the servant Nicolas, declaring that she might get whom she would to wait on that there moon-calf, he would not go neist the spiteful thing, and exhibiting a swollen finger, stung by a dead wasp, which Peregrine had cunningly disposed on the edge of his empty plate.

She soothed the man's wrath, and healed his wound as best she might, ere returning to her patient, who looked at her with an impish grin on his lips, and yet human deprecation in his eyes. Feeling unprepared for discussion, she merely asked whether the dinner had been relished, and sat

down to her book; but there was a grave, sorrowful expression on her countenance, and, after an interval of lying back uneasily in his chair, he exclaimed, “It is of no use; I could not help it. It is my nature.”

“It is the nature of many lads to be mischievous,” she answered; “but grace can cure them.”

Therewith she began to read aloud. She had bought the *Pilgrim’s Progress* (the first part) from a hawker, and she was glad to have at hand something that could hardly be condemned as frivolous or prelatical. The spell of the marvellous book fell on Peregrine; he listened intently, and craved ever to hear more, not being yet able to read without pain and dizziness. He was struck by hearing that the dream of Christian’s adventures had visited that same tinker, whose congregation his own wicked practices had broken up.

“He would take me for one of the hobgoblins that beset Master Christian.”

“Nay,” said Mrs. Woodford, “he would say you were Christian floundering in the Slough of Despond, and deeming yourself one of its efts or tadpoles.”

He made no answer, but on the whole behaved so well that the next day Mrs. Woodford ventured to bring her little daughter in after having extracted a promise that there should be no tricks nor teasing, a pledge honourably kept.

Anne did not like the prospect of the interview. “Oh, ma’am, don’t leave me alone with him!” she said. “Do you know what he did to Mistress Martha Browning, his own cousin, you know, who lives at Emsworth with her aunt? He put a horsehair slily round her glass of wine, and tipped it over her best gray taffeta, and her aunt whipped her for the stain. She never would say it was his doing, and yet he goes on teasing her the same as ever, though his brother Oliver found it out, and thrashed him for it: you know Oliver is to marry Mistress Martha.”

“My dear child, where did you hear all this?” asked Mrs. Woodford, rather overwhelmed with this flood of gossip from her usually quiet daughter.

“Lucy told me, mamma. She heard it from Sedley, who says he does not wonder at any one serving out Martha Browning, for she is as ugly as sin.”

“Hush, hush, Anne! Such sayings do not become a young maid. This poor lad has scarce known kindness. Every one’s hand has been against him, and so his hand has been against every one. I want my little daughter to be brave enough not to pain and anger him by shrinking from him as if he were not like other people. We must teach him to be happy before we can teach him to be good.”

“Madam, I will try,” said the child, with a great gulp; “only if you would be pleased not to leave me alone with him the first time!”

This Mrs. Woodford promised. At first the boy lay and looked at Anne as if she were a rare curiosity brought for his examination, and it took all her resolution, even to a heroic exertion of childish fortitude, not to flinch under the gaze of those queer eyes. However, Mrs. Woodford diverted the glances by producing a box of spillekins, and in the interest of the game the children became better acquainted.

Over their next day’s game Mrs. Woodford left them, and Anne became at ease since Peregrine never attempted any tricks. She taught him to play at draughts, the elders thinking it expedient not to doubt whether such vanities were permissible at Oakwood.

Soon there was such merriment between them that the kind Doctor said it did his heart good to hear the boy’s hearty natural laugh in lieu of the “Ho! ho! ho!” of malice or derision.

They were odd conversations that used to take place between that boy and girl. The King’s offer of a pageship had oozed out in the Oakshott family, and Peregrine greatly resented the refusal, which he naturally attributed to his father’s Whiggery and spite at all things agreeable, and he was fond of discussing his wrongs and longings with Anne, who, from her childish point of view, thought the walls of Portchester and the sluggish creek a very bad exchange for her enjoyments at Greenwich, where she had lived during her father’s years of broken health, after he had been disabled at Southwold by a wound which had prevented his being knighted by the Duke of York for his daring in the excitement

of the critical moment, a fact which Mistress Anne never forgot, though she only knew it by hearsay, as it happened a few weeks after she was born, and her father always averred that he was thankful to have missed the barren and expensive honour, and that the *worst* which had come of his exploit was the royal sponsorship to his little maid.

Anne had, however, been the pet of her father's old friends, the sea captains, had played with the little Evelyns under the yew hedges of Says Court, had been taken to London to behold the Lord Mayor's show and more than one Court pageant, had been sometimes at the palaces as the plaything of the Ladies Mary and Anne of York, had been more than once kissed by their father, the Duke, and called a pretty little poppet, and had even shared with them a notable game at romps with their good-natured uncle the King, when she had actually caught him at Blind-man's-buff!

Ignorant as she was of evil, her old surroundings appeared to her delightful, and Peregrine, bred in a Puritan home, was at fourteen not much more advanced than she was in the meaning of the vices and corruptions that he heard inveighed against in general or scriptural terms at home, and was only too ready to believe that all that his father proscribed must be enchanting. Thus they built castles together about brilliant lives at a Court of which they knew as little as of that at Timbuctoo.

There was another Court, however, of which Peregrine seemed to know all the details, namely, that of King Oberon and Queen Mab. How much was village lore picked up from Moll Owens and her kind, or how much was the work of his own imagination, no one could tell, probably not himself, certainly not Anne. When he appeared on intimate terms with Hip, Nip, and Skip, and described catching Daddy Long Legs to make a fence with his legs, or dwelt upon a terrible fight between two armies of elves mounted on grasshoppers and crickets, and armed with lances tipped with stings of bees and wasps, she would exclaim, "Is it true, Perry?" and he would wink his green eye and look at her with his yellow one till she hardly knew where she was.

He would tell of his putting a hornet in a sluttish maid's shoe, which was credible, if scarcely meriting that elfish laughter which made his auditor shrink, but when he told of dancing over the mud banks with a lantern, like a Will-of-the-wisp, till he lured boats to get stranded, or horsemen to get stuck, in the hopeless mud, Anne never questioned the possibility, but listened with wide open eyes, and a restrained shudder, feeling as if under a spell. That mysterious childish feeling which dreads even what common sense forbids the calmer mind to believe, made her credit Peregrine, for the time at least, with strange affinities to the underground folk, and kept her under a strange fascination, half attraction, half repulsion, which made her feel as if she must obey and follow him if he turned those eyes on her, whether she were willing or not.

Nor did she ever tell her mother of these conversations. She had been rebuked once for repeating nurse's story of the changeling, and again for her shrinking from him; and this was quite enough in an essentially reserved, as well as proud and sensitive, nature, to prevent further confidences on a subject which she knew would be treated as a foolish fancy, bringing both herself and her companion into trouble.

CHAPTER V
Peregrine's Home

"For, at a word, be it understood,
He was always for ill and never for good."

SCOTT.

A week had passed since any of the family from Oakwood had come to make inquiries after the convalescent at Portchester, when Dr. Woodford mounted his sleek, sober-paced pad, and accompanied by a groom, rode over to make his report and tender his counsel to Major Oakshott. He arrived just as the great bell was clanging to summon the family to the mid-day meal, since he had reckoned on the Squire being more amenable as a 'full man,' especially towards a guest, and he was well aware that the Major was thoroughly a gentleman in behaviour even to those with whom he differed in politics and religion.

Accordingly there was a ready welcome at the door of the old red house, which was somewhat gloomy looking, being on the north side of the hill, and a good deal stifled with trees. In a brief interval the Doctor found himself seated beside the pale languid lady at the head of the long table, placed in a large hall, wainscotted with the blackest of oak, which seemed to absorb into itself all the light from the windows, large enough indeed but heavily mullioned, and with almost as much of leading as of octagons and lozenges—greenish glass—in them, while the coats of arms, repeated in upper portions and at the intersections of beams and rafters, were not more cheerful, being sable chevrons on an argent field. The crest, a horse shoe, was indeed azure, but the blue of this and of the coats of the serving-men only deepened the thunderous effect of the black. Strangely, however, among these sad-coloured men there moved a figure entirely differently. A negro, white turbaned, and with his blue livery of a lighter shade, of fantastic make and relieved by a great deal of white and shining silver, so as to have an entirely different effect.

He placed himself behind the chair of Dr. Woodford's opposite neighbour, a shrewd business-like looking gentleman, soberly but handsomely dressed, with a certain foreign cut about his clothes, and a cravat of rich Flemish lace. He was presented to the Doctor as Major Oakshott's brother, Sir Peregrine. The rest of the party consisted of Oliver and Robert, sturdy, ruddy lads of fifteen and twelve, and their tutor, Mr. Horncastle, an elderly man, who twenty years before had resigned his living because he could not bring himself to accept all the Liturgy.

While Sir Peregrine courteously relieved his sister-in-law of the trouble of carving the gammon of bacon which accompanied the veal which her husband was helping, Dr. Woodford informed her of her son's progress towards recovery.

"Ah," she said, "I knew you had come to tell us that he is ready to be brought home;" and her tone was fretful.

"We are greatly beholden to you, sir," said the Major from the bottom of the table. "The boy shall be fetched home immediately."

"Not so, sir, as yet, I beg of you. Neither his head nor his side can brook the journey for at least another week, and indeed my good sister Woodford will hardly know how to part with her patient."

"She will not long be of that mind after Master Perry gets to his feet again," muttered the chaplain.

"Indeed no," chimed in the mother. "There will be no more peace in the house when he is come back."

"I assure you, madam," said Dr. Woodford, "that he has been a very good child, grateful and obedient, nor have I heard any complaints."

"Your kindness, or else that of Mrs. Woodford, carries you far, sir," answered his host.

"What? Is my nephew and namesake so peevish a scapegrace?" demanded the visitor.

On which anecdotes broke forth from all quarters. Peregrine had greased the already slippery oak stairs, had exchanged Oliver's careful exercise for a ribald broadsheet, had filled Mr. Horncastle's pipe with gunpowder, and mixed snuff with the chocolate specially prepared for the peculiar godly guest Dame Priscilla Waller. Every one had something to adduce, even the serving-men behind the chairs; and if Oliver and Robert did not add their quota, it was because absolute silence at meals was the rule for nonage. However, the subject was evidently distasteful to the father, who changed the conversation by asking his brother questions about the young Prince of Orange and the Grand Pensionary De Witt. For the gentleman had been acting as English attaché to the Embassy at the Hague, whence he had come on affairs of State to London, and after being knighted by Charles, had newly arrived at the old home, which he had scarcely seen since his brother's marriage. Dr. Woodford enjoyed his conversation, and his information on foreign politics, and the Major, though now and then protesting, was evidently proud of his brother.

When grace had been pronounced by the chaplain the lady withdrew to her parlour, the two boys, each with an obeisance and request for permission, departed for an hour's recreation, and Dr. Woodford intimated that he wished for some conversation with his host respecting the boy Peregrine.

"Let us discuss it here," said Major Oakshott, turning towards a small table set in the deep bay window, and garnished with wine, fruit, and long slender glasses. "Good Mr. Horncastle," he added, as he motioned his guest to one of the four seats, "is with me in all that concerns my children, and I desire my brother's counsel respecting the untoward lad with whom it has pleased Heaven to afflict me."

