

GEORGE MEREDITH

THE ORDEAL OF
RICHARD FEVEREL.
COMPLETE

George Meredith

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Feverel. Complete**

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The Ordeal of Richard Feverel – Complete

CHAPTER I

Some years ago a book was published under the title of “The Pilgrim’s Scrip.” It consisted of a selection of original aphorisms by an anonymous gentleman, who in this bashful manner gave a bruised heart to the world.

He made no pretension to novelty. “Our new thoughts have thrilled dead bosoms,” he wrote; by which avowal it may be seen that youth had manifestly gone from him, since he had ceased to be jealous of the ancients. There was a half-sigh floating through his pages for those days of intellectual coxcombry, when ideas come to us affecting the embraces of virgins, and swear to us they are ours alone, and no one else have they ever visited: and we believe them.

For an example of his ideas of the sex he said:

“I expect that Woman will be the last thing civilized by Man.”

Some excitement was produced in the bosoms of ladies by so monstrous a scorn of them.

One adventurous person betook herself to the Heralds’ College, and there ascertained that a Griffin between two Wheatsheaves, which stood on the title-page of the book, formed the crest of Sir Austin Absworthy Bearne Feverel, Baronet, of Raynham Abbey, in a certain Western county folding Thames: a man of wealth and honour, and a somewhat lamentable history.

The outline of the baronet’s story was by no means new. He had a wife, and he had a friend. His marriage was for love; his wife was a beauty; his friend was a sort of poet. His wife had his whole heart, and his friend all his confidence. When he selected Denzil Somers from among his college chums, it was not on account of any similarity of disposition between them, but from his intense worship of genius, which made him overlook the absence of principle in his associate for the sake of such brilliant promise. Denzil had a small patrimony to lead off with, and that he dissipated before he left college; thenceforth he was dependent upon his admirer, with whom he lived, filling a nominal post of bailiff to the estates, and launching forth verse of some satiric and sentimental quality; for being inclined to vice, and occasionally, and in a quiet way, practising it, he was of course a sentimentalist and a satirist, entitled to lash the Age and complain of human nature. His earlier poems, published under the pseudonym of Diaper Sandoe, were so pure and bloodless in their love passages, and at the same time so biting in their moral tone, that his reputation was great among the virtuous, who form the larger portion of the English book-buying public. Election-seasons called him to ballad-poetry on behalf of the Tory party. Dialer possessed undoubted fluency, but did tittle, though Sir Austin was ever expecting much of him.

A languishing, inexperienced woman, whose husband in mental and in moral stature is more than the ordinary height above her, and who, now that her first romantic admiration of his lofty bearing has worn off, and her fretful little refinements of taste and sentiment are not instinctively responded to, is thrown into no wholesome household collision with a fluent man, fluent in prose and rhyme. Lady Feverel, when she first entered on her duties at Raynham, was jealous of her husband’s friend. By degrees she tolerated him. In time he touched his guitar in her chamber, and they played Rizzio and Mary together.

“For I am not the first who found
The name of Mary fatal!”

says a subsequent sentimental alliterative love-poem of Diaper’s.

Such was the outline of the story. But the baronet could fill it up. He had opened his soul to these two. He had been noble Love to the one, and to the other perfect Friendship. He had bid them be brother and sister whom he loved, and live a Golden Age with him at Raynham. In fact, he had been prodigal of the excellences of his nature, which it is not good to be, and, like Timon, he became bankrupt, and fell upon bitterness.

The faithless lady was of no particular family; an orphan daughter of an admiral who educated her on his half-pay, and her conduct struck but at the man whose name she bore.

After five years of marriage, and twelve of friendship, Sir Austin was left to his loneliness with nothing to ease his heart of love upon save a little baby boy in a cradle. He forgave the man: he put him aside as poor for his wrath. The woman he could not forgive; she had sinned every way. Simple ingratitude to a benefactor was a pardonable transgression, for he was not one to recount and crush the culprit under the heap of his good deeds. But her he had raised to be his equal, and he judged her as his equal. She had blackened the world's fair aspect for him.

In the presence of that world, so different to him now, he preserved his wonted demeanor, and made his features a flexible mask. Mrs. Doria Forey, his widowed sister, said that Austin might have retired from his Parliamentary career for a time, and given up gaieties and that kind of thing; her opinion, founded on observation of him in public and private, was, that the light thing who had taken flight was but a feather on her brother's Feverel-heart, and his ordinary course of life would be resumed. There are times when common men cannot bear the weight of just so much. Hippias Feverel, one of his brothers, thought him immensely improved by his misfortune, if the loss of such a person could be so designated; and seeing that Hippias received in consequence free quarters at Raynham, and possession of the wing of the Abbey she had inhabited, it is profitable to know his thoughts. If the baronet had given two or three blazing dinners in the great hall he would have deceived people generally, as he did his relatives and intimates. He was too sick for that: fit only for passive acting.

The nursemaid waking in the night beheld a solitary figure darkening a lamp above her little sleeping charge, and became so used to the sight as never to wake with a start. One night she was strangely aroused by a sound of sobbing. The baronet stood beside the cot in his long black cloak and travelling cap. His fingers shaded a lamp, and reddened against the fitful darkness that ever and anon went leaping up the wall. She could hardly believe her senses to see the austere gentleman, dead silent, dropping tear upon tear before her eyes. She lay stone-still in a trance of terror and mournfulness, mechanically counting the tears as they fell, one by one. The hidden face, the fall and flash of those heavy drops in the light of the lamp he held, the upright, awful figure, agitated at regular intervals like a piece of clockwork by the low murderous catch of his breath: it was so piteous to her poor human nature that her heart began wildly palpitating. Involuntarily the poor girl cried out to him, "Oh, sir!" and fell a-weeping. Sir Austin turned the lamp on her pillow, and harshly bade her go to sleep, striding from the room forthwith. He dismissed her with a purse the next day.

Once, when he was seven years old, the little fellow woke up at night to see a lady bending over him. He talked of this the next day, but it was treated as a dream; until in the course of the day his uncle Algernon was driven home from Lobourne cricket-ground with a broken leg. Then it was recollected that there was a family ghost; and, though no member of the family believed in the ghost, none would have given up a circumstance that testified to its existence; for to possess a ghost is a distinction above titles.

Algernon Feverel lost his leg, and ceased to be a gentleman in the Guards. Of the other uncles of young Richard, Cuthbert, the sailor, perished in a spirited boat expedition against a slaving negro chief up the Niger. Some of the gallant lieutenant's trophies of war decorated the little boy's play-shed at Raynham, and he bequeathed his sword to Richard, whose hero he was. The diplomatist and beau, Vivian, ended his flutterings from flower to flower by making an improper marriage, as is the fate of many a beau, and was struck out of the list of visitors. Algernon generally occupied the baronet's disused town-house, a wretched being, dividing his time between horse and card exercise: possessed,

it was said, of the absurd notion that a man who has lost his balance by losing his leg may regain it by sticking to the bottle. At least, whenever he and his brother Hippias got together, they never failed to try whether one leg, or two, stood the bottle best. Much of a puritan as Sir Austin was in his habits, he was too good a host, and too thorough a gentleman, to impose them upon his guests. The brothers, and other relatives, might do as they would while they did not disgrace the name, and then it was final: they must depart to behold his countenance no more.

Algernon Feverel was a simple man, who felt, subsequent to his misfortune, as he had perhaps dimly fancied it before, that his career lay in his legs, and was now irrevocably cut short. He taught the boy boxing, and shooting, and the arts of fence, and superintended the direction of his animal vigour with a melancholy vivacity. The remaining energies of Algernon's mind were devoted to animadversions on swift bowling. He preached it over the county, struggling through laborious literary compositions, addressed to sporting newspapers, on the Decline of Cricket. It was Algernon who witnessed and chronicled young Richard's first fight, which was with young Tom Blaize of Belthorpe Farm, three years the boy's senior.

Hippias Feverel was once thought to be the genius of the family. It was his ill luck to have strong appetites and a weak stomach; and, as one is not altogether fit for the battle of life who is engaged in a perpetual contention with his dinner, Hippias forsook his prospects at the Bar, and, in the embraces of dyspepsia, compiled his ponderous work on the Fairy Mythology of Europe. He had little to do with the Hope of Raynham beyond what he endured from his juvenile tricks.

A venerable lady, known as Great-Aunt Grantley, who had money to bequeath to the heir, occupied with Hippias the background of the house and shared her candles with him. These two were seldom seen till the dinner hour, for which they were all day preparing, and probably all night remembering, for the Eighteenth Century was an admirable trencherman, and cast age aside while there was a dish on the table.

Mrs. Doris Foray was the eldest of the three sisters of the baronet, a florid affable woman, with fine teeth, exceedingly fine light wavy hair, a Norman nose, and a reputation for understanding men; and that, with these practical creatures, always means the art of managing them. She had married an expectant younger son of a good family, who deceased before the fulfilment of his prospects; and, casting about in her mind the future chances of her little daughter and sole child, Clare, she marked down a probability. The far sight, the deep determination, the resolute perseverance of her sex, where a daughter is to be provided for and a man to be overthrown, instigated her to invite herself to Raynham, where, with that daughter, she fixed herself.

The other two Feverel ladies were the wife of Colonel Wentworth and the widow of Mr. Justice Harley: and the only thing remarkable about them was that they were mothers of sons of some distinction.

Austin Wentworth's story was of that wretched character which to be comprehended, that justice should be dealt him, must be told out and openly; which no one dares now do.

For a fault in early youth, redeemed by him nobly, according to his light, he was condemned to undergo the world's harsh judgment: not for the fault—for its atonement.

“—Married his mother's housemaid,” whispered Mrs. Doria, with a ghastly look, and a shudder at young men of republican sentiments, which he was reputed to entertain. “‘The compensation for Injustice,’ says the ‘Pilgrim's Scrip,’ is, that in that dark Ordeal we gather the worthiest around us.”

And the baronet's fair friend, Lady Blandish, and some few true men and women, held Austin Wentworth high.

He did not live with his wife; and Sir Austin, whose mind was bent on the future of our species, reproached him with being barren to posterity, while knaves were propagating.

The principal characteristic of the second nephew, Adrian Harley, was his sagacity. He was essentially the wise youth, both in counsel and in action.

“In action,” the “Pilgrim's Scrip” observes, “Wisdom goes by majorities.”

Adrian had an instinct for the majority, and, as the world invariably found him enlisted in its ranks, his appellation of wise youth was acquiesced in without irony.

The wise youth, then, had the world with him, but no friends. Nor did he wish for those troublesome appendages of success. He caused himself to be required by people who could serve him; feared by such as could injure. Not that he went out of the way to secure his end, or risked the expense of a plot. He did the work as easily as he ate his daily bread. Adrian was an epicurean; one whom Epicurus would have scourged out of his garden, certainly: an epicurean of our modern notions. To satisfy his appetites without rashly staking his character, was the wise youth's problem for life. He had no intimates except Gibbon and Horace, and the society of these fine aristocrats of literature helped him to accept humanity as it had been, and was; a supreme ironic procession, with laughter of Gods in the background. Why not laughter of mortals also? Adrian had his laugh in his comfortable corner. He possessed peculiar attributes of a heathen God. He was a disposer of men: he was polished, luxurious, and happy—at their cost. He lived in eminent self-content, as one lying on soft cloud, lapt in sunshine. Nor Jove, nor Apollo, cast eye upon the maids of earth with cooler fire of selection, or pursued them in the covert with more sacred impunity. And he enjoyed his reputation for virtue as something additional. Stolen fruits are said to be sweet; undeserved rewards are exquisite.

The best of it was, that Adrian made no pretences. He did not solicit the favourable judgment of the world. Nature and he attempted no other concealment than the ordinary mask men wear. And yet the world would proclaim him moral, as well as wise, and the pleasing converse every way of his disgraced cousin Austin.

In a word, Adrian Harley had mastered his philosophy at the early age of one-and-twenty. Many would be glad to say the same at that age twice-told: they carry in their breasts a burden with which Adrian's was not loaded. Mrs. Doria was nearly right about his heart. A singular mishap (at his birth, possibly, or before it) had unseated that organ, and shaken it down to his stomach, where it was a much lighter, nay, an inspiring weight, and encouraged him merrily onward. Throned there it looked on little that did not arrive to gratify it. Already that region was a trifle prominent in the person of the wise youth, and carried, as it were, the flag of his philosophical tenets in front of him. He was charming after dinner, with men or with women: delightfully sarcastic: perhaps a little too unscrupulous in his moral tone, but that his moral reputation belied him, and it must be set down to generosity of disposition.

Such was Adrian Harley, another of Sir Austin's intellectual favourites, chosen from mankind to superintend the education of his son at Raynham. Adrian had been destined for the Church. He did not enter into Orders. He and the baronet had a conference together one day, and from that time Adrian became a fixture in the Abbey. His father died in his promising son's college term, bequeathing him nothing but his legal complexion, and Adrian became stipendiary officer in his uncle's household.

A playfellow of Richard's occasionally, and the only comrade of his age that he ever saw, was Master Ripton Thompson, the son of Sir Austin's solicitor, a boy without a character.

A comrade of some description was necessary, for Richard was neither to go to school nor to college. Sir Austin considered that the schools were corrupt, and maintained that young lads might by parental vigilance be kept pretty secure from the Serpent until Eve sided with him: a period that might be deferred, he said. He had a system of education for his son. How it worked we shall see.

CHAPTER II

October, shone royally on Richard's fourteenth birthday. The brown beechwoods and golden birches glowed to a brilliant sun. Banks of moveless cloud hung about the horizon, mounded to the west, where slept the wind. Promise of a great day for Raynham, as it proved to be, though not in the manner marked out.

Already archery-booths and cricketing-tents were rising on the lower grounds towards the river, whither the lads of Bursley and Lobourne, in boats and in carts, shouting for a day of ale and honour, jogged merrily to match themselves anew, and pluck at the lining laurel from each other's brows, line manly Britons. The whole park was beginning to be astir and resound with holiday cries. Sir Austin Feverel, a thorough good Tory, was no game-preserve, and could be popular whenever he chose, which Sir Males Papworth, on the other side of the river, a fast-handed Whig and terror to poachers, never could be. Half the village of Lobourne was seen trooping through the avenues of the park. Fiddlers and gipsies clamoured at the gates for admission: white smocks, and slate, surmounted by hats of serious brim, and now and then a scarlet cloak, smacking of the old country, dotted the grassy sweeps to the levels.

And all the time the star of these festivities was receding further and further, and eclipsing himself with his reluctant serf Ripton, who kept asking what they were to do and where they were going, and how late it was in the day, and suggesting that the lads of Lobourne would be calling out for them, and Sir Austin requiring their presence, without getting any attention paid to his misery or remonstrances. For Richard had been requested by his father to submit to medical examination like a boor enlisting for a soldier, and he was in great wrath.

He was flying as though he would have flown from the shameful thought of what had been asked of him. By-and-by he communicated his sentiments to Ripton, who said they were those of a girl: an offensive remark, remembering which, Richard, after they had borrowed a couple of guns at the bailiff's farm, and Ripton had fired badly, called his friend a fool.

Feeling that circumstances were making him look wonderfully like one, Ripton lifted his head and retorted defiantly, "I'm not!"

This angry contradiction, so very uncalled for, annoyed Richard, who was still smarting at the loss of the birds, owing to Ripton's bad shot, and was really the injured party. He, therefore bestowed the abusive epithet on Ripton anew, and with increase of emphasis.

"You shan't call me so, then, whether I am or not," says Ripton, and sucks his lips.

This was becoming personal. Richard sent up his brows, and stared at his defier an instant. He then informed him that he certainly should call him so, and would not object to call him so twenty times.

"Do it, and see!" returns Ripton, rocking on his feet, and breathing quick.

With a gravity of which only boys and other barbarians are capable, Richard went through the entire number, stressing the epithet to increase the defiance and avoid monotony, as he progressed, while Ripton bobbed his head every time in assent, as it were, to his comrade's accuracy, and as a record for his profound humiliation. The dog they had with them gazed at the extraordinary performance with interrogating wags of the tail.

Twenty times, duly and deliberately, Richard repeated the obnoxious word.

At the twentieth solemn iteration of Ripton's capital shortcoming, Ripton delivered a smart back-hander on Richard's mouth, and squared precipitately; perhaps sorry when the deed was done, for he was a kind-hearted lad, and as Richard simply bowed in acknowledgment of the blow he thought he had gone too far. He did not know the young gentleman he was dealing with. Richard was extremely cool.

"Shall we fight here?" he said.

“Anywhere you like,” replied Ripton.

“A little more into the wood, I think. We may be interrupted.” And Richard led the way with a courteous reserve that somewhat chilled Ripton’s ardour for the contest. On the skirts of the wood, Richard threw off his jacket and waistcoat, and, quite collected, waited for Ripton to do the same. The latter boy was flushed and restless; older and broader, but not so tight-limbed and well-set. The Gods, sole witnesses of their battle, betted dead against him. Richard had mounted the white cockade of the Feverels, and there was a look in him that asked for tough work to extinguish. His brows, slightly lined upward at the temples, converging to a knot about the well-set straight nose; his full grey eyes, open nostrils, and planted feet, and a gentlemanly air of calm and alertness, formed a spirited picture of a young combatant. As for Ripton, he was all abroad, and fought in school-boy style—that is, he rushed at the foe head foremost, and struck like a windmill. He was a lumpy boy. When he did hit, he made himself felt; but he was at the mercy of science. To see him come dashing in, blinking and puffing and whirling his arms abroad while the felling blow went straight between them, you perceived that he was fighting a fight of desperation, and knew it. For the dreaded alternative glared him in the face that, if he yielded, he must look like what he had been twenty times calumniously called; and he would die rather than yield, and swing his windmill till he dropped. Poor boy! he dropped frequently. The gallant fellow fought for appearances, and down he went. The Gods favour one of two parties. Prince Turnus was a noble youth; but he had not Pallas at his elbow. Ripton was a capital boy; he had no science. He could not prove he was not a fool! When one comes to think of it, Ripton did choose the only possible way, and we should all of us have considerable difficulty in proving the negative by any other. Ripton came on the unerring fist again and again; and if it was true, as he said in short colloquial gasps, that he required as much beating as an egg to be beaten thoroughly, a fortunate interruption alone saved our friend from resembling that substance. The boys heard summoning voices, and beheld Mr. Morton of Poer Hall and Austin Wentworth stepping towards them.

A truce was sounded, jackets were caught up, guns shouldered, and off they trotted in concert through the depths of the wood, not stopping till that and half-a-dozen fields and a larch plantation were well behind them.

When they halted to take breath, there was a mutual study of faces. Ripton’s was much discoloured, and looked fiercer with its natural war-paint than the boy felt. Nevertheless, he squared up dauntlessly on the new ground, and Richard, whose wrath was appeased, could not refrain from asking him whether he had not really had enough.

“Never!” shouts the noble enemy.

“Well, look here,” said Richard, appealing to common sense, “I’m tired of knocking you down. I’ll say you’re not a fool, if you’ll give me your hand.”

Ripton demurred an instant to consult with honour, who bade him catch at his chance.

He held out his hand. “There!” and the boys grasped hands and were fast friends. Ripton had gained his point, and Richard decidedly had the best of it. So, they were on equal ground. Both, could claim a victory, which was all the better for their friendship.

Ripton washed his face and comforted his nose at a brook, and was now ready to follow his friend wherever he chose to lead. They continued to beat about for birds. The birds on the Raynham estates were found singularly cunning, and repeatedly eluded the aim of these prime shots, so they pushed their expedition into the lands of their neighbors, in search of a stupider race, happily oblivious of the laws and conditions of trespass; unconscious, too, that they were poaching on the demesne of the notorious Farmer Blaize, the free-trade farmer under the shield of the Papworths, no worshipper of the Griffin between two Wheatsheaves; destined to be much allied with Richard’s fortunes from beginning to end. Farmer Blaize hated poachers, and, especially young chaps poaching, who did it mostly from impudence. He heard the audacious shots popping right and left, and going forth to have a glimpse at the intruders, and observing their size, swore he would teach my gentlemen a thing, lords or no lords.

Richard had brought down a beautiful cock-pheasant, and was exulting over it, when the farmer's portentous figure burst upon them, cracking an avenging horsewhip. His salute was ironical.

"Havin' good sport, gentlemen, are ye?"

"Just bagged a splendid bird!" radiant Richard informed him.

"Oh!" Farmer Blaize gave an admonitory flick of the whip.

"Just let me clap eye on't, then."

"Say, please," interposed Ripton, who was not blind to doubtful aspects.

Farmer Blaize threw up his chin, and grinned grimly.

"Please to you, sir? Why, my chap, you looks as if ye didn't much mind what come t'yer nose, I reckon. You looks an old poacher, you do. Tall ye what 'tis!" He changed his banter to business, "That bird's mine! Now you jest hand him over, and sheer off, you dam young scoundrels! I know ye!" And he became exceedingly opprobrious, and uttered contempt of the name of Feverel.

Richard opened his eyes.

"If you wants to be horsewhipped, you'll stay where y'are!" continued the farmer. "Giles Blaize never stands nonsense!"

"Then we'll stay," quoth Richard.

"Good! so be't! If you will have't, have't, my men!"

As a preparatory measure, Farmer Blaize seized a wing of the bird, on which both boys flung themselves desperately, and secured it minus the pinion.

"That's your game," cried the farmer. "Here's a taste of horsewhip for ye. I never stands nonsense!" and sweetch went the mighty whip, well swayed. The boys tried to close with him. He kept his distance and lashed without mercy. Black blood was made by Farmer Blaize that day! The boys wriggled, in spite of themselves. It was like a relentless serpent coiling, and biting, and stinging their young veins to madness. Probably they felt the disgrace of the contortions they were made to go through more than the pain, but the pain was fierce, for the farmer laid about from a practised arm, and did not consider that he had done enough till he was well breathed and his ruddy jowl inflamed. He paused, to receive the remainder of the cock-pheasant in his face.

"Take your beastly bird," cried Richard.

"Money, my lads, and interest," roared the farmer, lashing out again.

Shameful as it was to retreat, there was but that course open to them. They decided to surrender the field.

"Look! you big brute," Richard shook his gun, hoarse with passion, "I'd have shot you, if I'd been loaded. Mind if I come across you when I'm loaded, you coward, I'll fire!" The un-English nature of this threat exasperated Farmer Blaize, and he pressed the pursuit in time to bestow a few farewell stripes as they were escaping tight-breeched into neutral territory. At the hedge they parleyed a minute, the farmer to inquire if they had had a mortal good tanning and were satisfied, for when they wanted a further instalment of the same they were to come for it to Belthorpe Farm, and there it was in pickle: the boys meantime exploding in menaces and threats of vengeance, on which the farmer contemptuously turned his back. Ripton had already stocked an armful of flints for the enjoyment of a little skirmishing. Richard, however, knocked them all out, saying, "No! Gentlemen don't fling stones; leave that to the blackguards."

"Just one shy at him!" pleaded Ripton, with his eye on Farmer Blaize's broad mark, and his whole mind drunken with a sudden revelation of the advantages of light troops in opposition to heavies.

"No," said Richard, imperatively, "no stones," and marched briskly away. Ripton followed with a sigh. His leader's magnanimity was wholly beyond him. A good spanking mark at the farmer would have relieved Master Ripton; it would have done nothing to console Richard Feverel for the ignominy he had been compelled to submit to. Ripton was familiar with the rod, a monster much despoiled of his terrors by intimacy. Birch-fever was past with this boy. The horrible sense of shame, self-

loathing, universal hatred, impotent vengeance, as if the spirit were steeped in abysmal blackness, which comes upon a courageous and sensitive youth condemned for the first time to taste this piece of fleshly bitterness, and suffer what he feels is a defilement, Ripton had weathered and forgotten. He was seasoned wood, and took the world pretty wisely; not reckless of castigation, as some boys become, nor oversensitive as to dishonour, as his friend and comrade beside him was.