When the glasses had been filled with claret Dr. Woodford uttered a diplomatic compliment on the healthful and robust appearance of the eldest and youngest sons, and asked whether any cause had been assigned for the difference between them and the intermediate brother.

"None, sir," returned the father with a sigh, "save the will of the Almighty to visit us for our sins with a son who has thus far shown himself one of the marred vessels doomed to be broken by the potter. It may be in order to humble me and prove me that this hath been laid upon me."

The chaplain groaned acquiescence, but there was vexation in the brother's face.

"Sir," said the Doctor, "it is my opinion and that of my sister-in-law, an excellent, discreet, and devout woman, that the poor child would give you more cause for hope if the belief had not become fixed in his mind that he is really and truly a fairy elf—yes, in very sooth—a changeling!"

All the auditors broke out into exclamations that it was impossible that a boy of fourteen could entertain so absurd an idea, and the tutor evidently thought it a fresh proof of depravity that he should thus have tried to deceive his kind hosts.

In proof that Peregrine veritably believed it himself, Dr. Woodford related what he had witnessed on Midsummer night, mentioning how in delirium the boy had evidently believed himself in fairyland, and how disappointed he had been, on regaining his senses, to find himself on common earth; telling also of the adventure with the King, which Sir Christopher Wren had described to him, but of which Major Oakshott was unaware, though it explained the offer of the pageship. He was a good deal struck by these revelations, proving misery that he had never suspected, though, as he said, he had often pleaded, "Why will ye revolt more and more? ye *will* be stricken more and more."

"Have you ever sought his confidence?" asked the travelled brother, a question evidently scarcely understood, for the reply was, "I have always required of my sons to speak the truth, nor have they failed of late years save this unfortunate Peregrine."

"And," said Sir Peregrine, "if the unlucky lad actually supposes himself to be no human being, admonitions and chastisements would naturally be vain."

"I cannot believe it," exclaimed the Major. "'Tis true, as I now remember, I once came on a couple of beldames, my wife's nurse and another, who has since been ducked for witchcraft, and found them about to flog the babe with nettles, and lay him in the thorn hedge because he was a sickly child, whom, forsooth, they took to be a changeling; but I forbade the profane folly to be ever again mentioned in my household, nor did I ever hear thereof again."

"There are a good many more things mentioned in a household, brother, than the master is wont to hear of," remarked Sir Peregrine.

Dr. Woodford then begged as a personal favour for an individual examination of the family and servants on their opinion. The master was reluctant thus, as he expressed it, to go a-fooling, but his brother backed the Doctor up, and further prevented a general assembly to put one another to shame, but insisted on the witnesses being called in one by one. Oliver, the first summoned, was beginning to be somewhat less overawed by his father than in his earlier boyhood. To the inquiry what he thought of his brother Peregrine, he made a tentative sort of reply, that he was a strange fellow, who never could keep out of disgrace.

"That is not the question," said his father. "I am almost ashamed to speak it! Do you—nay, have you ever supposed him to be a—" he really could not bring out the word.

"A changeling, sir?" returned Oliver. "I do not believe so now, knowing that it is impossible, but as a child I always did."

"Who durst possess you with so foolish and profane a falsehood?"

"Every one, sir. I cannot recollect the time when I did not as entirely deem Peregrine a changeling elf as that Robin was my own brother. He believes so himself."

"You have never striven to disabuse him."

"Indeed, sir, he would scarce have listened to me had I done go; besides, to tell the truth, it has only been of late, since I have been older, and have studied more, that I have come to perceive the folly of it."

Major Oakshott groaned, and bade him call Robert without saying wherefore. The little fellow came in, somewhat frightened, and when asked the question that had been put to his elder, his face lighted up, and he exclaimed, "Oh, have they brought him back again?"

"Whom?"

"Our real brother, sir, who was carried off to fairyland!"

"Who told you so, Robert?"

He looked puzzled, and said, "Sir, they all know it. Molly Owens, that was his foster-mother, saw the fairies bear him off on a broomstick up the chimney."

"Robert, no lying!"

The boy was only restrained from tears by fear of his father, and just managed to say, "'Tis what they all say, and Perry knows."

"Knows!" muttered Major Oakshott in despair, but the uncle, drawing Robin towards him, extracted that Perry had been seen flying out of the loft window, when he had been locked up—Robin had never seen it himself, but the maids had often done so. Moreover, there was proof positive, in the mark on Oliver's head, where he had nearly killed himself by tumbling downstairs, being lured by the fairies while they stole away the babe.

The Major could not listen with patience. "A boy of that age to repeat such blasphemous nonsense!" he exclaimed; and Robert, restraining with difficulty his sobs of terror, was dismissed to fetch the butler.

The old Ironside who now appeared would not avouch his own disbelief in the identity of Master Peregrine, being, as he said, a man who had studied his Bible, listened to godly preachers, and seen the world; but he had no hesitation in declaring that almost every other soul in the household believed in it as firmly as in the Gospel, certainly all the women, and probably all the men, nor was there any doubt that the young gentleman conducted himself more like a goblin than the son of pious Christian

parents. In effect both the clergyman and the Diplomate could not help suspecting that in other company the worthy butler's disavowal of all share in the superstition might have been less absolute.

"After this," said Major Oakshott with a sigh, "it seems useless to carry the inquiry farther."

"What says my sister Oakshott?" inquired Sir Peregrine. "She! Poor soul, she is too feeble to be fretted," said her husband. "She has never been the same woman since the Fire of London, and it would be vain to vex her with questions. She would be of one mind while I spoke to her, and another while her women were pouring their tales into her ear. Methinks I now understand why she has always seemed to shrink from this unfortunate child, and to fear rather than love him."

"Even so, sir," added the tutor. "Much is explained that I never before understood. The question is how to deal with him under this fresh light. I will, so please your honour, assemble the family this very night, and expound to them that such superstitions are contrary to the very word of Scripture."

"Much good will that do," muttered the knight.

"I should humbly suggest," put in Dr. Woodford, "that the best hope for the poor lad would be to place him where these foolish tales were unknown, and he could start afresh on the same terms with other youths."

"There is no school in accordance with my principles," said the Squire gloomily. "Godly men who hold the faith as I do are inhibited by the powers that be from teaching in schools."

"And," said his brother, "you hold these principles as more important than the causing your son to be bred up a human being instead of being pointed at and rendered hopeless as a demon."

"I am bound to do so," said the Major.

"Surely," said Dr. Woodford, "some scholar might be found, either here or in Holland, who might share your opinions, and could receive the boy without incurring penalties for opening a school without license."

"It is a matter for prayer and consideration," said Major Oakshott. "Meantime, reverend sir, I thank you most heartily for the goodness with which you have treated my untoward son, and likewise for having opened my eyes to the root of his freakishness."

The Doctor understood this as dismissal, and asked for his horse, intimating, however, that he would gladly keep the boy till some arrangement had been decided upon. Then he rode home to tell his sister-in-law that he had done his best, and that he thought it a fortunate conjunction that the travelled brother had been present.

CHAPTER VI
A Relapse

"A tell-tale in their company
They never could endure,
And whoso kept not secretly
Their pranks was punished sure.
It was a just and Christian deed
To pinch such black and blue;
Oh, how the commonwealth doth need
Such justices as you!"

BISHOP CORBETT.

Several days passed, during which there could be no doubt that Peregrine Oakshott knew how to behave himself, not merely to grown-up people, but to little Anne, who had entirely lost her dread of him, and accepted him as a playfellow. He was able to join the family meals, and sit in the pleasant garden, shaded by the walls of the old castle, as well as by its own apple-trees, and looking out on the little bay in front, at full tide as smooth and shining as a lake.

There, while Anne did her task of spinning or of white seam, Mrs. Woodford would tell the children stories, or read to them from the *Pilgrim's Progress*, a wonderful romance to both. Peregrine, still tamed by weakness, would lie on the grass at her feet, in a tranquil bliss such as he had never known before, and his fairy romances to Anne were becoming mitigated, when one day a big coach came along the road from Fareham, with two boys riding beside it, escorting Lady Archfield and Mistress Lucy.

The lady was come to study Mrs. Woodford's recipe for preserved cherries, the young people, Charles, Lucy, and their cousin Sedley, now at home for the summer holidays, to spend an afternoon with Mistress Anne.

Great was Lady Archfield's surprise at finding that Major Oakshott's cross-grained slip of a boy was still at Portchester.

"If you were forced to take him in for very charity when he was hurt," she said, "I should have thought you would have been rid of him as soon as he could leave his bed."

"The road to Oakwood is too rough for broken ribs as yet," said Mrs. Woodford, "nor is the poor boy ready for discipline."

"Ay, I fancy that Major Oakshott is a bitter Puritan in his own house; but no discipline could be too harsh for such a boy as that, according to all that I hear," said her ladyship, "nor does he look as if much were amiss with him so far as may be judged of features so strange and writhen."

"He is nearly well, but not yet strong, and we are keeping him here till his father has decided on what is best for him."

"You even trust him with your little maid! And alone! I wonder at you, madam."

"Indeed, my lady, I have seen no harm come of it. He is gentle and kind with Anne, and I think she softens him."

Still Mrs. Woodford would gladly not have been bound to her colander and preserving-pan in her still-room, where her guest's housewifely mind found great scope for inquiry and comment, lasting for nearly two hours.

When at length the operations were over, and numerous little pots of jam tied up as specimens for the Archfield family to taste at home, the children were not in sight. No doubt, said Mrs.

Woodford, they would be playing in the castle court, and the visitor accompanied her thither in some anxiety about broken walls and steps, but they were not in sight, nor did calls bring them.

The children had gone out together, Anne feeling altogether at ease and natural with congenial playmates. Even Sedley's tortures were preferable to Peregrine's attentions, since the first were only the tyranny of a graceless boy, the other gave her an indescribable sense of strangeness from which these ordinary mundane comrades were a relief and protection.

However, Charles and Sedley rushed off to see a young colt in which they were interested, and Lucy, in spite of her first shrinking, found Peregrine better company than she could have expected, when he assisted in swinging her and Anne by turns under the old ash tree.

When the other two were seen approaching, the swinging girl hastily sprang out, only too well aware what Sedley's method of swinging would be. Then as the boys came up followed inquiries why Peregrine had not joined them, and jests in schoolboy taste ensued as to elf-locks in the horses' manes, and inquiries when he had last ridden to a witch's sabbath. Little Anne, in duty bound, made her protest, but this only incited Charles to add his word to the teasing, till Lucy joined in the laugh.

By and by, as they loitered along, they came to the Doctor's little boat, and there was a proposal to get in and rock. Lucy refused, out of respect for her company attire, and Anne could not leave her, so the two young ladies turned away with arms round each other's waists, Lucy demonstratively rejoicing to be quit of the troublesome boys.

Before they had gone far an eldritch shout of laughter was responded to by a burst of furious dismay and imprecation. The boat with the two boys was drifting out to sea, and Peregrine capering wildly on the shore, but in another instant he had vanished into the castle.

Anne had presence of mind enough to rush to the nearest fisherman's cottage, and send him out to bring them back, and it was at this juncture that the two mothers arrived on the scene. There was little real danger. A rope was thrown and caught, and after about half an hour of watching they were safely landed, but the tide had ebbed so far that they had to take off their shoes and stockings and wade through the mud. They were open-mouthed against the imp who had enticed them to rock in the boat, then in one second had cut the painter, bounded out, and sent them adrift with his mocking 'Ho! ho! ho!' Sedley Archfield clenched his fists, and gazed round wildly in search of the goblin to chastise him soundly, and Charles was ready to rush all over the castle in search of him.