Richard's blood was poisoned. He had the fever on him severely. He would not allow stone-throwing, because it was a habit of his to discountenance it. Mere gentlemanly considerations had scarce shielded Farmer Blaize, and certain very ungentlemanly schemes were coming to ghastly heads in the tumult of his brain; rejected solely from their glaring impracticability even to his young intelligence. A sweeping and consummate vengeance for the indignity alone should satisfy him. Something tremendous must be done; and done without delay. At one moment he thought of killing all the farmer's cattle; next of killing him; challenging him to single combat with the arms, and according to the fashion of gentlemen. But the farmer was a coward; he would refuse. Then he, Richard Feverel, would stand by the farmer's bedside, and rouse him; rouse him to fight with powder and ball in his own chamber, in the cowardly midnight, where he might tremble, but dare not refuse.

"Lord!" cried simple Ripton, while these hopeful plots were raging in his comrade's brain, now sparkling for immediate execution, and anon lapsing disdainfully dark in their chances of fulfilment, "how I wish you'd have let me notch him, Ricky! I'm a safe shot. I never miss. I should feel quite jolly if I'd spanked him once. We should have had the beat of him at that game. I say!" and a sharp thought drew Ripton's ideas nearer home, "I wonder whether my nose is as bad as he says! Where can I see myself?"

To these exclamations Richard was deaf, and he trudged steadily forward, facing but one object.

After tearing through innumerable hedges, leaping fences, jumping dykes, penetrating brambly copses, and getting dirty, ragged, and tired, Ripton awoke from his dream of Farmer Blaize and a blue nose to the vivid consciousness of hunger; and this grew with the rapidity of light upon him, till in the course of another minute he was enduring the extremes of famine, and ventured to question his leader whither he was being conducted. Raynham was out of sight. They were a long way down the valley, miles from Lobourne, in a country of sour pools, yellow brooks, rank pasturage, desolate heath. Solitary cows were seen; the smoke of a mud cottage; a cart piled with peat; a donkey grazing at leisure, oblivious of an unkind world; geese by a horse-pond, gabbling as in the first loneliness of creation; uncooked things that a famishing boy cannot possibly care for, and must despise. Ripton was in despair.

"Where are you going to?" he inquired with a voice of the last time of asking, and halted resolutely.

Richard now broke his silence to reply, "Anywhere."

"Anywhere!" Ripton took up the moody word. "But ain't you awfully hungry?" he gasped vehemently, in a way that showed the total emptiness of his stomach.

"No," was Richard's brief response.

"Not hungry!" Ripton's amazement lent him increased vehemence. "Why, you haven't had anything to eat since breakfast! Not hungry? I declare I'm starving. I feel such a gnawing I could eat dry bread and cheese!"

Richard sneered: not for reasons that would have actuated a similar demonstration of the philosopher.

"Come," cried Ripton, "at all events, tell us where you're going to stop."

Richard faced about to make a querulous retort. The injured and hapless visage that met his eye disarmed him. The lad's nose, though not exactly of the dreaded hue, was really becoming discoloured. To upbraid him would be cruel. Richard lifted his head, surveyed the position, and exclaiming "Here!" dropped down on a withered bank, leaving Ripton to contemplate him as a puzzle whose every new move was a worse perplexity.

CHAPTER III

Among boys there are laws of honour and chivalrous codes, not written or formally taught, but intuitively understood by all, and invariably acted upon by the loyal and the true. The race is not nearly civilized, we must remember. Thus, not to follow your leader whithersoever he may think proper to lead; to back out of an expedition because the end of it frowns dubious, and the present fruit of it is discomfort; to quit a comrade on the road, and return home without him: these are tricks which no boy of spirit would be guilty of, let him come to any description of mortal grief in consequence. Better so than have his own conscience denouncing him sneak. Some boys who behave boldly enough are not troubled by this conscience, and the eyes and the lips of their fellows have to supply the deficiency. They do it with just as haunting, and even more horrible pertinacity, than the inner voice, and the result, if the probation be not very severe and searching, is the same. The leader can rely on the faithfulness of his host: the comrade is sworn to serve. Master Ripton Thompson was naturally loyal. The idea of turning off and forsaking his friend never once crossed his mind, though his condition was desperate, and his friend's behaviour that of a Bedlamite. He announced several times impatiently that they would be too late for dinner. His friend did not budge. Dinner seemed nothing to him. There he lay plucking grass, and patting the old dog's nose, as if incapable of conceiving what a thing hunger was. Ripton took half-a-dozen turns up and down, and at last flung himself down beside the taciturn boy, accepting his fate.

Now, the chance that works for certain purposes sent a smart shower from the sinking sun, and the wet sent two strangers for shelter in the lane behind the hedge where the boys reclined. One was a travelling tinker, who lit a pipe and spread a tawny umbrella. The other was a burly young countryman, pipeless and tentless. They saluted with a nod, and began recounting for each other's benefit the daylong-doings of the weather, as it had affected their individual experience and followed their prophecies. Both had anticipated and foretold a bit of rain before night, and therefore both welcomed the wet with satisfaction. A monotonous betweenwhiles kind of talk they kept droning, in harmony with the still hum of the air. From the weather theme they fell upon the blessings of tobacco; how it was the poor man's friend, his company, his consolation, his comfort, his refuge at night, his first thought in the morning.

"Better than a wife!" chuckled the tinker. "No curtain-lecturin' with a pipe. Your pipe an't a shrew."

"That be it!" the other chimed in. "Your pipe doan't mak' ye out wi' all the cash Saturday evenin'."

"Take one," said the tinker, in the enthusiasm of the moment, handing a grimy short clay. Speed-the-Plough filled from the tinker's pouch, and continued his praises.

"Penny a day, and there y'are, primed! Better than a wife? Ha, ha!"

"And you can get rid of it, if ye wants for to, and when ye wants," added tinker.

"So ye can!" Speed-the-Plough took him up. "And ye doan't want for to. Leastways, t'other case. I means pipe."

"And," continued tinker, comprehending him perfectly, "it don't bring repentance after it."

"Not nohow, master, it doan't! And"—Speed-the-Plough cocked his eye—"it doan't eat up half the victuals, your pipe doan't."

Here the honest yeoman gesticulated his keen sense of a clincher, which the tinker acknowledged; and having, so to speak, sealed up the subject by saying the best thing that could be said, the two smoked for some time in silence to the drip and patter of the shower.

Ripton solaced his wretchedness by watching them through the briar hedge. He saw the tinker stroking a white cat, and appealing to her, every now and then, as his missus, for an opinion or a confirmation; and he thought that a curious sight. Speed-the-Plough was stretched at full length, with

his boots in the rain, and his head amidst the tinker's pots, smoking, profoundly contemplative. The minutes seemed to be taken up alternately by the grey puffs from their mouths.

It was the tinker who renewed the colloquy. Said he, "Times is bad!"

His companion assented, "Sure-ly!"

"But it somehow comes round right," resumed the tinker. "Why, look here. Where's the good o' moping? I sees it all come round right and tight. Now I travels about. I've got my beat. 'Casion calls me t'other day to Newcastle!—Eh?"

"Coals!" ejaculated Speed-the-Plough sonorously.

"Coals!" echoed the tinker. "You ask what I goes there for, mayhap? Never you mind. One sees a mort o' life in my trade. Not for coals it isn't. And I don't carry 'em there, neither. Anyhow, I comes back. London's my mark. Says I, I'll see a bit o' the sea, and steps aboard a collier. We were as nigh wrecked as the prophet Paul."

"—A—who's him?" the other wished to know.

"Read your Bible," said the tinker. "We pitched and tossed—'tain't that game at sea 'tis on land, I can tell ye! I thinks, down we're a-going—say your prayers, Bob Tiles! That was a night, to be sure! But God's above the devil, and here I am, ye see." Speed-the-Plough lurched round on his elbow and regarded him indifferently. "D'ye call that doctrin'? He bean't al'ays, or I shoo'n't be scrapin' my heels wi' nothin' to do, and, what's warse, nothin' to eat. Why, look heer. Luck's luck, and bad luck's the con-trary. Varmer Bollop, t'other day, has's rick burnt down. Next night his gran'ry's burnt. What do he tak' and go and do? He takes and goes and hangs unsel', and turns us out of his employ. God warn't above the devil then, I thinks, or I can't make out the reckonin'."

The tinker cleared his throat, and said it was a bad case.

"And a darn'd bad case. I'll tak' my oath on't!" cried Speed-the-Plough. "Well, look heer! Heer's another darn'd bad case. I threshed for Varmer Blaize Blaize o' Beltharpe afore I goes to Varmer Bollop. Varmer Blaize misses pilkins. He swears our chaps steals pilkins. 'Twarn't me steals 'em. What do he tak' and go and do? He takes and tarns us off, me and another, neck and crop, to scuffle about and starve, for all he keers. God warn't above the devil then, I thinks. Not nohow, as I can see!"

The tinker shook his head, and said that was a bad case also.

"And you can't mend it," added Speed-the-Plough. "It's bad, and there it be. But I'll tell ye what, master. Bad wants payin' for." He nodded and winked mysteriously. "Bad has its wages as well's honest work, I'm thinkin'. Varmer Bollop I don't owe no grudge to: Varmer Blaize I do. And I shud like to stick a Lucifer in his rick some dry windy night." Speed-the-Plough screwed up an eye villainously. "He wants hittin' in the wind,—jest where the pocket is, master, do Varmer Blaize, and he'll cry out 'O Lor'! Varmer Blaize will. You won't get the better o' Varmer Blaize by no means, as I makes out, if ye doan't hit into him jest there."

The tinker sent a rapid succession of white clouds from his mouth, and said that would be taking the devil's side of a bad case. Speed-the-Plough observed energetically that, if Farmer Blaize was on the other, he should be on that side.

There was a young gentleman close by, who thought with him. The hope of Raynham had lent a careless half-compelled attention to the foregoing dialogue, wherein a common labourer and a travelling tinker had propounded and discussed one of the most ancient theories of transmundane dominion and influence on mundane affairs. He now started to his feet, and came tearing through the briar hedge, calling out for one of them to direct them the nearest road to Bursley. The tinker was kindling preparations for his tea, under the tawny umbrella. A loaf was set forth, oh which Ripton's eyes, stuck in the edge, fastened ravenously. Speed-the-Plough volunteered information that Bursley was a good three mile from where they stood, and a good eight mile from Lobourne.

"I'll give you half-a-crown for that loaf, my good fellow," said Richard to the tinker.

"It's a bargain;" quoth the tinker, "eh, missus?"

His cat replied by humping her back at the dog.

The half-crown was tossed down, and Ripton, who had just succeeded in freeing his limbs from the briar, prickly as a hedgehog, collared the loaf.

“Those young squires be sharp-set, and no mistake,” said the tinker to his companion. “Come! we’ll to Bursley after ‘em, and talk it out over a pot o’ beer.” Speed-the-Plough was nothing loath, and in a short time they were following the two lads on the road to Bursley, while a horizontal blaze shot across the autumn and from the Western edge of the rain-cloud.

CHAPTER IV

Search for the missing boys had been made everywhere over Raynham, and Sir Austin was in grievous discontent. None had seen them save Austin Wentworth and Mr. Morton. The baronet sat construing their account of the flight of the lads when they were hailed, and resolved it into an act of rebellion on the part of his son. At dinner he drank the young heir's health in ominous silence. Adrian Harley stood up in his place to propose the health. His speech was a fine piece of rhetoric. He warmed in it till, after the Ciceronic model, inanimate objects were personified, and Richard's table-napkin and vacant chair were invoked to follow the steps of a peerless father, and uphold with his dignity the honour of the Feverels. Austin Wentworth, whom a soldier's death compelled to take his father's place in support of the toast, was tame after such magniloquence. But the reply, the thanks which young Richard should have delivered in person were not forthcoming. Adrian's oratory had given but a momentary life to napkin and chair. The company of honoured friends, and aunts and uncles, remotest cousins, were glad to disperse and seek amusement in music and tea. Sir Austin did his utmost to be hospitable cheerful, and requested them to dance. If he had desired them to laugh he would have been obeyed, and in as hearty a manner.

"How triste!" said Mrs. Doria Forey to Lobourne's curate, as that most enamoured automaton went through his paces beside her with professional stiffness.

"One who does not suffer can hardly assent," the curate answered, basking in her beams.

"Ah, you are good!" exclaimed the lady. "Look at my Clare. She will not dance on her cousin's birthday with anyone but him. What are we to do to enliven these people?"

"Alas, madam! you cannot do for all what you do for one," the curate sighed, and wherever she wandered in discourse, drew her back with silken strings to gaze on his enamoured soul.

He was the only gratified stranger present. The others had designs on the young heir. Lady Attenbury of Longford House had brought her highly-polished specimen of market-ware, the Lady Juliana Jaye, for a first introduction to him, thinking he had arrived at an age to estimate and pine for her black eyes and pretty pert mouth. The Lady Juliana had to pair off with a dapper Papworth, and her mama was subjected to the gallantries of Sir Miles, who talked land and steam-engines to her till she was sick, and had to be impertinent in self-defence. Lady Blandish, the delightful widow, sat apart with Adrian, and enjoyed his sarcasms on the company. By ten at night the poor show ended, and the rooms were dark, dark as the prognostics multitudinously hinted by the disappointed and chilled guests concerning the probable future of the hope of Raynham. Little Clare kissed her mama, curtsied to the lingering curate, and went to bed like a very good girl. Immediately the maid had departed, little Clare deliberately exchanged night, attire for that of day. She was noted as an obedient child. Her light was allowed to burn in her room for half-an-hour, to counteract her fears of the dark. She took the light, and stole on tiptoe to Richard's room. No Richard was there. She peeped in further and further. A trifling agitation of the curtains shot her back through the door and along the passage to her own bedchamber with extreme expedition. She was not much alarmed, but feeling guilty she was on her guard. In a short time she was prowling about the passages again. Richard had slighted and offended the little lady, and was to be asked whether he did not repent such conduct toward his cousin; not to be asked whether he had forgotten to receive his birthday kiss from her; for, if he did not choose to remember that, Miss Clare would never remind him of it, and to-night should be his last chance of a reconciliation. Thus she meditated, sitting on a stair, and presently heard Richard's voice below in the hall, shouting for supper.

"Master Richard has returned," old Benson the butler tolled out intelligence to Sir Austin.

"Well?" said the baronet.

"He complains of being hungry," the butler hesitated, with a look of solemn disgust.

"Let him eat."

Heavy Benson hesitated still more as he announced that the boy had called for wine. It was an unprecedented thing. Sir Austin's brows were portending an arch, but Adrian suggested that he wanted possibly to drink his birthday, and claret was conceded.

The boys were in the vortex of a partridge-pie when Adrian strolled in to them. They had now changed characters. Richard was uproarious. He drank a health with every glass; his cheeks were flushed and his eyes brilliant. Ripton looked very much like a rogue on the tremble of detection, but his honest hunger and the partridge-pie shielded him awhile from Adrian's scrutinizing glance. Adrian saw there was matter for study, if it were only on Master Ripton's betraying nose, and sat down to hear and mark.

"Good sport, gentlemen, I trust to hear?" he began his quiet banter, and provoked a loud peal of laughter from Richard.

"Ha, ha! I say, Rip: 'Havin' good sport, gentlemen, are ye?' You remember the farmer! Your health, parson! We haven't had our sport yet. We're going to have some first-rate sport. Oh, well! we haven't much show of birds. We shot for pleasure, and returned them to the proprietors. You're fond of game, parson! Ripton is a dead shot in what Cousin Austin calls the Kingdom of 'would-have-done' and 'might-have-been.' Up went the birds, and cries Rip, 'I've forgotten to load!' Oh, ho!—Rip! some more claret.—Do just leave that nose of yours alone.—Your health, Ripton Thompson! The birds hadn't the decency to wait for him, and so, parson, it's their fault, and not Rip's, you haven't a dozen brace at your feet. What have you been doing at home, Cousin Rady?"

"Playing Hamlet, in the absence of the Prince of Denmark. The day without you, my dear boy, must be dull, you know."

"He speaks: can I trust what he says is sincere?"

There's an edge to his smile that cuts much like a sneer."

"Sandoe's poems! You know the couplet, Mr. Rady. Why shouldn't I quote Sandoe? You know you like him, Rady. But, if you've missed me, I'm sorry. Rip and I have had a beautiful day. We've made new acquaintances. We've seen the world. I'm the monkey that has seen the world, and I'm going to tell you all about it. First, there's a gentleman who takes a rifle for a fowling-piece. Next, there's a farmer who warns everybody, gentleman and beggar, off his premises. Next, there's a tinker and a ploughman, who think that God is always fighting with the devil which shall command the kingdoms of the earth. The tinker's for God, and the ploughman"—

"I'll drink your health, Ricky," said Adrian, interrupting.

"Oh, I forgot, parson;—I mean no harm, Adrian. I'm only telling what I've heard."

"No harm, my dear boy," returned Adrian. "I'm perfectly aware that Zoroaster is not dead. You have been listening to a common creed. Drink the Fire-worshippers, if you will."

"Here's to Zoroaster, then!" cried Richard. "I say, Rippy! we'll drink the Fire-worshippers to-night won't we?"

A fearful conspiratorial frown, that would not have disgraced Guido Fawkes, was darted back from the plastic features of Master Ripton.

Richard gave his lungs loud play.

"Why, what did you say about Blaizes, Rippy? Didn't you say it was fun?"

Another hideous and silencing frown was Ripton's answer. Adrian matched the innocent youths, and knew that there was talking under the table. "See," thought he, "this boy has tasted his first scraggy morsel of life today, and already he talks like an old stager, and has, if I mistake not, been acting too. My respected chief," he apostrophized Sir Austin, "combustibles are only the more dangerous for compression. This boy will be ravenous for Earth when he is let loose, and very soon make his share of it look as foolish as yonder game-pie!"—a prophecy Adrian kept to himself.

Uncle Algernon shambled in to see his nephew before the supper was finished, and his more genial presence brought out a little of the plot.

“Look here, uncle!” said Richard. “Would you let a churlish old brute of a farmer strike you without making him suffer for it?”

“I fancy I should return the compliment, my lad,” replied his uncle.

“Of course you would! So would I. And he shall suffer for it.” The boy looked savage, and his uncle patted him down.

“I’ve boxed his son; I’ll box him,” said Richard, shouting for more wine.

“What, boy! Is it old Blaize has been putting you up!”

“Never mind, uncle!” The boy nodded mysteriously.

‘Look there!’ Adrian read on Ripton’s face, he says ‘never mind,’ and lets it out!

“Did we beat to-day, uncle?”

“Yes, boy; and we’d beat them any day they bowl fair. I’d beat them on one leg. There’s only Watkins and Featherdene among them worth a farthing.”

“We beat!” cries Richard. “Then we’ll have some more wine, and drink their healths.”

The bell was rung; wine ordered. Presently comes in heavy Benson, to say supplies are cut off. One bottle, and no more. The Captain whistled: Adrian shrugged.

The bottle, however, was procured by Adrian subsequently. He liked studying intoxicated urchins.

One subject was at Richard’s heart, about which he was reserved in the midst of his riot. Too proud to inquire how his father had taken his absence, he burned to hear whether he was in disgrace. He led to it repeatedly, and it was constantly evaded by Algernon and Adrian. At last, when the boy declared a desire to wish his father good-night, Adrian had to tell him that he was to go straight to bed from the supper-table. Young Richard’s face fell at that, and his gaiety forsook him. He marched to his room without another word.

Adrian gave Sir Austin an able version of his son’s behaviour and adventures; dwelling upon this sudden taciturnity when he heard of his father’s resolution not to see him. The wise youth saw that his chief was mollified behind his moveless mask, and went to bed, and Horace, leaving Sir Austin in his study. Long hours the baronet sat alone. The house had not its usual influx of Feverels that day. Austin Wentworth was staying at Poer Hall, and had only come over for an hour. At midnight the house breathed sleep. Sir Austin put on his cloak and cap, and took the lamp to make his rounds. He apprehended nothing special, but with a mind never at rest he constituted himself the sentinel of Raynham. He passed the chamber where the Great-Aunt Grantley lay, who was to swell Richard’s fortune, and so perform her chief business on earth. By her door he murmured, “Good creature! you sleep with a sense of duty done,” and paced on, reflecting, “She has not made money a demon of discord,” and blessed her. He had his thoughts at Hippias’s somnolent door, and to them the world might have subscribed.

A monomaniac at large, watching over sane people in slumber! thinks Adrian Harley, as he hears Sir Austin’s footfall, and truly that was a strange object to see.—Where is the fortress that has not one weak gate? where the man who is sound at each particular angle? Ay, meditates the recumbent cynic, more or less mad is not every mother’s son? Favourable circumstances—good air, good company, two or three good rules rigidly adhered to—keep the world out of Bedlam. But, let the world fly into a passion, and is not Bedlam the safest abode for it?

Sir Austin ascended the stairs, and bent his steps leisurely toward the chamber where his son was lying in the left wing of the Abbey. At the end of the gallery which led to it he discovered a dim light. Doubting it an illusion, Sir Austin accelerated his pace. This wing had aforetime a bad character. Notwithstanding what years had done to polish it into fair repute, the Raynham kitchen stuck to tradition, and preserved certain stories of ghosts seen there, that effectually blackened it in the susceptible minds of new house-maids and under-crooks, whose fears would not allow the sinner to

wash his sins. Sir Austin had heard of the tales circulated by his domestics underground. He cherished his own belief, but discouraged theirs, and it was treason at Raynham to be caught traducing the left wing. As the baronet advanced, the fact of a light burning was clear to him. A slight descent brought him into the passage, and he beheld a poor human candle standing outside his son's chamber. At the same moment a door closed hastily. He entered Richard's room. The boy was absent. The bed was unpressed: no clothes about: nothing to show that he had been there that night. Sir Austin felt vaguely apprehensive. Has he gone to my room to await me? thought the father's heart. Something like a tear quivered in his arid eyes as he meditated and hoped this might be so. His own sleeping-room faced that of his son. He strode to it with a quick heart. It was empty. Alarm dislodged anger from his jealous heart, and dread of evil put a thousand questions to him that were answered in air. After pacing up and down his room he determined to go and ask the boy Thompson, as he called Ripton, what was known to him.

The chamber assigned to Master Ripton Thompson was at the northern extremity of the passage, and overlooked Lobourne and the valley to the West. The bed stood between the window and the door. Six Austin found the door ajar, and the interior dark. To his surprise, the boy Thompson's couch, as revealed by the rays of his lamp, was likewise vacant. He was turning back when he fancied he heard the sibilation of a whispering in the room. Sir Austin cloaked the lamp and trod silently toward the window. The heads of his son Richard and the boy Thompson were seen crouched against the glass, holding excited converse together. Sir Austin listened, but he listened to a language of which he possessed not the key. Their talk was of fire, and of delay: of expected agrarian astonishment: of a farmer's huge wrath: of violence exercised upon gentlemen, and of vengeance: talk that the boys jerked out by fits, and that came as broken links of a chain impossible to connect. But they awake curiosity. The baronet condescended to play the spy upon his son.

Over Lobourne and the valley lay black night and innumerable stars.

"How jolly I feel!" exclaimed Ripton, inspired by claret; and then, after a luxurious pause—"I think that fellow has pocketed his guinea, and cut his lucky."

Richard allowed a long minute to pass, during which the baronet waited anxiously for his voice, hardly recognizing it when he heard its altered tones.

"If he has, I'll go; and I'll do it myself."

"You would?" returned Master Ripton. "Well, I'm hanged!—I say, if you went to school, wouldn't you get into rows! Perhaps he hasn't found the place where the box was stuck in. I think he funks it. I almost wish you hadn't done it, upon my honour—eh? Look there! what was that? That looked like something.—I say! do you think we shall ever be found out?"

Master Ripton intoned this abrupt interrogation verb seriously.

"I don't think about it," said Richard, all his faculties bent on signs from Lobourne.

"Well, but," Ripton persisted, "suppose we are found out?"

"If we are, I must pay for it."

Sir Austin breathed the better for this reply. He was beginning to gather a clue to the dialogue. His son was engaged in a plot, and was, moreover, the leader of the plot. He listened for further enlightenment.

"What was the fellow's name?" inquired Ripton.

His companion answered, "Tom Bakewell."

"I'll tell you what," continued Ripton. "You let it all clean out to your cousin and uncle at supper.—How capital claret is with partridge-pie! What a lot I ate!—Didn't you see me frown?"

The young sensualist was in an ecstasy of gratitude to his late refection, and the slightest word recalled him to it. Richard answered him:

"Yes; and felt your kick. It doesn't matter. Rady's safe, and uncle never blabs."