"Two to one!" cried Anne, "and he so small; you would never be so cowardly."

"As if he were like an honest fellow," said Charley. "A goblin like that has his odds against a dozen of us."

"I'd teach him, if I could but catch him," cried Sedley.

"I told you," said Anne, "that he would be good if you would let him alone and not plague him."

"Now, Anne," said Charles, as he sat putting on his stockings, "how could I stand being cast off for that hobgoblin, that looks as if he had been cut out of a root of yew with a blunt knife, and all crooked! I that always was your sweetheart, to see you consorting with a mis-shapen squinting Whig of a Nonconformist like that."

"Nonconformist! I'll Nonconform him indeed," added Sedley. "I wish I had the wringing of his neck."

"Now is not that hard!" said Anne; "a poor lad who has been very sick, and that every one baits and spurns."

"Serve him right," said Sedley; "he shall have more of the same sauce!"

"I think he has cast his spell on Anne," added Charles, "or how can she stand up for him?"

"My mamma bade me be kind to him."

"Kind! I would as lief be kind to a toad!" put in Lucy.

"To see you kind to him makes me sick," exclaimed Charles. "You see what comes of it."

"It did not come of my kindness, but of your unkindness," reasoned Anne.

"I told you so," said Charles. "You would have been best pleased if we had been carried out to sea and drowned!"

Anne burst into tears and disavowed any such intention, and Charles was protesting that he would only forgive her on condition of her never showing any kindness to Peregrine again, when a sudden shower of sand and pebbles descended, one of them hitting Sedley pretty sharply on the ear. The boys sprang up with a howl of imprecation and vengeance, but no one was to be seen, only 'Ho! ho! ho!' resounded from the battlements. Off they rushed headlong, but the nearest door was in a square tower a good way off, and when they reached it the door defied their efforts of frantic rage, whilst another shower descended on them from above, accompanied by the usual shout. But while they were dashing off in quest of another entrance they were met by a servant sent to summon them to return home. Coach and horses were at the door, and Lady Archfield was in haste to get them away, declaring that she should not think their lives safe near that fiendish monster. Considering that Sedley was nearly twice as big as Peregrine, and Charles a strong well-grown lad, this was a tribute to his preternatural powers.

Very unwillingly they went, and if Lady Archfield had not kept a strict watch from her coach window, they would certainly have turned back to revenge the pranks played on them. The last view of them showed Sedley turning round shaking his whip and clenching his teeth in defiance. Mrs. Woodford was greatly concerned, especially as Peregrine could not be found and did not appear at supper.

"Had he run away to sea?" the usual course of refractory lads at Portchester, but for so slight a creature only half recovered it did not seem probable. It was more likely that he had gone home, and that Mrs. Woodford felt as somewhat a mortifying idea. However, on looking into his chamber, as she sought her own, she beheld him in bed, with his face turned into the pillow, whether asleep or feigning slumber there was no knowing.

Later, she heard sounds that induced her to go and look at him. He was starting, moaning, and babbling in his sleep. But with morning all his old nature seemed to have returned.

There was a hedgehog in Anne's bowl of milk, Mrs. Woodford's poultry were cackling hysterically at an unfortunate kitten suspended from an apple tree and let down and drawn up among them. The three-legged stool of the old waiting-woman 'toppled down headlong' as though by the hands of Puck, and even on Anne's arms certain black and blue marks of nails were discovered, and when her mother examined her on them she only cried and begged not to be made to answer.

And while Dr. Woodford was dozing in his chair as usual after the noonday dinner Mrs. Woodford actually detected a hook suspended from a horsehair descending in the direction of his big horn spectacles, and quietly moving across to frustrate the attempt, she unearthed Peregrine on a chair angling from behind the window curtain.

She did not speak, but fixed her calm eyes on him with a look of sad, grave disappointment as she wound up the line. In a few seconds the boy had thrown himself at her feet, rolling as if in pain, and sobbing out, "'Tis all of no use! Let me alone."

Nevertheless he obeyed the hushing gesture of her hand, and held his breath, as she led him out to the garden-seat, where they had spent so many happy quiet hours. Then he flung himself down and repeated his exclamation, half piteous, half defiant. "Leave me alone! Leave me alone! It has me! It is all of no use."

"What has you, my poor child?"

"The evil spirit. You will have it that I'm not one of—one of them—so it must be as my father says, that I am possessed—the evil spirit. I was at peace with you—so happy—happier than ever I was before—and now—those boys. It has me again—I could not help it—I've even hurt her—Mistress Anne. Let me alone—send me home—to be scorned, and shunned, and brow-beaten—and as bad as ever—then at least she will be safe from me."

All this came out between sobs such that Mrs. Woodford could not attempt to speak, but she kept her hand on him, and at last she said, when he could hear her: “Every one of us has to fight with an evil spirit, and when we are not on our guard he is but too apt to take advantage of us.”

The boy rather sullenly repeated that it was of no use to fight against his.

“Indeed! Nay. Were you ever so much grieved before at having let him have the mastery?”

“No—but no one ever was good to me before.”

“Yes; all about you lived under a cruel error, and you helped them in it. But if you had not a better nature in you, my poor child, you would not be happy here and thankful for what we can do for you.”

“I was like some one else here,” said Peregrine, picking a daisy to pieces, “but they stirred it all up. And at home I shall be just the same as ever I was.”

She longed to tell him that there was hope of a change in his life, but she durst not till it was more certain, so she said—

“There was One who came to conquer the evil spirit and the evil nature, and to give each one of us the power to get the victory. The harder the victory, the more glorious!” and her eyes sparkled at the thought.

He caught a moment’s glow, then fell back. “For those that are chosen,” he said.

“You are chosen—you were chosen by your baptism. You have the stirrings of good within you. You can win and beat back the evil side of you in Christ’s strength, if you will ask for it, and go on in His might.”

The boy groaned. Mrs. Woodford knew that the great point with him would be to teach him to hope and to pray, but the very name of prayer had been rendered so distasteful to him that she scarce durst press the subject by name, and her heart sank at the thought of sending him home again, but she was glad to be interrupted, and said no more.

At night, however, she heard sounds of moaning and stifled babbling that reminded her of his times of delirium, and going into his room she found him tossing and groaning so that it was manifestly a kindness to wake him; but her gentle touch occasioned a scream of terror, and he started aside with open glassy eyes, crying, “Oh take me not!”

“My dear boy! It is I. Perry, do you not know me?”

“Oh, madam!” in infinite relief, “it is you. I thought—I thought I was in elfland and that they were paying me for the tithe to hell;” and he still shuddered all over.

“No elf—no elf, dear boy; a christened boy—God’s child, and under His care;” and she began the 121st Psalm.

“Oh, but I am not under His shadow! The Evil One has had me again! He will have me. Aren’t those his claws? He will have me!”

“Never, my child, if you will cry to God for help. Say this with me, ‘Lord, be Thou my keeper.’”

He did so, and grew more quiet, and she began to repeat Dr. Ken’s evening hymn, which had become known in manuscript in Winchester. It soothed him, and she thought he was dropping off to sleep, but no sooner did she move than he started with “There it is again—the black wings—the claws —” then while awake, “Say it again! Oh, say it again. Fold me in your prayers—you can pray.” She went back to the verse, and he became quiet, but her next attempt to leave him caused an entreaty that she would remain, nor could she quit him till the dawn, happily very early, was dispelling the terrors of the night, and then, when he had himself murmured once—

> “Let no ill dreams disturb my rest,
> No powers of darkness me molest,”

he fell asleep at last, with a softer look on his pinched face. Poor boy, would that verse be his first step to prayer and deliverance from his own too real enemy?

CHAPTER VII
The Envoy

"I then did ask of her, her changeling child."

Midsummer Night's Dream.

Mrs. Woodford was too good a housewife to allow herself any extra rest on account of her vigil, and she had just put her Juneating apple-tart into the oven when Anne rushed into the kitchen with the warning that there was a grand gentleman getting off his horse at the gateway, and speaking to her uncle—she thought it must be Peregrine's uncle.

Mrs. Woodford was of the same opinion, and asked where Peregrine was.

"Fast asleep in the window-seat of the parlour, mother! I did not waken him, for he looked so tired."

"That was right, my little maiden," said Mrs. Woodford, hastily washing her hands, taking off her cooking apron, letting down her black gown from its pocket holes, and arranging her veil-like widow's coif, after which, in full trim for company, she sallied out to the front door, to avert, if possible, the wakening of the boy, whom she wished to appear to the best advantage.

She met in the garden her brother-in-law, and Sir Peregrine Oakshott, on being presented to her, made such a bow as had seldom been seen in those parts, as he politely said that he was the bearer of his brother's thanks for her care of his nephew.

Mrs. Woodford explained that the boy had had so bad a night that it would be well not to break his present sleep, and invited the guest to walk in the garden or sit in the Doctor's study or in the shade of the castle wall.

This last was what he preferred, and there they seated themselves, with a green slope before them down to the pale gray creek, and the hill beyond lying in the summer sunshine.

"I have been long in coming hither," said the knight, "partly on account of letters on affairs of State, and partly likewise because I desired to come alone, thinking that I might better understand how it is with the lad without the presence of his father or brothers."

"I am very glad you have so done, sir."

"Then, madam, I entreat of you to speak freely and tell me your opinion of him without reserve. You need not fear offence by speaking of the mode in which they have treated him at home. My poor brother has meant to do his duty, but he has stood so far aloof from his sons that he has dealt with them in ignorance, and their mother, between sickliness and timidity, is a mere prey to the folly of her gossips. So speak plainly, madam, I beg of you."

Mrs. Woodford did speak plainly of the boy's rooted belief in his own elfish origin, and how when arguing against it she had found the alternative even sadder and more hopeless, how well he comported himself as long as he was treated as a human and rational being, but how the taunts and jests of the young Archfields had renewed all the mischief, to the poor fellow's own remorse and despair.

Sir Peregrine listened with only a word of comment, or question now and then, like a man of the world well used to hearing all before he committed himself, and the description was only just ended when the clang of the warning dinner-bell sounded and they rose; but as they were passing the window of the dining-parlour a shriek of Anne's startled them all, and as they sprang forward, Mrs. Woodford first, Peregrine's voice was heard, "No, no, Anne, don't be afraid. It is for me he is come; I knew he would."

Something in a strange language was heard. A black face with round eyes and gleaming teeth might be seen bending forward. Anne gave another shriek, but was heard crying, "No, no! Get away, sir. He is our Lord Christ's! He is! You can't! you shan't have him."

And Anne was seen standing over Peregrine, who had dropped shuddering and nearly fainting on the floor, while she stood valiantly up warding off the advance of him whom she took for the Prince of Darkness, and in her excitement not at first aware of those who were come to her aid at the window. In one second the negro was saying something which his master answered, and sent him off. Mrs. Woodford had called out, "Don't be afraid, dear children. 'Tis Sir Peregrine's black servant"; and the Doctor, "Foolish children! What is this nonsense?" A moment or two more and they were in the room, Anne, all trembling, flying up to her mother and hiding her face against her between fright and shame at not having thought of the black servant, and the while they lifted up Peregrine, who, as he met his kind friend's eyes, said faintly, "Is he gone? Was it the dream again?"