“Well, my plan is to keep it close. You’re never safe if you don’t.—I never drank much claret before,” Ripton was off again. “Won’t I now, though! claret’s my wine. You know, it may come out any day, and then we’re done for,” he rather incongruously appended.

Richard only took up the business-thread of his friend’s rambling chatter, and answered:

“You’ve got nothing to do with it, if we are.”

“Haven’t I, though! I didn’t stick-in the box but I’m an accomplice, that’s clear. Besides,” added Ripton, “do you think I should leave you to bear it all on your shoulders? I ain’t that sort of chap, Ricky, I can tell you.”

Sir Austin thought more highly of the boy Thompson. Still it looked a detestable conspiracy, and the altered manner of his son impressed him strangely. He was not the boy of yesterday. To Sir Austin it seemed as if a gulf had suddenly opened between them. The boy had embarked, and was on the waters of life in his own vessel. It was as vain to call him back as to attempt to erase what Time has written with the Judgment Blood! This child, for whom he had prayed nightly in such a fervour and humbleness to God, the dangers were about him, the temptations thick on him, and the devil on board piloting. If a day had done so much, what would years do? Were prayers and all the watchfulness he had expended of no avail?

A sensation of infinite melancholy overcame the poor gentleman—a thought that he was fighting with a fate in this beloved boy.

He was half disposed to arrest the two conspirators on the spot, and make them confess, and absolve themselves; but it seemed to him better to keep an unseen eye over his son: Sir Austin’s old system prevailed.

Adrian characterized this system well, in saying that Sir Austin wished to be Providence to his son.

If immeasurable love were perfect wisdom, one human being might almost impersonate Providence to another. Alas! love, divine as it is, can do no more than lighten the house it inhabits—must take its shape, sometimes intensify its narrowness—can spiritualize, but not expel, the old lifelong lodgers above-stairs and below.

Sir Austin decided to continue quiescent.

The valley still lay black beneath the large autumnal stars, and the exclamations of the boys were becoming fevered and impatient. By-and-by one insisted that he had seen a twinkle. The direction he gave was out of their anticipations. Again the twinkle was announced. Both boys started to their feet. It was a twinkle in the right direction now.

“He’s done it!” cried Richard, in great heat. “Now you may say old Blaize’ll soon be old Blazes, Rip. I hope he’s asleep.”

“I’m sure he’s snoring!—Look there! He’s alight fast enough. He’s dry. He’ll burn.—I say,” Ripton re-assumed the serious intonation, “do you think they’ll ever suspect us?”

“What if they do? We must brunt it.”

“Of course we will. But, I say! I wish you hadn’t given them the scent, though. I like to look innocent. I can’t when I know people suspect me. Lord! look there! Isn’t it just beginning to flare up!”

The farmer’s grounds were indeed gradually standing out in sombre shadows.

“I’ll fetch my telescope,” said Richard. Ripton, somehow not liking to be left alone, caught hold of him.

“No; don’t go and lose the best of it. Here, I’ll throw open the window, and we can see.”

The window was flung open, and the boys instantly stretched half their bodies out of it; Ripton appearing to devour the rising flames with his mouth: Richard with his eyes.

Opaque and statuesque stood the figure of the baronet behind them. The wind was low. Dense masses of smoke hung amid the darting snakes of fire, and a red malign light was on the neighbouring leafage. No figures could be seen. Apparently the flames had nothing to contend against, for they were making terrible strides into the darkness.

“Oh!” shouted Richard, overcome by excitement, “if I had my telescope! We must have it! Let me go and fetch it! I Will!”

The boys struggled together, and Sir Austin stepped back. As he did so, a cry was heard in the passage. He hurried out, closed the chamber, and came upon little Clare lying senseless along the door.

CHAPTER V

In the morning that followed this night, great gossip was interchanged between Raynham and Lobourne. The village told how Farmer Blaize, of Belthorpe Farm, had his Pick feloniously set fire to; his stables had caught fire, himself had been all but roasted alive in the attempt to rescue his cattle, of which numbers had perished in the flames. Raynham counterbalanced arson with an authentic ghost seen by Miss Clare in the left wing of the Abbey—the ghost of a lady, dressed in deep mourning, a scar on her forehead and a bloody handkerchief at her breast, frightful to behold! and no wonder the child was frightened out of her wits, and lay in a desperate state awaiting the arrival of the London doctors. It was added that the servants had all threatened to leave in a body, and that Sir Austin to appease them had promised to pull down the entire left wing, like a gentleman; for no decent creature, said Lobourne, could consent to live in a haunted house.

Rumour for the nonce had a stronger spice of truth than usual. Poor little Clare lay ill, and the calamity that had befallen Farmer Blaize, as regards his rick, was not much exaggerated. Sir Austin caused an account of it be given him at breakfast, and appeared so scrupulously anxious to hear the exact extent of injury sustained by the farmer that heavy Benson went down to inspect the scene. Mr. Benson returned, and, acting under Adrian's malicious advice, framed a formal report of the catastrophe, in which the farmer's breeches figured, and certain cooling applications to a part of the farmer's person. Sir Austin perused it without a smile. He took occasion to have it read out before the two boys, who listened very demurely, as to ordinary newspaper incident; only when the report particularized the garments damaged, and the unwonted distressing position Farmer Blaize was reduced to in his bed, indecorous fit of sneezing laid hold of Master Ripton Thompson, and Richard bit his lip and burst into loud laughter, Ripton joining him, lost to consequences.

"I trust you feel for this poor man," said Sir Austin to his son, somewhat sternly. He saw no sign of feeling.

It was a difficult task for Sir Austin to keep his old countenance toward the hope of Raynham, knowing him the accomplice-incendiary, and believing the deed to have been unprovoked and wanton. But he must do so, he knew, to let the boy have a fair trial against himself. Be it said, moreover, that the baronet's possession of his son's secret flattered him. It allowed him to act, and in a measure to feel, like Providence; enabled him to observe and provide for the movements of creatures in the dark. He therefore treated the boy as he commonly did, and Richard saw no change in his father to make him think he was suspected.

The youngster's game was not so easy against Adrian. Adrian did not shoot or fish. Voluntarily he did nothing to work off the destructive nervous fluid, or whatever it may be, which is in man's nature; so that two culprit boys once in his power were not likely to taste the gentle hand of mercy; and Richard and Ripton paid for many a trout and partridge spared. At every minute of the day Ripton was thrown into sweats of suspicion that discovery was imminent, by some stray remark or message from Adrian. He was as a fish with the hook in his gills, mysteriously caught without having nibbled; and dive into what depths he would he was sensible of a summoning force that compelled him perpetually towards the gasping surface, which he seemed inevitably approaching when the dinner-bell sounded. There the talk was all of Farmer Blaize. If it dropped, Adrian revived it, and his caressing way with Ripton was just such as a keen sportsman feels toward the creature that had owned his skill, and is making its appearance for the world to acknowledge the same. Sir Austin saw the manoeuvres, and admired Adrian's shrewdness. But he had to check the young natural lawyer, for the effect of so much masked examination upon Richard was growing baneful. This fish also felt the hook in his gills, but this fish was more of a pike, and lay in different waters, where there were old stumps and black roots to wind about, and defy alike strong pulling and delicate handling. In other words, Richard showed symptoms of a disposition to take refuge in lies.

"You know the grounds, my dear boy," Adrian observed to him. "Tell me; do you think it easy to get to the rick unperceived? I hear they suspect one of the farmer's turned-off hands."

"I tell you I don't know the grounds," Richard sullenly replied.

"Not?" Adrian counterfeited courteous astonishment. "I thought Mr. Thompson said you were over there yesterday?"

Ripton, glad to speak the truth, hurriedly assured Adrian that it was not he had said so.

"Not? You had good sport, gentlemen, hadn't you?"

"Oh, yes!" mumbled the wretched victims, reddening as they remembered, in Adrian's slightly drawled rusticity of tone, Farmer Blaize's first address to them.

"I suppose you were among the Fire-worshippers last night, too?" persisted Adrian. "In some countries, I hear, they manage their best sport at night-time, and beat up for game with torches. It must be a fine sight. After all, the country would be dull if we hadn't a rip here and there to treat us to a little conflagration."

"A rip!" laughed Richard, to his friend's disgust and alarm at his daring. "You don't mean this Rip, do you?"

"Mr. Thompson fire a rick? I should as soon suspect you, my dear boy.—You are aware, young gentlemen, that it is rather a serious thing eh? In this country, you know, the landlord has always been the pet of the Laws. By the way," Adrian continued, as if diverging to another topic, "you met two gentlemen of the road in your explorations yesterday, Magians. Now, if I were a magistrate of the county, like Sir Miles Papworth, my suspicions would light upon those gentlemen. A tinker and a ploughman, I think you said, Mr. Thompson. Not? Well, say two ploughmen."

"More likely two tinkers," said Richard.

"Oh! if you wish to exclude the ploughman—was he out of employ?"

Ripton, with Adrian's eyes inveterately fixed on him, stammered an affirmative.

"The tinker, or the ploughman?"

"The ploughm—" Ingenuous Ripton looking about, as if to aid himself whenever he was able to speak the truth, beheld Richard's face blackening at him, and swallowed back half the word.

"The ploughman!" Adrian took him up cheerily. "Then we have here a ploughman out of employ. Given a ploughman out of employ, and a rick burnt. The burning of a rick is an act of vengeance, and a ploughman out of employ is a vengeful animal. The rick and the ploughman are advancing to a juxtaposition. Motive being established, we have only to prove their proximity at a certain hour, and our ploughman voyages beyond seas."

"Is it transportation for rick-burning?" inquired Ripton aghast.

Adrian spoke solemnly: "They shave your head. You are manacled. Your diet is sour bread and cheese-parings. You work in strings of twenties and thirties. ARSON is branded on your backs in an enormous A. Theological works are the sole literary recreation of the well-conducted and deserving. Consider the fate of this poor fellow, and what an act of vengeance brings him to! Do you know his name?"

"How should I know his name?" said Richard, with an assumption of innocence painful to see.

Sir Austin remarked that no doubt it would soon be known, and Adrian perceived that he was to quiet his line, marvelling a little at the baronet's blindness to what was so clear. He would not tell, for that would ruin his influence with Richard; still he wanted some present credit for his discernment and devotion. The boys got away from dinner, and, after deep consultation, agreed upon a course of conduct, which was to commiserate with Farmer Blaize loudly, and make themselves look as much like the public as it was possible for two young malefactors to look, one of whom already felt Adrian's enormous A devouring his back with the fierceness of the Promethean eagle, and isolating him forever from mankind. Adrian relished their novel tactics sharply, and led them to lengths of lamentation for Farmer Blaize. Do what they might, the hook was in their gills. The farmer's whip had reduced them to bodily contortions; these were decorous compared with the spiritual writhings

they had to perform under Adrian's manipulation. Ripton was fast becoming a coward, and Richard a liar, when next morning Austin Wentworth came over from Poer Hall bringing news that one Mr. Thomas Bakewell, yeoman, had been arrested on suspicion of the crime of Arson and lodged in jail, awaiting the magisterial pleasure of Sir Miles Papworth. Austin's eye rested on Richard as he spoke these terrible tidings. The hope of Raynham returned his look, perfectly calm, and had, moreover, the presence of mind not to look at Ripton.

CHAPTER VI

As soon as they could escape, the boys got together into an obscure corner of the park, and there took counsel of their extremity.

“Whatever shall we do now?” asked Ripton of his leader.

Scorpion girt with fire was never in a more terrible prison-house than poor Ripton, around whom the raging element he had assisted to create seemed to be drawing momentarily narrower circles.

“There’s only one chance,” said Richard, coming to a dead halt, and folding his arms resolutely. His comrade inquired with the utmost eagerness what that chance might be.

Richard fixed his eyes on a flint, and replied: “We must rescue that fellow from jail.”

Ripton gazed at his leader, and fell back with astonishment. “My dear Ricky! but how are we to do it?”

Richard, still perusing his flint, replied: “We must manage to get a file in to him and a rope. It can be done, I tell you. I don’t care what I pay. I don’t care what I do. He must be got out.”

“Bother that old Blaize!” exclaimed Ripton, taking off his cap to wipe his frenzied forehead, and brought down his friend’s reproof.