"It was your uncle's blackamoor servant," said Mrs. Woodford. "You woke up, and no wonder you were startled. Come with me, both of you, and make you ready for dinner."

Peregrine had rather collapsed than fainted, for he was able to walk with her hand on his shoulder, and Sir Peregrine understood her sign and did not attempt to accost either of the children, though as the Doctor took him to his chamber he expressed his admiration of the little maiden.

"That's the right woman," he said, "losing herself when there is one to guard. Nay, sir, she needs no excuse. Such a spirit may well redeem a child's mistake."

Mrs. Woodford had reassured the children, so that they were more than half ashamed, though scarce willing to reappear when she had made Peregrine wash his face and hands, smooth the hair ruffled in his nap, freshly tying his little cravat and the ribbons on his shoes and at his knees. To make his hair into anything but elf locks, or to obliterate the bristly tuft that made him like Riquet, was impossible, illness had made him additionally lean and sallow, and his keen eyes, under their black contracted brows and dark lashes, showed all the more the curious variation in their tints, and with an obliquity that varied according to the state of the nerves. There was a satirical mischievous cast in the mould of the face, though individually the features were not amiss except for their thinness, and in fact the unpleasantness of the expression had insensibly been softened during this last month, and there was nothing repellent, though much that was quaint, in the slight figure, with the indescribably one-sided air, and stature more befitting ten than fourteen years. What would the visitor think of him? The Doctor called to him, "Come, Peregrine, your uncle, Sir Peregrine Oakshott, has been good enough to come over to see you."

Peregrine had been well trained enough in that bitter school of home to make a correct bow, though his feelings were betrayed by his yellow eye going almost out of sight.

"My namesake—your father will not let me say my godson," said Sir Peregrine smiling. "We ought to be good friends."

The boy looked up. Perhaps he had never been greeted in so human a manner before, and there was something confiding in the way those bony fingers of his rested a moment in his uncle's clasp.

"And this is your little daughter, madam, Peregrine's kind playmate? You may well be proud of her valour," said the knight, while Anne made her courtesy, which he, in the custom of the day, returned with a kiss; and she, who had been mortally ashamed of her terror, marvelled at his praise.

The pair of fowls were by this time on the table, and good manners required silence on the part of the children, but while Sir Peregrine explained that he had been appointed by his Majesty as Envoy to the Elector of Brandenburg, and gave various interesting particulars of foreign life, Mrs. Woodford saw that he was keeping a quiet watch over his nephew's habits at table, and she was thankful that when unmoved by any wayward spirit of mischief they were quite beyond reproach. Something of the refinement of his poor mother's tastes must have been inherited by Peregrine, for a certain daintiness of taste and habit had probably added to his discomforts in the austere, not to say rude simplicity imposed upon the children of the family.

When the meal was over the children were dismissed to the garden, but bidden to keep within call, in case Sir Peregrine should wish to see his nephew again. The others repaired again to the garden seat, with wine and fruit, but the knight begged Mrs. Woodford not to leave them.

"I am satisfied," he said. "The boy shows gentle blood and breeding. There was cause enough for fright without cowardice, and there is not, what I was led to fear, such uncouthness or ungainliness as should hinder me from having him with me."

"Oh, sir, is that your purpose?" cried the lady, almost as eagerly as if it had been high preferment for her own child.

"I had thought thereon," said the envoy. "There is reason that he should be my charge, and my brother is like to give a ready consent, since he is sorely perplexed what to do with this poor untoward slip."

"He would be less untoward were he happier," said Mrs. Woodford. "Indeed, sir, I do not think you will repent it, if—" and she paused.

"What would you say, madam?"

"If only all your honour's household are absolutely ignorant of all these tales."

"That can well be, madam. I have only one body-servant with me, this unlucky blackamoor, who speaks nothing save Dutch. I had already thought of leaving my grooms here, and returning to London by sea, and this could well be done, and would cut off all channels of gossiping. The boy is, the chaplain tells me, quick-witted, and a fair scholar for his years, and I can find good schooling for him."

"When his head is able to bear it," said Mrs. Woodford.

"Truly, sir," added the Doctor, "you are doing a good work, and I trust that the boy will requite you worthily."

"I tell your reverence," said Sir Peregrine, "crooked stick though they term him, I had ten times rather have the dealing with him than with those comely great lubbers his brothers! The question now is, shall I tell him what is in store for him?"

"I should say," returned Dr. Woodford, "that provided it is certain that the intention can be carried out, nothing would be so good for him as hope. Do you not say so, sister?"

"Indeed I do," she replied. "I believe that he would be a very different boy if he were relieved from the misery he suffers at home and requites by mischievous pranks. I do not say he will or can be a good lad at once, but if your honour can have patience with him, I do believe there is that in him which can be turned to good. If he only can believe in the better nature and higher guidings, and pray, and not give himself up in despair." She had tears in her eyes.

"My good madam, I can believe it all," said Sir Peregrine. "Short of being supposed an elf, I have gone through the same, and it was not my good father's fault that I did not loathe the very name of preaching or prayer. But I had a mother who knew how to deal with me, whereas this poor child's mother, I am sure, believes in her secret heart that he is none of hers, though she has enough sense not to dare to avow it. Alas! I cannot give the boy the woman's tending by which you have already wrought so much," and Mrs. Woodford remembered to have heard that his wife had died at Rotterdam, "but I can treat him like a human being, I hope indeed as a son; and, at any rate, there will be no one to remind him of these old wives' tales."

"I can only say that I am heartily rejoiced," said Mrs. Woodford.

So Peregrine was summoned, and shambled up, his eyes showing that he expected a trying interview, and, moreover, with a certain twinkle of mischief or perverseness in their corners.

"Soh! my lad, we ought to be better acquainted," said the uncle. "D'ye know what our name means?"

"*Peregrinus*, a vagabond," responded the boy.

"Eh! The translation may be correct, but 'tis scarce the most complimentary. I wonder now if you, like me, were born on a Wednesday. 'Wednesday's child has far to go.'"

"No. I was born on a Sunday, and if to see goblins and oafs—"

"Nay, I read it, 'Sunday's child is full of grace.'"

Peregrine's mouth twitched ironically, but his uncle continued, "Look you, my boy, what say you to fulfilling the augury of your name with me. His Majesty has ordered me off again to represent the British name to the Elector of Brandenburg, and I have a mind to carry you with me. What do you say?"

If any one expected Peregrine to be overjoyed his demeanour was disappointing. He shuffled with his feet, and after two or three "Ehs?" from his uncle, he mumbled, "I don't care," and then shrank together, as one prepared for the stripe with the riding-whip which such a rude answer merited: but his uncle had, as a diplomate, learnt a good deal of patience, and he said, "Ha! don't care to leave home and brothers. Eh?"

Peregrine's chin went down, and there was no answer; his hair dropped over his heavy brow.

"See, boy, this is no jest," said his uncle. "You are too big to be told that 'I'll put you into my pocket and carry you off.' I am in earnest."

Peregrine looked up, and with one sudden flash surveyed his uncle. His lips trembled, but he did not speak.

"It is sudden," said the knight to the other two. "See, boy, I am not about to take you away with me now. In a week or ten days' time I start for London; and there we will fit you out for Königsberg or Berlin, and I trust we shall make a man of you, and a good man. Your tutor tells me you have excellent parts, and I mean that you shall do me credit."

Dr. Woodford could not help telling the lad that he ought to thank his uncle, whereat he scowled; but Sir Peregrine said, "He is not ready for that yet. Wait till he feels he has something to thank me for."

So Peregrine was dismissed, and his friends exclaimed with some wonder and annoyance that the boy who had been willing to be decapitated to put an end to his wretchedness, should be so reluctant to accept such an offer, but Sir Peregrine only laughed, and said—

"The lad has pith in him! I like him better than if he came like a spaniel to my foot. But I will say no more till I fully have my brother's consent. No one knows what crooks there may be in folks' minds."

He took his leave, and presently Mrs. Woodford had a fresh surprise. She found this strange boy lying flat on the grass, sobbing as if his heart would break, and when she tried to soothe and comfort him it was very hard to get a word from him; but at last, as she asked, "And does it grieve you so much to leave home?" the answer was—

"No, no! not home!"

"What is it, then? What are you sorry to leave?"

"Oh, *you* don't know! you and Anne—the only ones that ever were good to me—and drove away—*it*."

"Nay, my dear boy. Your uncle means to be good to you."

"No, no. No one ever will be like you and Anne. Oh, let me stay with you, or they will have me at last!"

He was too much shaken, in his still half-recovered state, by the events of these last days, to be reasoned with. Mrs. Woodford was afraid he would work himself into delirium, and could only soothe him into a calmer state. She found from Anne that the children had some vague hopes of his being allowed to remain at Portchester, and that this was the ground of his disappointment, since he seemed to be attaching himself to them as the first who had ever touched his heart or opened to him a gleam of better things.

By the next day, however, he was in a quieter and more reasonable state, and Mrs. Woodford was able to have a long talk with him. She represented that the difference of opinions made it almost certain that his father would never consent to his remaining under her roof, and that even if this were

possible, Portchester was far too much infected with the folly from which he had suffered so much; and his uncle would take care that no one he would meet should ever hear of it.

"There's little good in that," said the boy moodily. "I'm a thing they'll jibe at and bait any way."

"I do not see that, if you take pains with yourself. Your uncle said you showed blood and breeding, and when you are better dressed, and with him, no one will dare to mock his Excellency's nephew. Depend upon it, Peregrine, this is the fresh start that you need."

"If you were there—"

"My boy, you must not ask for what is impossible. You must learn to conquer in God's strength, not mine."

All, however, that passed may not here be narrated, and it apparently left that wayward spirit unconvinced. Nevertheless, when on the second day Major Oakshott himself came over with his brother, and informed Peregrine that his uncle was good enough to undertake the charge of him, and to see that he was bred up in godly ways in a Protestant land, free from prelacy and superstition, the boy seemed reconciled to his fate. Major Oakshott spoke more kindly than usual to him, being free from fresh irritation at his misdemeanours; but even thus there was a contrast with the gentler, more persuasive tones of the diplomatist, and no doubt this tended to increase Peregrine's willingness to be thus handed over.

The next question was whether he should go home first, but both the uncle and the friends were averse to his remaining there, amid the unavoidable gossip and chatter of the household, and it was therefore decided that he should only ride over with Dr. Woodford for an hour or two to take leave of his mother and brothers.

This settled, Mrs. Woodford found him much easier to deal with. He had really, through his midnight invocation of the fairies, obtained an opening into a new world, and he was ready to believe that with no one to twit him with being a changeling or worse, he could avoid perpetual disgrace and punishment and live at peace. Nor was he unwilling to promise Mrs. Woodford to say daily, and especially when tempted, one or two brief collects and ejaculations which she selected to teach him, as being as unlike as possible to the long extempore exercises which had made him hate the very name of prayer. The Doctor gave him a Greek Testament, as being least connected with unpleasant recollections.

"And," entreated Peregrine humbly, in a low voice to Mrs. Woodford on his last Sunday evening, "may I not have something of yours, to lay hold of, and remember you if—when—the evil spirit tries to lay hold of me again?"

She would fain have given him a prayer-book, but she knew that would be treason to his father, and with tears in her eyes and something of a pang, she gave him a tiny miniature of herself, which had been her husband's companion at sea, and hung it round his neck with the chain of her own hair that had always held it.

"It will always keep my heart warm," said Peregrine, as he hid it under his vest. There was a shade of disappointment on Anne's face when he showed it to her, for she had almost deemed it her own.

"Never mind, Anne," he said; "I am coming back a knight like my uncle to marry you, and then it will be yours again."

"I—I'm not going to wed you—I have another sweetheart," added Anne in haste, lest he should think she scorned him.

"Oh, that lubberly Charles Archfield! No fear of him. He is promised long ago to some little babe of quality in London. You may whistle for him. So you'd better wait for me."

"It is not true. You only say it to plague me."

"It's as true as Gospel! I heard Sir Philip telling one of the big black gowns one day in the Close, when I was sitting up in a tree overhead, how they had fixed a marriage between his son and his

old friend's daughter, who would have ever so many estates. So I'd give that"—snapping his fingers —"for your chances of being my Lady Archfield in the salt mud at Fareham."

"I shall ask Lucy. It is not kind of you, Perry, when you are just going away."

"Come, come, don't cry, Anne."

"But I knew Charley ever so long first, and—"

"Oh, yes. Maids always like straight, comely, dull fellows, I know that. But as you can't have Charles Archfield, I mean to have you, Anne—for I shall look to you as the only one as can ever make a good man of me! Ay—your mother—I'd wed her if I could, but as I can't, I mean to have you, Anne Woodford."

"I don't mean to have you! I shall go to Court, and marry some noble earl or gentleman! Why do you laugh and make that face, Peregrine? you know my father was almost a knight—"

"Nobody is long with you without knowing that!" retorted Peregrine; "but a miss is as good as a mile, and you will find the earls and the lords will think so, and be fain to take the crooked stick at last!"

Mistress Anne tossed her head—and Peregrine returned a grimace. Nevertheless they parted with a kiss, and for some time the thought of Peregrine haunted the little girl with a strange, fateful feeling, between aversion and attraction, which wore off, as a folly of her childhood, with her growth in years.

CHAPTER VIII
The Return

"I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet in Germany, and his behaviour everywhere."
Merchant of Venice.

It was autumn, but in the year 1687, when again Lucy Archfield and Anne Jacobina Woodford were pacing the broad gravel walk along the south side of the nave of Winchester Cathedral. Lucy, in spite of her brocade skirt and handsome gown of blue velvet tucked up over it, was still devoid of any look of distinction, but was a round-faced, blooming, cheerful maiden, of that ladylike thoroughly countrified type happily frequent in English girlhood throughout all time.

Anne, or Jacobina, as she tried to be called, towered above her head, and had never lost that tincture of courtly grace that early breeding had given her, and though her skirt was of gray wool, and the upper gown of cherry tabinet, she wore both with an air that made them seem more choice and stylish than those of her companion, while the simple braids and curls of her brown hair set off an unusually handsome face, pale and clear in complexion, with regular features, fine arched eyebrows over clear brown eyes, a short chin, and a mouth of perfect outline, but capable of looking very resolute.

Altogether she looked fit for a Court atmosphere, and perhaps she was not without hopes of it, for Dr. Woodford had become a royal chaplain under Charles II, and was now continued in the same office; and though this was a sinecure as regarded the present King, yet Tory and High Church views were as much in the ascendant as they could be under a Romanist king, and there were hopes of a canonry at Windsor or Westminster, or even higher preferment still, if he were not reckoned too staunch an Anglican. That Mrs. Woodford's health had been failing for many months past would, her sanguine daughter thought, be remedied by being nearer the best physicians in London, which had been quitted with regret. Meantime Lucy's first experiences of wedding festivities were to be heard. For the Archfield family had just returned from celebrating the marriage of the heir. Long ago Anne Jacobina had learnt to reckon Master Charles's pledges of affection among the sports and follies of childhood, and the strange sense of disappointment and shame with which she recollected them had perhaps added to her natural reserve, and made her feel it due to maidenly dignity to listen with zest to the account of the bride, who was to be brought to supper at Doctor Woodford's that eve.

"She is a pretty little thing," said Lucy, "but my mother was much concerned to find her so mere a child, and would not, if she had seen her, have consented to the marriage for two years to come, except for the sake of having her in our own hands."

"I thought she was sixteen."

"Barely fifteen, my dear, and far younger than we were at that age. She cried because her woman said she must leave her old doll behind her; and when my brother declared that she should have anything she liked, she danced about, and kissed him, and made him kiss its wooden face with half the paint rubbed off."

"He did?"

"Oh, yes! She is like a pretty fresh plaything to him, and they go about together just like big Towzer and little Frisk at home. He is very much amused with her, and she thinks him the finest possession that ever came in her way."

"Well, so he is."

"That is true; but somehow it is scarcely like husband and wife; and my mother fears that she may be sickly, for she is so small and slight that it seems as if you could blow her away, and so white that you would think she had no blood, except when a little heat brings the purest rose colour to her

cheek, and that, my lady says, betokens weakliness. You know, of course, that she is an orphan; her father died of a wasting consumption, and her mother not long after, when she was a yearling babe. It was her grandfather who was my father's friend in the old cavalier days, and wrote to propose the contract to my brother not long before his death, when she was but five years old. The pity was that she was not sent to us at once, for the old lord, her grand-uncle, never heeded or cared for her, but left her to servants, who petted her, but understood nothing of care of her health or her education, so that the only wonder is that she is alive or so sweet and winning as she is. She can hardly read without spelling, and I had to make copies for her of Alice Fitzhubert, to show her how to sign the book. All she knew she learnt from the old steward, and only when she liked. My father laughs and is amused, but my lady sighs, and hopes her portion is not dearly bought."

"Is not she to be a great heiress?"

"Not of the bulk of the lands—they go to heirs male; but there is much besides, enough to make Charles a richer man than our father. I wonder what you will think of her. My mother is longing to talk her over with Mrs Woodford."

"And my mother is longing to see my lady."

"I fear she is still but poorly."

"We think she will be much better when we get home," said Anne. "I am sure she is stronger, for she walked round the Close yesterday, and was scarcely tired."

"But tell me, Anne, is it true that poor Master Oliver Oakshott is dead of smallpox?"

"Quite true. Poor young gentleman, he was to have married that cousin of his mother's, Mistress Martha Browning, living at Emsworth. She came on a visit, and they think she brought the infection, for she sickened at once, and though she had it favourably, is much disfigured. Master Oliver caught it and died in three days, and all the house were down with it. They say poor Mrs. Oakshott forgot her ailments and went to and fro among them all. My mother would have gone to help in their need if she had been as well as she used to be."

"How is it with the other son? He was a personable youth enough. I saw him at the ship launch in the spring, and thought both lads would fain have staid for the dance on board but for their grim old father."

"You saw Robert, but he is not the elder."

"What? Is that shocking impish urchin whom we used to call Riquet with the tuft, older than he?"

"Certainly he is. He writes from time to time to my mother, and seems to be doing well with his uncle."

"I cannot believe he would come to good. Do you remember his sending my brother and cousin adrift in the boat?"

"I think that was in great part the fault of your cousin for mocking and tormenting him."

"Sedley Archfield was a bad boy! There's no denying that. I am afraid he had good reason for running away from college."

"Have you heard of him since?"

"Yes; he has been serving with the Life-guards in Scotland, and mayhap he will come home and see us. My father wishes to see whether he is worthy to have a troop procured by money or favour for him, and if they are recalled to the camp at November it will be an opportunity. But see —who is coming through the Slype?"

"My uncle. And who is with him?"

Dr. Woodford advanced, and with him a small slender figure in black. As the broad hat with sable plume was doffed with a sweep on approaching the ladies, a dark head and peculiar countenance appeared, while the Doctor said, "Here is an old acquaintance, young ladies, whom I met dismounting at the White Hart, and have brought home with me."

"Mr. Peregrine Oakshott!" exclaimed Anne, feeling bound to offer in welcome a hand, which he kissed after the custom of the day, while Lucy dropped a low and formal courtesy, and being already close to the gate of the house occupied by her family, took her leave till supper-time.

Even in the few steps before reaching home Anne was able to perceive that a being very unlike the imp of seven years ago had returned, though still short in stature and very slight, with long dark hair hanging straight enough to suggest elf-locks, but his figure was well proportioned, and had a finished air of high breeding and training. His riding suit was point device, from the ostrich feather in his hat, to the toes of his well made boots, and his sword knew its place, as well as did those of the gentlemen that Anne remembered at the Duke of York's when she was a little child. His thin, marked face was the reverse of handsome, but it was keen, shrewd, perhaps satirical, and the remarkable eyes were very bright under dark eyebrows and lashes, and the thin lips, devoid of hair, showed fine white teeth when parted by a smile of gladness—at the meeting—though he was concerned to hear that Mrs. Woodford had been very ill all the last spring, and had by no means regained her former health, and even in the few words that passed it might be gathered that Anne was far more hopeful than her uncle.

She did indeed look greatly changed, though her countenance was sweeter than ever, as she rose from her seat by the fire and held out her arms to receive the newcomer with a motherly embrace, while the expression of joy and affection was such as could never once have seemed likely to sit on Peregrine Oakshott's features. They were left together, for Anne had the final touches to put to the supper, and Dr. Woodford was sent for to speak to one of the Cathedral staff.

Peregrine explained that he was on his way home, his father having recalled him on his brother's death, but he hoped soon to rejoin his uncle, whose secretary he now was. They had been for the last few months in London, and were thence to be sent on an embassy to the young Czar of Muscovy, an expedition to which he looked forward with eager curiosity. Mrs. Woodford hoped that all danger of infection at Oakwood was at an end.

"There is none for me, madam," he said, with a curious writhed smile. "Did you not know that they thought they were rid of me when I took the disease at seven years old, and lay in the loft over the hen-house with Molly Owens to tend me? and I believe it was thought to be fairy work that I came out of it no more unsightly than before."

"You are seeking for compliments, Peregrine; you are greatly improved."

"Crooked sticks can be pruned and trained," he responded, with a courteous bow.

"You are a travelled man. Let me see, how many countries have you seen?"

"A year at Berlin and Königsberg—strange places enough, specially the last, two among the scholars and high roofs of Leyden, half a year at Versailles and Paris, another year at Turin, whence back for another half year to wait on old King Louis, then to the Hague, and the last three months at Court. Not much like buying and selling cows, or growing wheat on the slopes, or lying out on a cold winter's night to shoot a few wild fowl; and I have you to thank for it, my first and best friend!"

"Nay, your uncle is surely your best."

"Never would he have picked up the poor crooked stick save for you, madam. Moreover, you gave me my talisman," and he laid his hand on his breast; "it is your face that speaks to me and calls me back when the elf, or whatever it is, has got the mastery of me."

Somewhat startled, Mrs. Woodford would have asked what he meant, but that intelligence was brought that Mr. Oakshott's man had brought his mail, so that he had to repair to his room. Mrs. Woodford had kept up some correspondence with him, for which his uncle's position as envoy afforded unusual facilities, and she knew that on the whole he had been a very different being from what he was at home. Once, indeed, his uncle had written to the Doctor to express his full satisfaction in the lad, on whom he seemed to look like a son, but from some subsequent letters she had an impression that he had got into trouble of some sort while at the University of Leyden, and she was afraid that she must accept the belief that the wild elfish spirit, as he called it, was by no means extinct

in him, any more, she said to herself, than temptation is in any human creature. The question is, What is there to contend therewith?