“Never mind old Blaize now. Talk about letting it out! Look at you. I’m ashamed of you. You talk about Robin Hood and King Richard! Why, you haven’t an atom of courage. Why, you let it out every second of the day. Whenever Rady begins speaking you start; I can see the perspiration rolling down you. Are you afraid?—And then you contradict yourself. You never keep to one story. Now, follow me. We must risk everything to get him out. Mind that! And keep out of Adrian’s way as much as you can. And keep to one story.”

With these sage directions the young leader marched his companion-culprit down to inspect the jail where Tom Bakewell lay groaning over the results of the super-mundane conflict, and the victim of it that he was.

In Lobourne Austin Wentworth had the reputation of the poor man’s friend; a title he earned more largely ere he went to the reward God alone can give to that supreme virtue. Dame Bakewell, the mother of Tom, on hearing of her son’s arrest, had run to comfort him and render him what help she could; but this was only sighs and tears, and, oh deary me! which only perplexed poor Tom, who bade her leave an unlucky chap to his fate, and not make himself a thundering villain. Whereat the dame begged him to take heart, and he should have a true comforter. “And though it’s a gentleman that’s coming to you, Tom—for he never refuses a poor body,” said Mrs. Bakewell, “it’s a true Christian, Tom! and the Lord knows if the sight of him mayn’t be the saving of you, for he’s light to look on, and a sermon to listen to, he is!”

Tom was not prepossessed by the prospect of a sermon, and looked a sullen dog enough when Austin entered his cell. He was surprised at the end of half-an-hour to find himself engaged in man-to-man conversation with a gentleman and a Christian. When Austin rose to go Tom begged permission to shake his hand.

“Take and tell young master up at the Abbey that I an’t the chap to peach. He’ll know. He’s a young gentleman as’ll make any man do as he wants ‘em! He’s a mortal wild young gentleman! And I’m a Ass! That’s where ‘tis. But I an’t a blackguard. Tell him that, sir!”

This was how it came that Austin eyed young Richard seriously while he told the news at Raynham. The boy was shy of Austin more than of Adrian. Why, he did not know; but he made it a hard task for Austin to catch him alone, and turned sulky that instant. Austin was not clever like Adrian: he seldom divined other people’s ideas, and always went the direct road to his object; so instead of beating about and setting the boy on the alert at all points, crammed to the muzzle with lies, he just said, “Tom Bakewell told me to let you know he does not intend to peach on you,” and left him.

Richard repeated the intelligence to Ripton, who cried aloud that Tom was a brick.

“He shan’t suffer for it,” said Richard, and pondered on a thicker rope and sharper file.

“But will your cousin tell?” was Ripton’s reflection.

“He!” Richard’s lip expressed contempt. “A ploughman refuses to peach, and you ask if one of our family will?”

Ripton stood for the twentieth time reproved on this point.

The boys had examined the outer walls of the jail, and arrived at the conclusion that Tom’s escape might be managed if Tom had spirit, and the rope and file could be anyway reached to him. But to do this, somebody must gain admittance to his cell, and who was to be taken into their confidence?

“Try your cousin,” Ripton suggested, after much debate.

Richard, smiling, wished to know if he meant Adrian.

“No, no!” Ripton hurriedly reassured him. “Austin.”

The same idea was knocking at Richard’s head.

“Let’s get the rope and file first,” said he, and to Bursley they went for those implements to defeat the law, Ripton procuring the file at one shop and Richard the rope at another, with such masterly cunning did they lay their measures for the avoidance of every possible chance of detection. And better to assure this, in a wood outside Bursley Richard stripped to his shirt and wound the rope round his body, tasting the tortures of anchorites and penitential friars, that nothing should be risked to make Tom’s escape a certainty. Sir Austin saw the marks at night as his son lay asleep, through the half-opened folds of his bed-gown.

It was a severe stroke when, after all their stratagems and trouble, Austin Wentworth refused the office the boys had zealously designed for him. Time pressed. In a few days poor Tom would have to face the redoubtable Sir Miles, and get committed, for rumours of overwhelming evidence to convict him were rife about Lobourne, and Farmer Blaize’s wrath was unappeasable. Again and again young Richard begged his cousin not to see him disgraced, and to help him in this extremity. Austin smiled on him.

“My dear Ricky,” said he, “there are two ways of getting out of a scrape: a long way and a short way. When you’ve tried the roundabout method, and failed, come to me, and I’ll show you the straight route.”

Richard was too entirely bent upon the roundabout method to consider this advice more than empty words, and only ground his teeth at Austin’s unkind refusal.

He imparted to Ripton, at the eleventh hour, that they must do it themselves, to which Ripton heavily assented.

On the day preceding poor Tom’s doomed appearance before the magistrate, Dame Bakewell had an interview with Austin, who went to Raynham immediately, and sought Adrian’s counsel upon what was to be done. Homeric laughter and nothing else could be got out of Adrian when he heard of the doings of these desperate boys: how they had entered Dame Bakewell’s smallest of retail shops, and purchased tea, sugar, candles, and comfits of every description, till the shop was clear of customers: how they had then hurried her into her little back-parlour, where Richard had torn open his shirt and revealed the coils of rope, and Ripton displayed the point of a file from a serpentine recess in his jacket: how they had then told the astonished woman that the rope she saw and the file she saw were instruments for the liberation of her son; that there existed no other means on earth to save him, they, the boys, having unsuccessfully attempted all: how upon that Richard had tried with the utmost earnestness to persuade her to disrobe and wind the rope round her own person: and Ripton had aired his eloquence to induce her to secrete the file: how, when she resolutely objected to the rope, both boys began backing the file, and in an evil hour, she feared, said Dame Bakewell, she had rewarded the gracious permission given her by Sir Miles Papworth to visit her son, by tempting Tom to file the Law. Though, thanks be to the Lord! Dame Bakewell added, Tom had turned up his nose at the file, and so she had told young Master Richard, who swore very bad for a young gentleman.

“Boys are like monkeys,” remarked Adrian, at the close of his explosions, “the gravest actors of farcical nonsense that the world possesses. May I never be where there are no boys! A couple of boys left to themselves will furnish richer fun than any troop of trained comedians. No: no Art arrives at the artlessness of nature in matters of comedy. You can’t simulate the ape. Your antics are dull. They haven’t the charming inconsequence of the natural animal. Lack at these two! Think of the shifts they are put to all day long! They know I know all about it, and yet their serenity of innocence is all but unruffled in my presence. You’re sorry to think about the end of the business, Austin? So am I! I dread the idea of the curtain going down. Besides, it will do Ricky a world of good. A practical lesson is the best lesson.”

“Sinks deepest,” said Austin, “but whether he learns good or evil from it is the question at stake.”

Adrian stretched his length at ease.

“This will be his first nibble at experience, old Time’s fruit, hateful to the palate of youth! for which season only hath it any nourishment! Experience! You know Coleridge’s capital simile?—Mournful you call it? Well! all wisdom is mournful. ‘Tis therefore, coz, that the wise do love the Comic Muse. Their own high food would kill them. You shall find great poets, rare philosophers, night after night on the broad grin before a row of yellow lights and mouthing masks. Why? Because all’s dark at home. The stage is the pastime of great minds. That’s how it comes that the stage is now down. An age of rampant little minds, my dear Austin! How I hate that cant of yours about an Age of Work—you, and your Mortons, and your parsons Brawnley, rank radicals all of you, base materialists! What does Diaper Sandoe sing of your Age of Work? Listen!

‘An Age of betty tit for tat,
An Age of busy gabble:
An Age that’s like a brewer’s vat,
Fermenting for the rabble!

‘An Age that’s chaste in Love, but lax
To virtuous abuses:
Whose gentlemen and ladies wax
Too dainty for their uses.

‘An Age that drives an Iron Horse,
Of Time and Space defiant;
Exulting in a Giant’s Force,
And trembling at the Giant.

‘An Age of Quaker hue and cut,
By Mammon misbegotten;
See the mad Hamlet mouth and strut!
And mark the Kings of Cotton!

‘From this unrest, lo, early wreck’d,
A Future staggers crazy,
Ophelia of the Ages, deck’d
With woeful weed and daisy!’”

Murmuring, “Get your parson Brawnley to answer that!” Adrian changed the resting-place of a leg, and smiled. The Age was an old battle-field between him and Austin.

“My parson Brawnley, as you call him, has answered it,” said Austin, “not by hoping his best, which would probably leave the Age to go mad to your satisfaction, but by doing it. And he has and will answer your Diaper Sandoe in better verse, as he confutes him in a better life.”

“You don’t see Sandoe’s depth,” Adrian replied. “Consider that phrase, ‘Ophelia of the Ages’! Is not Brawnley, like a dozen other leading spirits—I think that’s your term just the metaphysical Hamlet to drive her mad? She, poor maid! asks for marriage and smiling babes, while my lord lover stands questioning the Infinite, and rants to the Impalpable.”

Austin laughed. “Marriage and smiling babes she would have in abundance, if Brawnley legislated. Wait till you know him. He will be over at Poer Hall shortly, and you will see what a Man of the Age means. But now, pray, consult with me about these boys.”

“Oh, those boys!” Adrian tossed a hand. “Are there boys of the Age as well as men? Not? Then boys are better than men: boys are for all Ages. What do you think, Austin? They’ve been studying Latude’s Escape. I found the book open in Ricky’s room, on the top of Jonathan Wild. Jonathan preserved the secrets of his profession, and taught them nothing. So they’re going to make a Latude of Mr. Tom Bakewell. He’s to be Bastille Bakewell, whether he will or no. Let them. Let the wild colt run free! We can’t help them. We can only look on. We should spoil the play.”

Adrian always made a point of feeding the fretful beast Impatience with pleasantries—a not congenial diet; and Austin, the most patient of human beings, began to lose his self-control.

“You talk as if Time belonged to you, Adrian. We have but a few hours left us. Work first, and joke afterwards. The boy’s fate is being decided now.”

“So is everybody’s, my dear Austin!” yawned the epicurean.

“Yes, but this boy is at present under our guardianship—under yours especially.”

“Not yet! not yet!” Adrian interjected languidly. “No getting into scrapes when I have him. The leash, young hound! the collar, young colt! I’m perfectly irresponsible at present.”

“You may have something different to deal with when you are responsible, if you think that.”

“I take my young prince as I find him, coz: a Julian, or a Caracalla: a Constantine, or a Nero. Then, if he will play the fiddle to a conflagration, he shall play it well: if he must be a disputatious apostate, at any rate he shall understand logic and men, and have the habit of saying his prayers.”

“Then you leave me to act alone?” said Austin, rising.

“Without a single curb!” Adrian gesticulated an acquiesced withdrawal. “I’m sure you would not, still more certain you cannot, do harm. And be mindful of my prophetic words: Whatever’s done, old Blaize will have to be bought off. There’s the affair settled at once. I suppose I must go to the chief to-night and settle it myself. We can’t see this poor devil condemned, though it’s nonsense to talk of a boy being the prime instigator.”

Austin cast an eye at the complacent languor of the wise youth, his cousin, and the little that he knew of his fellows told him he might talk forever here, and not be comprehended. The wise youth’s two ears were stuffed with his own wisdom. One evil only Adrian dreaded, it was clear—the action of the law.

As he was moving away, Adrian called out to him, “Stop, Austin! There! don’t be anxious! You invariably take the glum side. I’ve done something. Never mind what. If you go down to Belthorpe, be civil, but not obsequious. You remember the tactics of Scipio Africanus against the Punic elephants? Well, don’t say a word—in thine ear, coz: I’ve turned Master Blaize’s elephants. If they charge, ‘twill bye a feint, and back to the destruction of his serried ranks! You understand. Not? Well, ‘tis as well. Only, let none say that I sleep. If I must see him to-night, I go down knowing he has not got us in his power.” The wise youth yawned, and stretched out a hand for any book that might be within his reach. Austin left him to look about the grounds for Richard.

CHAPTER VII

A little laurel-shaded temple of white marble looked out on the river from a knoll bordering the Raynham beechwoods, and was dubbed by Adrian Daphne's Bower. To this spot Richard had retired, and there Austin found him with his head buried in his hands, a picture of desperation, whose last shift has been defeated. He allowed Austin to greet him and sit by him without lifting his head. Perhaps his eyes were not presentable.

"Where's your friend?" Austin began.