The guests were, however, about to assemble. The Doctor, in black velvet cap and stately silken cassock, sash, and gown, sailed down to receive them, and again greeted Peregrine, who emerged in black velvet and satin, delicate muslin cravat and cuffs, dainty silk stockings and rosetted shoes, in a style such as made the far taller and handsomer Charles Archfield, in spite of gay scarlet coat, embroidered flowery vest, rich laced cravat, and thick shining brown curls, look a mere big schoolboy, almost bumpkin-like in contrast. However, no one did look at anything but the little creature who could just reach to hang upon that resplendent bridegroom's arm. She was in glistening white brocade, too stiff and cumbrous for so tiny a figure, yet together with the diamonds glistening on her head and breast giving her the likeness of a fairy queen. The whiteness was almost startling, for the neck and arms were like pearl in tint, the hair flowing in full curls on her shoulders was like shining flax or pale silk just unwound from the cocoon, and the only relief of colour was the deep blue of the eyes, the delicate tint of the lips, and the tender rosy flush that was called up by her presentation to her hosts by stout old Sir Philip, in plum-coloured coat and full-bottomed wig, though she did not blush half as much as the husband of nineteen in his new character. Indeed, had it not been for her childish prettiness, her giggle would have been unpleasing to more than Lady Archfield, who, broad and matronly, gave a courtesy and critical glance at Peregrine before subsiding into a seat beside Mrs. Woodford.

Lucy stood among a few other young people from the Close, watching for Anne, who came in, trim and bright, though still somewhat reddened in face and arms from her last attentions to the supper—an elaborate meal on such occasions, though lighter than the mid-day repast. There were standing pies of game, lobster and oyster patties, creams, jellies, and other confections, on which Sir Philip and his lady highly complimented Anne, who had been engaged on them for at least a couple of days, her mother being no longer able to assist except by advice.

"See, daughter Alice, you will learn one day to build up a jelly as well as to eat it," said Sir Philip good-humouredly, whereat the small lady pouted a little and said—

"Bet lets me make shapes of the dough, but I won't stir the pans and get to look like a turkey-cock."

"Ah, ha! and you have always done what you liked, my little madam?"

"Of course, sir! and so I shall," she answered, drawing up her pretty little head, while Lady Archfield gave hers a boding shake.

"Time, and life, and wifehood teach lessons," murmured Mrs. Woodford in consolation, and the Doctor changed the subject by asking Peregrine whether the ladies abroad were given to housewifery.

"The German dames make a great ado about their *Wirthschaft*, as they call it," was the reply, "but as to the result! Pah! I know not how we should have fared had not Hans, my uncle's black, been an excellent cook; but it was in Paris that we were exquisitely regaled, and our *maître d'hôtel* would discourse on *ragoûts* and *entremets* till one felt as if his were the first of the sciences."

"So it is to a Frenchman," growled Sir Philip. "French and Frenchifications are all the rage nowadays, but what will your father say to your science, my young spark?"

The gesture of head and shoulder that replied had certainly been caught at Paris. Mrs. Woodford rushed into the breach, asking about the Princess of Orange, whom she had often seen as a child.

"A stately and sightly dame is she, madam," Peregrine answered, "towering high above her little mynheer, who outwardly excels her in naught save the length of nose, and has the manners of a boor."

"The Prince of Orange is the hope of the country," said Sir Philip severely.

Peregrine's face wore a queer satirical look, which provoked Sir Philip into saying, "Speak up, sir! what d'ye mean? We don't understand French grins here."

"Nor does he, nor French courtesies either," said Peregrine.

"So much the better!" exclaimed the baronet.

Here the little clear voice broke in, "O Mr. Oakshott, if I had but known you were coming, you might have brought me a French doll in the latest fashion."

"I should have been most happy, madam," returned Peregrine; "but unfortunately I am six months from Paris, and besides, his honour might object lest a French doll should contaminate the Dutch puppets."

"But oh, sir, is it true that French dolls have real hair that will curl?"

"Don't be foolish," muttered Charles impatiently; and she drew up her head and made an indescribably droll *moue* of disgust at him.

Supper ended, the party broke up into old and young, the two elder gentlemen sadly discussing politics over their tall glasses of wine, the matrons talking over the wedding and Lady Archfield's stay in London at the parlour fire, and the young folk in a window, waiting for the fiddler and a few more of the young people who were to join them in the dance.

The Archfield ladies had kissed the hand of the Queen, and agreed with Peregrine in admiration of her beauty and grace, though they did not go so far as he did, especially when he declared that her eyes were as soft as Mistress Anne's, and nearly of the same exquisite brown, which made the damsel blush and experience a revival of the old feeling of her childhood, as if he put her under a spell.

He went on to say that he had had the good fortune to pick up and restore to Queen Mary Beatrice a gold and coral rosary which she had dropped on her way to St. James's Palace from Whitehall. She thanked him graciously, letting him kiss her hand, and asking him if he were of the true Church. "Imagine my father's feelings," he added, "when she said, 'Ah! but you will be ere long; I give it you as a pledge.'"

He produced the rosary, handing it first to Anne, who admired the beautiful filigree work, but it was almost snatched from her by Mrs. Archfield, who wound it twice on her tiny wrist, tried to get it over her head, and did everything but ask for it, till her husband, turning round, said roughly, "Give it back, madam. We want no Popish toys here."

Lucy put in a hasty question whether Master Oakshott had seen much sport, and this led to a spirited description of the homely earnest of wild boar hunting under the great Elector of Brandenburg, in contrast with the splendours of *la chasse aux sangliers* at Fontainebleau with the green and gold uniforms, the fanfares on the curled horns, the ladies in their coaches, forced to attend whether ill or well, the very boars themselves too well bred not to conform to the sport of the great idol of France. And again, he showed the diamond sleeve buttons, the trophies of a sort of bazaar held at Marly, where the stalls were kept by the Dauphin, Monsieur, the Duke of Maine, Madame de Maintenon, and the rest, where the purchases were winnings at Ombre, made not with coin but with nominal sums, and other games at cards, and all was given away that was not purchased. And again the levees, when the King's wig was handed through the curtains on a stick. Peregrine's profane mimicry of the stately march of Louis Quatorze, and the cringing obeisances of his courtiers, together with their strutting majesty towards their own inferiors, convulsed all with merriment; and the bride shrieked out, "Do it again! Oh, I shall die of laughing!"

It was very girlish, with a silvery ring, but the elder ladies looked round, and the bridegroom muttered 'Mountebank.'

The fiddler arrived at that moment, and the young people paired off, the young couple naturally together, and Peregrine, to the surprise and perhaps discomfiture of more than one visitor, securing Anne's hand. The young lady pupils of Madame knew their steps, and Lucy danced correctly, Anne with an easy, stately grace, Charles Archfield performed his *devoir* seriously, his little wife frisked with childish glee, evidently quite untaught, but Peregrine's light narrow feet sprang, pointed themselves, and bounded with trained agility, set off by the tight blackness of his suit. He was like one of the grotesque figures shaped in black paper, or as Sir Philip, looking in from the dining-parlour, observed, "like a light-heeled French fop."

As a rule partners retained one another all the evening, but little Mrs. Archfield knew no etiquette, and maybe her husband had pushed and pulled her into place a little more authoritatively than she quite approved, for she shook him off, and turning round to Peregrine exclaimed—

"Now, I will dance with you! You do leap and hop so high and trippingly! Never mind her; she is only a parson's niece!"

"Madam!" exclaimed Charles, in a tone of surprised displeasure; but she only nodded archly at him, and said, "I must dance with him; he can jump so high."

"Let her have her way," whispered Lucy, "she is but a child, and it will be better not to make a pother."

He yielded, though with visible annoyance, asking Anne if she would put up with a poor deserted swain, and as he led her off muttering, "That fellow's friskiness is like to be taken out of him at Oakwood."

Meanwhile the small creature had taken possession of her chosen partner, who, so far as size went, was far better suited to her than any of the other men present. They were dancing something original and unpremeditated, with twirls and springs, sweeps and bends, bounds and footings, just as the little lady's fancy prompted, perhaps guided in some degree by her partner's experience of national dances. White and black, they figured about, she with floating sheeny hair and glistening robes, he trim and tight and jetty, like fairy and imp! It was so droll and pretty that talkers and dancers alike paused to watch them in a strange fascination, till at last, quite breathless and pink as a moss rosebud, Alice dropped upon a chair near her husband. He stood grim, stiff, and vexed, all the more because Peregrine had taken her fan and was using it so as to make it wave like butterfly's wings, while poor Charles looked, as the Doctor whispered to his father, far more inclined to lay it about her ears.

Sir Philip laughed heartily, for both he and the Doctor had been so much entranced and amused as to be far more diverted at the lad's discomfiture than scandalised at the bride's escapade, which they viewed as child's play.

Perhaps, however, he was somewhat comforted by her later observation, "He is as ugly as Old Nick, and looks like always laughing at you; but I wish you could dance like him, Mr. Archfield, only then you wouldn't be my dear old great big husband, or so beautiful to look at. Oh, yes, to be sure, he is nothing but a skipjack such as one makes out of a chicken bone!"

And Anne meanwhile was exclaiming to her mother, "Oh, madam! how could they do such a thing? How could they make poor Charley marry that foolish ill-mannered little creature?"

"Hush, daughter, you must drop that childish name," said Mrs. Woodford gravely.

Anne blushed. "I forgot, madam, but I am so sorry for him."

"There is no reason for uneasiness, my dear. She is a mere child, and under such hands as Lady Archfield she is sure to improve. It is far better that she should be so young, as it will be the more easy to mould her."

"I hope there is any stuff in her to be moulded," sighed the maiden.

"My dear child," returned her mother, "I cannot permit you to talk in this manner. Yes, I know Mr. Archfield has been as a brother to you, but even his sister ought not to allow herself to discuss or dwell on what she deems the shortcomings of his wife."

The mother in her prudence had silenced the girl; but none the less did each fall asleep with a sad and foreboding heart. She knew her child to be good and well principled, but those early days of notice and petting from the young Princesses of the House of York had never faded from the childish mind, and although Anne was dutiful, cheerful, and outwardly contented, the mother often suspected that over the spinning-wheel or embroidery frame she indulged in day dreams of heroism, promotion, and grandeur, which might either fade away in a happy life of domestic duty or become temptations.

Before going away next morning Peregrine entreated that Mistress Anne might have the Queen's rosary, but her mother decidedly refused. "It ought to be an heirloom in your family," said she.

He threw up his hands with one of his strange gestures.

CHAPTER IX
On His Travels

"For Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do."

ISAAC WATTS.