"Gone!" was the answer, sounding cavernous from behind hair and fingers. An explanation presently followed, that a summons had come for him in the morning from Mr. Thompson; and that Mr. Ripton had departed against his will.

In fact, Ripton had protested that he would defy his parent and remain by his friend in the hour of adversity and at the post of danger. Sir Austin signified his opinion that a boy should obey his parent, by giving orders to Benson for Ripton's box to be packed and ready before noon; and Ripton's alacrity in taking the baronet's view of filial duty was as little feigned as his offer to Richard to throw filial duty to the winds. He rejoiced that the Fates had agreed to remove him from the very hot neighbourhood of Lobourne, while he grieved, like an honest lad, to see his comrade left to face calamity alone. The boys parted amicably, as they could hardly fail to do, when Ripton had sworn fealty to the Feverels with a warmth that made him declare himself bond, and due to appear at any stated hour and at any stated place to fight all the farmers in England, on a mandate from the heir of the house.

"So you're left alone," said Austin, contemplating the boy's shapely head. "I'm glad of it. We never know what's in us till we stand by ourselves."

There appeared to be no answer forthcoming. Vanity, however, replied at last, "He wasn't much support."

"Remember his good points now he's gone, Ricky."

"Oh! he was staunch," the boy grumbled.

"And a staunch friend is not always to be found. Now, have you tried your own way of rectifying this business, Ricky?"

"I have done everything."

"And failed!"

There was a pause, and then the deep-toned evasion—

"Tom Bakewell's a coward!"

"I suppose, poor fellow," said Austin, in his kind way, "he doesn't want to get into a deeper mess. I don't think he's a coward."

"He is a coward," cried Richard. "Do you think if I had a file I would stay in prison? I'd be out the first night! And he might have had the rope, too—a rope thick enough for a couple of men his size and weight. Ripton and I and Ned Markham swung on it for an hour, and it didn't give way. He's a coward, and deserves his fate. I've no compassion for a coward."

"Nor I much," said Austin.

Richard had raised his head in the heat of his denunciation of poor Tom. He would have hidden it had he known the thought in Austin's clear eyes while he faced them.

"I never met a coward myself," Austin continued. "I have heard of one or two. One let an innocent man die for him."

"How base!" exclaimed the boy.

"Yes, it was bad," Austin acquiesced.

"Bad!" Richard scorned the poor contempt. "How I would have spurned him! He was a coward!"

"I believe he pleaded the feelings of his family in his excuse, and tried every means to get the man off. I have read also in the confessions of a celebrated philosopher, that in his youth he committed some act of pilfering, and accused a young servant-girl of his own theft, who was condemned and dismissed for it, pardoning her guilty accuser."

"What a coward!" shouted Richard. "And he confessed it publicly?"

"You may read it yourself."

"He actually wrote it down, and printed it?"

"You have the book in your father's library. Would you have done so much?"

Richard faltered. No! he admitted that he never could have told people.

"Then who is to call that man a coward?" said Austin. "He expiated his cowardice as all who give way in moments of weakness, and are not cowards, must do. The coward chooses to think 'God does not see.' I shall escape.' He who is not a coward, and has succumbed, knows that God has seen all, and it is not so hard a task for him to make his heart bare to the world. Worse, I should fancy it, to know myself an impostor when men praised me."

Young Richard's eyes were wandering on Austin's gravely cheerful face. A keen intentness suddenly fixed them, and he dropped his head.

"So I think you're wrong, Ricky, in calling this poor Tom a coward because he refuses to try your means of escape," Austin resumed. "A coward hardly objects to drag in his accomplice. And, where the person involved belongs to a great family, it seems to me that for a poor plough-lad to volunteer not to do so speaks him anything but a coward."

Richard was dumb. Altogether to surrender his rope and file was a fearful sacrifice, after all the time, trepidation, and study he had spent on those two saving instruments. If he avowed Tom's manly behaviour, Richard Feverel was in a totally new position. Whereas, by keeping Tom a coward, Richard Feverel was the injured one, and to seem injured is always a luxury; sometimes a necessity, whether among boys or men.

In Austin the Magian conflict would not have lasted long. He had but a blind notion of the fierceness with which it raged in young Richard. Happily for the boy, Austin was not a preacher. A single instance, a cant phrase, a fatherly manner, might have wrecked him, by arousing ancient or latent opposition. The born preacher we feel instinctively to be our foe. He may do some good to the wretches that have been struck down and lie gasping on the battlefield: he rouses antagonism in the strong. Richard's nature, left to itself, wanted little more than an indication of the proper track, and when he said, "Tell me what I can do, Austin?" he had fought the best half of the battle. His voice was subdued. Austin put his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"You must go down to Farmer Blaize."

"Well!" said Richard, sullenly divining the deed of penance.

"You'll know what to say to him when you're there."

The boy bit his lip and frowned. "Ask a favour of that big brute, Austin? I can't!"

"Just tell him the whole case, and that you don't intend to stand by and let the poor fellow suffer without a friend to help him out of his scrape."

"But, Austin," the boy pleaded, "I shall have to ask him to help off Tom Bakewell! How can I ask him, when I hate him?"

Austin bade him go, and think nothing of the consequences till he got there.

Richard groaned in soul.

"You've no pride, Austin."

"Perhaps not."

"You don't know what it is to ask a favour of a brute you hate."

Richard stuck to that view of the case, and stuck to it the faster the more imperatively the urgency of a movement dawned upon him.

"Why," continued the boy, "I shall hardly be able to keep my fists off him!"

“Surely you’ve punished him enough, boy?” said Austin.

“He struck me!” Richard’s lip quivered. “He dared not come at me with his hands. He struck me with a whip. He’ll be telling everybody that he horsewhipped me, and that I went down and begged his pardon. Begged his pardon! A Feverel beg his pardon! Oh, if I had my will!”

“The man earns his bread, Ricky. You poached on his grounds. He turned you off, and you fired his rick.”

“And I’ll pay him for his loss. And I won’t do any more.”

“Because you won’t ask a favour of him?”

“No! I will not ask a favour of him.”

Austin looked at the boy steadily. “You prefer to receive a favour from poor Tom Bakewell?”

At Austin’s enunciation of this obverse view of the matter Richard raised his brow. Dimly a new light broke in upon him. “Favour from Tom Bakewell, the ploughman? How do you mean, Austin?”

“To save yourself an unpleasantness you permit a country lad to sacrifice himself for you? I confess I should not have so much pride.”

“Pride!” shouted Richard, stung by the taunt, and set his sight hard at the blue ridges of the hills.

Not knowing for the moment what else to do, Austin drew a picture of Tom in prison, and repeated Tom’s volunteer statement. The picture, though his intentions were far from designing it so, had to Richard, whose perception of humour was infinitely keener, a horrible chaw-bacon smack about it. Visions of a grinning lout, open from ear to ear, unkempt, coarse, splay-footed, rose before him and afflicted him with the strangest sensations of disgust and comicality, mixed up with pity and remorse—a sort of twisted pathos. There lay Tom; hobnail Tom! a bacon-munching, reckless, beer-swilling animal! and yet a man; a dear brave human heart notwithstanding; capable of devotion and unselfishness. The boy’s better spirit was touched, and it kindled his imagination to realize the abject figure of poor clodpole Tom, and surround it with a halo of mournful light. His soul was alive. Feelings he had never known streamed in upon him as from an ethereal casement, an unwonted tenderness, an embracing humour, a consciousness of some ineffable glory, an irradiation of the features of humanity. All this was in the bosom of the boy, and through it all the vision of an actual hob-nail Tom, coarse, unkempt, open from ear to ear; whose presence was a finger of shame to him and an oppression of clodpole; yet toward whom he felt just then a loving-kindness beyond what he felt for any living creature. He laughed at him, and wept over him. He prized him, while he shrank from him. It was a genial strife of the angel in him with constituents less divine; but the angel was uppermost and led the van—extinguished loathing, humanized laughter, transfigured pride—pride that would persistently contemplate the corduroys of gaping Tom, and cry to Richard, in the very tone of Adrian’s ironic voice, “Behold your benefactor!”

Austin sat by the boy, unaware of the sublimer tumult he had stirred. Little of it was perceptible in Richard’s countenance. The lines of his mouth were slightly drawn; his eyes hard set into the distance. He remained thus many minutes. Finally he jumped to his legs, saying, “I’ll go at once to old Blaize and tell him.”

Austin grasped his hand, and together they issued out of Daphne’s Bower, in the direction of Lobourne.

CHAPTER VIII

Farmer Blaize was not so astonished at the visit of Richard Feverel as that young gentleman expected him to be. The farmer, seated in his easy-chair in the little low-roofed parlour of an old-fashioned farm-house, with a long clay pipe on the table at his elbow, and a veteran pointer at his feet, had already given audience to three distinguished members of the Feverel blood, who had come separately, according to their accustomed secretiveness, and with one object. In the morning it was Sir Austin himself. Shortly after his departure, arrived Austin Wentworth; close on his heels, Algernon, known about Lobourne as the Captain, popular wherever he was known. Farmer Blaize reclined in considerable elation. He had brought these great people to a pretty low pitch. He had welcomed them hospitably, as a British yeoman should; but not budged a foot in his demands: not to the baronet: not to the Captain: not to good young Mr. Wentworth. For Farmer Blaize was a solid Englishman; and, on hearing from the baronet a frank confession of the hold he had on the family, he determined to tighten his hold, and only relax it in exchange for tangible advantages—compensation to his pocket, his wounded person, and his still more wounded sentiments: the total indemnity being, in round figures, three hundred pounds, and a spoken apology from the prime offender, young Mister Richard. Even then there was a reservation. Provided, the farmer said, nobody had been tampering with any of his witnesses. In that ease Farmer Blaize declared the money might go, and he would transport Tom Bakewell, as he had sworn he would. And it goes hard, too, with an accomplice, by law, added the farmer, knocking the ashes leisurely out of his pipe. He had no wish to bring any disgrace anywhere; he respected the inmates of Raynham Abbey, as in duty bound; he should be sorry to see them in trouble. Only no tampering with his witnesses. He was a man for Law. Rank was much: money was much: but Law was more. In this country Law was above the sovereign. To tamper with the Law was treason to the realm.

“I come to you direct,” the baronet explained. “I tell you candidly what way I discovered my son to be mixed up in this miserable affair. I promise you indemnity for your loss, and an apology that shall, I trust, satisfy your feelings, assuring you that to tamper with witnesses is not the province of a Feverel. All I ask of you in return is, not to press the prosecution. At present it rests with you. I am bound to do all that lies in my power for this imprisoned man. How and wherefore my son was prompted to suggest, or assist in, such an act, I cannot explain, for I do not know.”

“Hum!” said the farmer. “I think I do.”

“You know the cause?” Sir Austin stared. “I beg you to confide it to me.”

“Least, I can pretty nigh neighbour it with a gues,” said the farmer. “We an’t good friends, Sir Austin, me and your son, just now—not to say cordial. I, ye see, Sir Austin, I’m a man as don’t like young gentlemen a-poachin’ on his grounds without his permission,—in special when birds is plentiful on their own. It appear he do like it. Consequently I has to flick this whip—as them fellers at the races: All in this ‘ere Ring’s mine! as much as to say; and who’s been hit, he’s had fair warnin’. I’m sorry for’t, but that’s just the case.”

Sir Austin retired to communicate with his son, when he should find him.

Algernon’s interview passed off in ale and promises. He also assured Farmer Blaize that no Feverel could be affected by his proviso.

No less did Austin Wentworth. The farmer was satisfied.

“Money’s safe, I know,” said he; “now for the ‘pology!” and Farmer Blaize thrust his legs further out, and his head further back.

The farmer naturally reflected that the three separate visits had been conspired together. Still the baronet’s frankness, and the baronet’s not having reserved himself for the third and final charge, puzzled him. He was considering whether they were a deep, or a shallow lot, when young Richard was announced.

A pretty little girl with the roses of thirteen springs in her cheeks, and abundant beautiful bright tresses, tripped before the boy, and loitered shyly by the farmer's arm-chair to steal a look at the handsome new-comer. She was introduced to Richard as the farmer's niece, Lucy Desborough, the daughter of a lieutenant in the Royal Navy, and, what was better, though the farmer did not pronounce it so loudly, a real good girl.

Neither the excellence of her character, nor her rank in life, tempted Richard to inspect the little lady. He made an awkward bow, and sat down.