Peregrine went off in good spirits, promising a visit on his return to London, of which he seemed to have no doubt; but no more was heard of him for ten days. At the end of that time the Portsmouth carrier conveyed the following note to Winchester:—

> HONOURED AND REVEREND SIR—Seven years since your arguments and intercession induced my father to consent to what I hoped had been the rescue of me, body and soul. I know not whether to ask of your goodness to make the same endeavour again. My father declares that nothing shall induce him again to let me go abroad with my uncle, and persists in declaring that the compact has been broken by our visits to Papist lands, nor will aught that I can say persuade him that the Muscovite abhors the Pope quite as much as he can. He likewise deems that having unfortunately become his heir, I must needs remain at home to thin the timber and watch the ploughmen; and when I have besought him to let me yield my place to Robert he replies that I am playing the part of Esau. I have written to my uncle, who has been a true father to me, and would be loth to part from me for his own sake as well as mine but I know not whether he will be able to prevail; and I entreat of you, reverend sir, to add your persuasions, for I well know that it would be my perdition to remain bound where I am.
>
> Commend me to Mrs. Woodford and Mistress Anne. I trust that the former is in better health.—I remain, reverend sir, Your humble servant to command,
> PEREGRINE OAKSHOTT.
> *Given at Oakwood House,*
> *This 10th of October 1687.*

This was very bad news, but Dr. Woodford knew not how to interfere; moreover, being in course at the Cathedral, he could not absent himself long enough for an expedition to Oakwood, through wintry roads in short days. He could only write an encouraging letter to the poor lad, and likewise one to Mr. Horncastle, who under the Indulgence had a chapel of his own. The Doctor had kept up the acquaintance formed by Peregrine's accident, and had come to regard him with much esteem, and as likely to exercise a wholesome influence upon his patron. Nothing more was heard for a week, and then came another visitor to the Doctor's door, Sir Peregrine himself, on his way down, at considerable inconvenience, to endeavour to prevail with his brother to allow him to retain his nephew in his suite.

"Surely," he said, "my brother had enough of camps in his youth to understand that his son will be none the worse squire for having gone a little beyond Hampshire bogs, and learnt what the world is made of."

"I cannot tell," said Dr. Woodford; "I have my fears that he thinks the less known of the world the better."

"That might answer with a heavy clod of a lad such as the poor youth who is gone, and such as, for his own sake and my brother's, I trust the younger one is, *fruges consumere natus*; but as for this

boy, dulness and vacancy are precisely what would be the ruin of him. Let my brother keep Master Robert at home, and give him Oakwood; I will provide for Perry as I always promised to do."

"If he is wise he will accept the offer," said Dr. Woodford; "but 'tis hard to be wise for others."

"Nothing harder, sir. I would that I had gone home with Perry, but mine audience of his Majesty was fixed for the ensuing week, and my brother's summons was peremptory."

"I trust your honour will prevail," said Mrs. Woodford gently. "You have effected a mighty change in the poor boy, and I can well believe that he is as a son to you."

"Well, madam, yes—as sons go," said the knight in a somewhat disappointing tone.

She looked at him anxiously, and ventured to murmur a hope so very like an inquiry, and so full of solicitous hope, that it actually unlocked the envoy's reserve, and he said, "Ah, madam, you have been the best mother that the poor youth has ever had! I will speak freely to you, for should I fail in overcoming my brother's prejudices, you will be able to do more for him than any one else, and I know you will be absolutely secret."

Mrs. Woodford sighed, with forebodings of not long being able to aid any one in this world, but still she listened with earnest interest and sympathy.

"Yes, madam, you implanted in him that which yet may conquer his strange nature. Your name is as it were a charm to conjure up his better spirit."

"Of course," she said, "I never durst hope, that he could be tamed and under control all at once, but—" and she paused.

"He has improved—vastly improved," said the uncle. "Indeed, when first I took him with me, while he was still weak, and moreover much overcome by sea-sickness, while all was strange to him, and he was relieved by not finding himself treated as an outcast, I verily thought him meeker than other urchins, and that the outcry against him was unmerited. But no sooner had we got to Berlin, and while I was as yet too busy to provide either masters or occupations for my young gentleman, than he did indeed make me feel that I had charge of a young imp, and that if I did not watch the better, it might be a case of war with his Spanish Majesty. For would you believe it, his envoy's gardens joined ours, and what must my young master do, but sit atop of our wall, making grimaces at the dons and donnas as they paced the walks, and pelting them from time to time with walnuts. Well, I was mindful of your counsel, and did not flog him, nor let my chaplain do so, though I know the good man's fingers itched to be at him; but I reasoned with him on the harm he was doing me, and would you believe it, the poor lad burst into tears, and implored me to give him something to do, to save him from his own spirit. I set him to write out and translate a long roll of Latin despatches sent up by that pedant Court in Hungary, and I declare to you I had no more trouble with him till next he was left idle. I gave him tutors, and he studied with fervour, and made progress at which they were amazed. He learnt the High Dutch faster than any other of my people, and could soon jabber away in it with the best of the Elector's folk, and I began to think I had a nephew who would do me no small credit. I sent him to perfect his studies at Leyden, but shall I confess it to you? it was to find that no master nor discipline could keep him out of the riotings and quarrels of the worse sort of students. Nay, I found him laid by with a rapier thrust in the side from a duel, for no better cause than biting his thumb at a Scots law student in chapel, his apology being that to sit through a Dutch sermon drove him crazy. 'Tis not that he is not trustworthy. Find employment for the restless demon that is in him, and all is well with him; moreover, he is full of wit and humour, and beguiles a long journey or tedious evening at an inn better than any comrade I ever knew, extracting mirth from all around, even the very discomforts, and searching to the quick all that is to be seen. But if left to himself, the restless demon that preys on him is sure to set him to something incalculable. At Turin it set him to scraping acquaintance with a Capuchin friar, a dirty rogue whom I would have kept on the opposite side of the street. That was his graver mood; but what more must he do, but borrow or steal, I know not how, the ghastly robes of the Confraternity of Death—the white garb and peaked cap with two holes for the eyes, wherewith men of all degrees disguise themselves while doing the pious work of

bearing the dead to the grave. None suspected him, for the disguise is complete, and a duke may walk unknown beside a water-carrier, bearing the corpse of a cobbler. All would have been well, but that at the very brink of the grave the boy's fiend—'tis his own word—impelled him to break forth into his wild "Ho! ho! ho!" with an eldritch shriek, and slipping out of his cerements, dash off headlong over the wall of the cemetery. He was not followed. I believe the poor body belonged to a fellow whose salvation was more than doubtful in spite of all the priests could do, and that the bearers really took him for the foul fiend. It was not till a week or two after that the ring of his voice and laugh caused him to be recognised by one of the Duke of Savoy's gentlemen, happily a prudent man, loth to cause a tumult against one of my suite, and he told me all privately in warning. Ay, and when I spoke to Peregrine, I found him thoroughly penitent at having insulted the dead; he had been unhappy ever since, and had actually bestowed his last pocket-piece on the widow. He made handsome apologies in good Italian, which he had picked up as fast as the German, to the gentleman, who promised that it should go no farther, and kept his word. It was the solemnity, Peregrine assured me, that brought back all the intolerableness of the preachings at home, and awoke the same demon."

"How long ago was this, sir?"

"About eighteen months."

"And has all been well since?"

"Fairly well. He has had fuller and more responsible work to do for me, his turn for languages making him a most valuable secretary; and in the French Court, really the most perilous of all to a young man's virtue, he behaved himself well. It is not debauchery that he has a taste for, but he must be doing something, and if wholesome occupations do not stay his appetite, he will be doing mischief. He brought on himself a very serious rebuke from the Prince of Orange, churlishly and roughly given, I allow, but fully merited, for making grimaces at his acquaintance among the young officers at a military inspection. Heaven help the lad if he be left with his father, whose most lively notion of innocent sport is scratching the heads of his hogs!"

Nothing could be said in answer save earnest wishes that the knight might persuade his brother. Mrs. Woodford wished her brother-in-law to go with him to add force to his remonstrance; but on the whole it was thought better to leave the family to themselves, Dr. Woodford only writing to Major Oakshott, as well as to the youth himself.

The result was anxiously watched for, and in another week, earlier in the day than Mrs. Woodford was able to leave her room, Sir Peregrine's horses stopped at the door, and as Anne ascertained by a peep from the window, he was only accompanied by his servants.

"Yes," he said to the Doctor in his vexation, "one would really think that by force of eating Southdown mutton my poor brother had acquired the brains of one of his own rams! I declare 'tis a piteous sight to see a man resolute on ruining his son and breaking his own heart all for conscience sake!"

"Say you so, sir! I had hoped that the sight of what you have made of your nephew might have had some effect."

"All the effect it has produced is to make him more determined to take him from me. The Hampshire mind abhors foreign breeding, and the old Cromwellian spirit thinks good manners sprung from the world, and wit from the Evil One!"

"I can quite believe that Peregrine's courtly airs are not welcomed here; I could see what our good neighbour, Sir Philip Archfield, thought of them; but whereas no power on earth could make the young gentleman a steady-going clownish youth after his father's heart, methought he might prefer his present polish to impishness."

"So I told him, but I might as well have talked to the horse block. It is his duty, quotha, to breed his heir up in godly simplicity!"

"Simplicity is all very well to begin with, but once flown, it cannot be restored."

"And that is what my brother cannot see. Well, my poor boy must be left to his fate. There is no help for it, and all I can hope is that you, sir, and the ladies, will stand his friend, and do what may lie in your power to make him patient and render his life less intolerable."

"Indeed, sir, we will do what we can; I wish that I could hope that it would be of much service."

"My brother has more respect for your advice than perhaps you suppose; and to you, madam, the poor lad looks with earnest gratitude. Nay, even his mother reaps the benefit of the respect with which you have inspired him. Peregrine treats her with a gentleness and attention such as she never knew before from her bear cubs. Poor soul! I think she likes it, though it somewhat perplexes her, and she thinks it all French manners. There is one more favour, your reverence, which I scarce dare lay before you. You have seen my black boy Hans?"

"He was with you at Oakwood seven years ago."

"Even so. I bought the poor fellow when a mere child from a Dutch skipper who had used him scurvily, and he has grown up as faithful as a very spaniel, and mightily useful too, not only as body servant, but he can cook as well as any French *maître d'hôtel*, froth chocolate, and make the best coffee I ever tasted; is as honest as the day, and, I believe, would lay down his life for Peregrine or me. I shall be cruelly at a loss without him, but a physician I met in London tells me it would be no better than murder to take the poor rogue to so cold a country as Muscovy. I would leave him to wait on Perry, but they will not hear of it at Oakwood. My sister-in-law wellnigh had a fit every time she looked at him when I was there before, and I found, moreover, that even when I was at hand, the servants jeered at the poor blackamoor, gave him his meals apart, and only the refuse of their own, so that he would fare but ill if I left him to their mercy. I had thought of offering him to Mr. Evelyn of Says Court, who would no doubt use him well, but it was Peregrine who suggested that if you of your goodness would receive the poor fellow, they could sometimes meet, and that would cheer his heart, and he really is far from a useless knave, but is worth two of any serving-men I ever saw."

To take an additional man-servant was by no means such a great proposal as it would be in most houses at present. Men swarmed in much larger proportion than maids in all families of condition, and the Doctor was wealthy enough for one—more or less—to make little difference, but the question was asked as to what wages Hans should receive.

The knight laughed. "Wages, poor lad, what should he do with them? He is but a slave, I tell you. Meat, clothes, and fire, that is all he needs, and I will so deal with him that he will serve you in all faithfulness and obedience. He can speak English enough to know what you bid him do, but not enough for chatter with the servants."

So the agreement was made, and poor Hans was to be sent down by the Portsmouth coach together with Peregrine's luggage.

CHAPTER X
The Menagerie

"The head remains unchanged within,
  Nor altered much the face,
It still retains its native grin,
  And all its old grimace.

"Men with contempt the brute surveyed,
  Nor would a name bestow,
But women liked the motley beast,
  And called the thing a beau."

The Monkies, MERRICK.

The Woodford family did not long remain at Winchester. Anne declared the cold to be harming her mother, and became very anxious to bring her to the milder sea breezes of Portchester, and though Mrs. Woodford had little expectation that any place would make much difference to her, she was willing to return to the quiet and repose of her home under the castle walls beside the tranquil sea.

Thus they travelled back, as soon as the Doctor's Residence was ended, plodding through the heavy chalk roads as well as the big horses could drag the cumbrous coach up and down the hills, only halting for much needed rest at Sir Philip Archfield's red house, round three sides of a quadrangle, the fourth with a low wall backed by a row of poplar trees, looking out on the alternate mud and sluggish waters of Fareham creek, but with a beautiful garden behind the house.

The welcome was hearty. Lady Archfield at once conducted Mrs. Woodford to her own bedroom, where she was to rest and be served apart, and Anne disrobed her of her wraps, covered her upon the bed, and at her hostess's desire was explaining what refreshment would best suit her, when there was a shrill voice at the door: "I want Mistress Anne! I want to show her my clothes and jewels."

"Coming, child, she is coming when she has attended to her mother," responded the lady. "White wine, or red, did you say, Anne, and a little ginger?"

"Is she never coming?" was again the call; and Lady Archfield muttering, "Was there ever such an impatient poppet?" released Anne, who was instantly pounced upon by young Mrs. Archfield. Linking her arm into that of her visitor, and thrusting Lucy into the background, the little heiress proceeded to her own wainscotted bedroom, bare according to modern views, but very luxurious according to those of the seventeenth century, and with the toilette apparatus, scanty indeed, but of solid silver, and with a lavish amount of perfumery. Her 'own woman' was in waiting to display and refold the whole wedding wardrobe, brocade, satin, taffetas, cambric, Valenciennes, and point d'Alençon. Anne had to admire each in detail, and then to give full meed to the whole casket of jewels, numerous and dazzling as befitted a constellation of heirlooms upon one small head. They were beautiful, but it was wearisome to repeat 'Vastly pretty!' 'How exquisite!' 'That becomes you very well,' almost mechanically, when Lucy was standing about all the time, longing to exchange the girlish confidences that were burning to come forth. 'Young Madam,' as every one called her in those times when Christian names were at a discount, seemed to be jealous of attention to any one else, and the instant she saw the guest attempt to converse with her sister-in-law peremptorily interrupted, almost as if affronted.

Perhaps if Anne had enjoyed freedom of speech with Lucy she would not have learnt as much as did her mother, for the young are often more scrupulous as to confidences than their seniors, who view them as still children, and freely discuss their affairs among themselves.

So Lady Archfield poured out her troubles: how her daughter-in-law refused employment, and disdained instruction in needlework, housewifery, or any domestic art, how she jangled the spinnet, but would not learn music, and was unoccupied, fretful, and exacting, a burthen to herself and every one else, and treating Lucy as the slave of her whims and humours. As to such discipline as mothers-in-law were wont to exercise upon young wives, the least restraint or contradiction provoked such a tempest of passion as to shake the tiny, delicate frame to a degree that alarmed the good old matron for the consequences. Her health was a continual difficulty, for her constitution was very frail, every imprudence cost her suffering, and yet any check to her impulses as to food, exertion, or encountering weather was met by a spoilt child's resentment. Moreover, her young husband, and even his father, always thought the ladies were hard upon her, and would not have her vexed; and as their presence always brightened and restrained her, they never understood the full amount of her petulance and waywardness, and when they found her out of spirits, or out of temper, they charged all on her ailments or on want of consideration from her mother and sister-in-law.

Poor Lady Archfield, it was trying for her that her husband should be nearly as blind as his son. The young husband was wonderfully tender, indulgent, and patient with the little creature, but it would not be easy to say whether the affection were not a good deal like that for his dog or his horse, as something absolutely his own, with which no one else had a right to interfere. It was a relief to the family that she always wanted to be out of doors with him whenever the weather permitted, nay, often when it was far from suitable to so fragile a being; but if she came home aching and crying ever so much with chill or fatigue, even if she had to keep her bed afterwards, she was equally determined to rush out as soon as she was up again, and as angry as ever at remonstrance.

Charles was gone to try a horse; and as the remains of the effects of her last imprudence had prevented her accompanying him, the arrival of the guests had been a welcome diversion to the monotony of the morning.

He was, however, at home again by the time the dinner-bell summoned the younger ladies from the inspection of the trinkets and the gentlemen from the live stock, all to sit round the heavy oaken table draped with the whitest of napery, spun by Lady Archfield in her maiden days, and loaded with substantial joints, succeeded by delicacies manufactured by herself and Lucy.

As to the horse, Charles was fairly satisfied, but 'that fellow, young Oakshott, had been after him, and had the refusal.'

"Don't you be outbid, Mr. Archfield," exclaimed the wife. "What is the matter of a few guineas to us?"

"Little fear," replied Charles. "The old Major is scarcely like to pay down twenty gold caroluses, but if he should, the bay is his."

"Oh, but why not offer thirty?" she cried.

Charles laughed. "That would be a scurvy trick, sweetheart, and if Peregrine be a crooked stick, we need not be crooked too."

"I was about to ask," said the Doctor, "whether you had heard aught of that same young gentleman."

"I have seen him where I never desire to see him again," said Sir Philip, "riding as though he would be the death of the poor hounds."

"Nick Huntsman swears that he bewitches them," said Charles, "for they always lose the scent when he is in the field, but I believe 'tis the wry looks of him that throw them all out."

"And I say," cried the inconsistent bride, "that 'tis all jealousy that puts the gentlemen beside themselves, because none of them can dance, nor make a bow, nor hand a cup of chocolate, nor open a gate on horseback like him."

"What does a man on horseback want with opening gates?" exclaimed Charles.

"That's your manners, sir," said young Madam with a laugh. "What's the poor lady to do while her cavalier flies over and leaves her in the lurch?"

Her husband did not like the general laugh, and muttered, "You know what I mean well enough."

"Yes, so do I! To fumble at the fastening till your poor beast can bear it no longer and swerves aside, and I sit waiting a good half hour before you bring down your pride enough to alight and open it."

"All because you *would* send Will home for your mask."

"You would like to have had my poor little face one blister with the glare of sun and sea."

"Blisters don't come at this time of the year."

"No, nor to those who have no complexion to lose," she cried, with a triumphant look at the two maidens, who certainly had not the lilies nor the roses that she believed herself to have, though, in truth, her imprudences had left her paler and less pretty than at Winchester.

If this were the style of the matrimonial conversations, Anne again grieved for her old playfellow, and she perceived that Lucy looked uncomfortable; but there was no getting a moment's private conversation with her before the coach was brought round again for the completion of the journey. All that neighbourhood had a very bad reputation as the haunt of lawless characters, prone to violence; and though among mere smugglers there was little danger of an attack on persons well known like the Woodford family, they were often joined by far more desperate men from the seaport, so that it was never desirable to be out of doors after dark.

The journey proved to have been too much for Mrs. Woodford's strength, and for some days she was so ill that Anne never left the house; but she rallied again, and on coming downstairs became very anxious that her daughter should not be more confined by attendance than was wholesome, and insisted on every opportunity of change or amusement being taken.

One day as Anne was in the garden she was surprised by Peregrine dashing up on horseback.

"You would not take the Queen's rosary before," he said. "You must now, to save it. My father has smelt it out. He says it is teraphim! Micah—Rachel, what not, are quoted against it. He would have smashed it into fragments, but that Martha Browning said it would be a pretty bracelet. I'd sooner see it smashed than on her red fist. To think of her giving in to such vanities! But he said she might have it, only to be new strung. When he was gone she said, 'I don't really want the thing, but it was hard you should lose the Queen's keepsake. Can you bestow it safely?' I said I could, and brought it hither. Keep it, Anne, I pray."

Anne hesitated, and referred it to her mother upstairs.

"Tell him," she said, "that we will keep it in trust for him as a royal gift."

Peregrine was disappointed, but had to be content.

A Dutch vessel from the East Indies had brought home sundry strange animals, which were exhibited at the Jolly Mariner at Portsmouth, and thus announced on a bill printed on execrable paper, brought out to Portchester by some of the market people:—

"An Ellefante twice the Bignesse of an Ocks, the Trunke or Probosces whereof can pick up a Needle or roote up an Ellum Tree. Also the Royale Tyger, the same as has slaine and devoured seven yonge Gentoo babes, three men, and two women at the township at Chuttergong, nie to Bombay, in the Eastern Indies. Also the sacred Ape, worshipped by the heathen of the Indies, the Dancing Serpent which weareth Spectacles, and whose Bite is instantly mortal, with other rare Fish, Fowle, Idols and the like. All to be seene at the Charge of one Groat per head."

Mrs. Woodford declared herself to be extremely desirous that her daughter should see and bring home an account of all these marvels, and though Anne had no great inclination to face the tiger with the formidable appetite, she could not refuse to accompany her uncle.

The Jolly Mariner stood in one of the foulest and narrowest of the streets of the unsavoury seaport, and Dr. Woodford sighed, and fumed, and wished for a good pipe of tobacco more than

once as he hesitated to try to force a way for his niece through the throng round the entrance to the stable-yard of the Jolly Mariner, apparently too rough to pay respect to gown and cassock. Anne clung to his arm, ready to give up the struggle, but a voice said, "Allow me, sir. Mistress Anne, deign to take my arm."

It was Peregrine Oakshott with his brother Robert, and she could hardly tell how in a few seconds she had been squeezed through the crowd, and stood in the inn-yard, in a comparatively free space, for a groat was a prohibitory charge to the vulgar.

"Peregrine! Master Oakshott!" They heard an exclamation of pleasure, at which Peregrine shrugged his shoulders and looked expressively at Anne, before turning to receive the salutations of an elderly gentleman and a tall young woman, very plainly but handsomely clad in mourning deeper than his own. She was of a tall, gaunt, angular figure, and a face that never could have been handsome, and now bore evident traces of smallpox in redness and pits.

Dr. Woodford knew the guardian Mr. Browning, and his ward Mistress Martha and Mistress Anne Jacobina were presented to one another. The former gave a good-humoured smile, as if perfectly unconscious of her own want of beauty, and declared she had hoped to meet all the rest here, especially Mistress Anne Woodford, of whom she had heard so much. There was just a little patronage about the tone which repelled the proud spirit that was in Anne, and in spite of the ordinary dread and repulsion she felt for Peregrine, she was naughty enough to have the feeling of a successful beauty when Peregrine most manifestly turned away from the heiress in her silk and velvet to do the honours of the exhibition to the parson's niece.

The elephant was fastened by the leg to a post, which perhaps he could have pulled up, had he thought it worth his while, but he was well contented to wave his trunk about and extend its clever finger to receive contributions of cakes and apples, and he was too well amused to resort to any strong measures. The tiger, to Anne's relief, proved to be only a stuffed specimen. Peregrine, who had seen a good many foreign animals in Holland, where the Dutch captains were in the habit of bringing curiosities home for the delectation of their families in their *Lusthausen*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.