The farmer's eyes twinkled. "Her father," he continued, "fought and fell for his coountry. A man as fights for's coountry's a right to hould up his head—ay! with any in the land. Desb'roughs o' Dorset! d'ye know that family, Master Feverel?"

Richard did not know them, and, by his air, did not desire to become acquainted with any offshoot of that family.

"She can make puddens and pies," the farmer went on, regardless of his auditor's gloom. "She's a lady, as good as the best of 'em. I don't care about their being Catholics—the Desb'roughs o' Dorset are gentlemen. And she's good for the pianer, too! She strums to me of evenin's. I'm for the old tunes: she's for the new. Gal-like! While she's with me she shall be taught things use'l. She can parley-voo a good 'un and foot it, as it goes; been in France a couple of year. I prefer the singin' of 't to the talkin' of 't. Come, Luce! toon up—eh?—Ye wun't? That song about the Viffendeer—a female"—Farmer Blaize volunteered the translation of the title—"who wears the—you guess what! and marches along with the French sojers: a pretty brazen bit o' goods, I sh'd fancy."

Mademoiselle Lucy corrected her uncle's French, but objected to do more. The handsome cross boy had almost taken away her voice for speech, as it was, and sing in his company she could not; so she stood, a hand on her uncle's chair to stay herself from falling, while she wriggled a dozen various shapes of refusal, and shook her head at the farmer with fixed eyes.

"Aha!" laughed the farmer, dismissing her, "they soon learn the difference 'twixt the young 'un and the old 'un. Go along, Luce! and learn yer lessons for to-morrow."

Reluctantly the daughter of the Royal Navy glided away. Her uncle's head followed her to the door, where she dallied to catch a last impression of the young stranger's lowering face, and darted through.

Farmer Blaize laughed and chuckled. "She an't so fond of her uncle as that, every day! Not that she an't a good nurse—the kindest little soul you'd meet of a winter's walk! She'll read t' ye, and make drinks, and sing, too, if ye likes it, and she won't be tired. A obstinate good 'un, she be! Bless her!"

The farmer may have designed, by these eulogies of his niece, to give his visitor time to recover his composure, and establish a common topic. His diversion only irritated and confused our shame-eaten youth. Richard's intention had been to come to the farmer's threshold: to summon the farmer thither, and in a loud and haughty tone then and there to take upon himself the whole burden of the charge against Tom Bakewell. He had strayed, during his passage to Belthorpe, somewhat back to his old nature; and his being compelled to enter the house of his enemy, sit in his chair, and endure an introduction to his family, was more than he bargained for. He commenced blinking hard in preparation for the horrible dose to which delay and the farmer's cordiality added inconceivable bitters. Farmer Blaize was quite at his ease; nowise in a hurry. He spoke of the weather and the harvest: of recent doings up at the Abbey: glanced over that year's cricketing; hoped that no future Feverel would lose a leg to the game. Richard saw and heard Arson in it all. He blinked harder as he neared the cup. In a moment of silence, he seized it with a gasp.

"Mr. Blaize! I have come to tell you that I am the person who set fire to your rick the other night."

An odd consternation formed about the farmer's mouth. He changed his posture, and said, "Ay? that's what ye're come to tell me sir?"

"Yes!" said Richard, firmly.

“And that be all?”

“Yes!” Richard reiterated.

The farmer again changed his posture. “Then, my lad, ye’ve come to tell me a lie!”

Farmer Blaize looked straight at the boy, undismayed by the dark flush of ire he had kindled.

“You dare to call me a liar!” cried Richard, starting up.

“I say,” the farmer renewed his first emphasis, and smacked his thigh thereto, “that’s a lie!”

Richard held out his clenched fist. “You have twice insulted me. You have struck me: you have dared to call me a liar. I would have apologized—I would have asked your pardon, to have got off that fellow in prison. Yes! I would have degraded myself that another man should not suffer for my deed”—

“Quite proper!” interposed the farmer.

“And you take this opportunity of insulting me afresh. You’re a coward, sir! nobody but a coward would have insulted me in his own house.”

“Sit ye down, sit ye down, young master,” said the farmer, indicating the chair and cooling the outburst with his hand. “Sit ye down. Don’t ye be hasty. If ye hadn’t been hasty t’other day, we sh’d a been friends yet. Sit ye down, sir. I sh’d be sorry to reckon you out a liar, Mr. Feverel, or anybody o’ your name. I respects yer father though we’re opp’site politics. I’m willin’ to think well o’ you. What I say is, that as you say an’t the trewth. Mind! I don’t like you none the worse for’t. But it an’t what is. That’s all! You knows it as well’s I!”

Richard, disdaining to show signs of being pacified, angrily reseated himself. The farmer spoke sense, and the boy, after his late interview with Austin, had become capable of perceiving vaguely that a towering passion is hardly the justification for a wrong course of conduct.

“Come,” continued the farmer, not unkindly, “what else have you to say?”

Here was the same bitter cup he had already once drained brimming at Richard’s lips again! Alas, poor human nature! that empties to the dregs a dozen of these evil drinks, to evade the single one which Destiny, less cruel, had insisted upon.

The boy blinked and tossed it off.

“I came to say that I regretted the revenge I had taken on you for your striking me.”

Farmer Blaize nodded.

“And now ye’ve done, young gentleman?”

Still another cupful!

“I should be very much obliged,” Richard formally began, but his stomach was turned; he could but sip and sip, and gather a distaste which threatened to make the penitential act impossible. “Very much obliged,” he repeated: “much obliged, if you would be so kind,” and it struck him that had he spoken this at first he would have given it a wording more persuasive with the farmer and more worthy of his own pride: more honest, in fact: for a sense of the dishonesty of what he was saying caused him to cringe and simulate humility to deceive the farmer, and the more he said the less he felt his words, and, feeling them less, he inflated them more. “So kind,” he stammered, “so kind” (fancy a Feverel asking this big brute to be so kind!) “as to do me the favour” (me the favour!) “to exert yourself” (it’s all to please Austin) “to endeavour to—hem! to” (there’s no saying it!)—

The cup was full as ever. Richard dashed at it again.

“What I came to ask is, whether you would have the kindness to try what you could do” (what an infamous shame to have to beg like this!) “do to save—do to ensure—whether you would have the kindness” It seemed out of all human power to gulp it down. The draught grew more and more abhorrent. To proclaim one’s iniquity, to apologize for one’s wrongdoing; thus much could be done; but to beg a favour of the offended party—that was beyond the self-abasement any Feverel could consent to. Pride, however, whose inevitable battle is against itself, drew aside the curtains of poor Tom’s prison, crying a second time, “Behold your Benefactor!” and, with the words burning in his ears, Richard swallowed the dose:

“Well, then, I want you, Mr. Blaize,—if you don’t mind—will you help me to get this man Bakewell off his punishment?”

To do Farmer Blaize justice, he waited very patiently for the boy, though he could not quite see why he did not take the gate at the first offer.

“Oh!” said he, when he heard and had pondered on the request. “Hum! ha! we’ll see about it t’morrow. But if he’s innocent, you know, we shan’t mak’n guilty.”

“It was I did it!” Richard declared.

The farmer’s half-amused expression sharpened a bit.

“So, young gentleman! and you’re sorry for the night’s work?”

“I shall see that you are paid the full extent of your losses.”

“Thank’ee,” said the farmer drily.

“And, if this poor man is released to-morrow, I don’t care what the amount is.”

Farmer Blaize deflected his head twice in silence. “Bribery,” one motion expressed: “Corruption,” the other.

“Now,” said he, leaning forward, and fixing his elbows on his knees, while he counted the case at his fingers’ ends, “excuse the liberty, but wishin’ to know where this ‘ere money’s to come from, I sh’d like jest t’ask if so be Sir Austin know o’ this?”

“My father knows nothing of it,” replied Richard.

The farmer flung back in his chair. “Lie number Two,” said his shoulders, soured by the British aversion to being plotted at, and not dealt with openly.

“And ye’ve the money ready, young gentleman?”

“I shall ask my father for it.”

“And he’ll hand’t out?”

“Certainly he will!”

Richard had not the slightest intention of ever letting his father into his counsels.

“A good three hundred pounds, ye know?” the farmer suggested.

No consideration of the extent of damages, and the size of the sum, affected young Richard, who said boldly, “He will not object when I tell him I want that sum.”

It was natural Farmer Blaize should be a trifle suspicious that a youth’s guarantee would hardly be given for his father’s readiness to disburse such a thumping bill, unless he had previously received his father’s sanction and authority.

“Hum!” said he, “why not ‘a told him before?”

The farmer threw an objectionable shrewdness into his query, that caused Richard to compress his mouth and glance high.

Farmer Blaize was positive ‘twas a lie.

“Hum! Ye still hold to’t you fired the rick?” he asked.

“The blame is mine!” quoth Richard, with the loftiness of a patriot of old Rome.

“Na, na!” the straightforward Briton put him aside. “Ye did’t, or ye didn’t do’t. Did ye do’t, or no?”

Thrust in a corner, Richard said, “I did it.”

Farmer Blaize reached his hand to the bell. It was answered in an instant by little Lucy, who received orders to fetch in a dependent at Belthorpe going by the name of the Bantam, and made her exit as she had entered, with her eyes on the young stranger.

“Now,” said the farmer, “these be my principles. I’m a plain man, Mr. Feverel. Above board with me, and you’ll find me handsome. Try to circumvent me, and I’m a ugly customer. I’ll show you I’ve no animosity. Your father pays—you apologize. That’s enough for me! Let Tom Bakewell fight’t out with the Law, and I’ll look on. The Law wasn’t on the spot, I suppose? so the Law ain’t much witness. But I am. Leastwise the Bantam is. I tell you, young gentleman, the Bantam saw’t! It’s no moral use whatever your denyin’ that ev’dence. And where’s the good, sir, I ask? What comes of ‘t?

Whether it be you, or whether it be Tom Bakewell—ain't all one? If I holds back, ain't it sim'lar? It's the trewth I want! And here't comes," added the farmer, as Miss Lucy ushered in the Bantam, who presented a curious figure for that rare divinity to enliven.

CHAPTER IX

In build of body, gait and stature, Giles Jinkson, the Bantam, was a tolerably fair representative of the Punic elephant, whose part, with diverse anticipations, the generals of the Blaize and Feverel forces, from opposing ranks, expected him to play. Giles, surnamed the Bantam, on account of some forgotten sally of his youth or infancy, moved and looked elephantine. It sufficed that Giles was well fed to assure that Giles was faithful—if uncorrupted. The farm which supplied to him ungrudging provender had all his vast capacity for work in willing exercise: the farmer who held the farm his instinct revered as the fountain source of beef and bacon, to say nothing of beer, which was plentiful at Belthorpe, and good. This Farmer Blaize well knew, and he reckoned consequently that here was an animal always to be relied on—a sort of human composition out of dog, horse, and bull, a cut above each of these quadrupeds in usefulness, and costing proportionately more, but on the whole worth the money, and therefore invaluable, as everything worth its money must be to a wise man. When the stealing of grain had been made known at Belthorpe, the Bantam, a fellow-thresher with Tom Bakewell, had shared with him the shadow of the guilt. Farmer Blaize, if he hesitated which to suspect, did not debate a second as to which he would discard; and, when the Bantam said he had seen Tom secreting pilkins in a sack, Farmer Blaize chose to believe him, and off went poor Tom, told to rejoice in the clemency that spared his appearance at Sessions.

The Bantam's small sleepy orbits saw many things, and just at the right moment, it seemed. He was certainly the first to give the clue at Belthorpe on the night of the conflagration, and he may, therefore, have seen poor Tom retreating stealthily from the scene, as he averred he did. Lobourne had its say on the subject. Rustic Lobourne hinted broadly at a young woman in the case, and, moreover, told a tale of how these fellow-threshers had, in noble rivalry, one day turned upon each other to see which of the two threshed the best; whereof the Bantam still bore marks, and malice, it was said. However, there he stood, and tugged his forelocks to the company, and if Truth really had concealed herself in him she must have been hard set to find her unlikeliest hiding-place.

"Now," said the farmer, marshalling forth his elephant with the confidence of one who delivers his ace of trumps, "tell this young gentleman what ye saw on the night of the fire, Bantam!"

The Bantam jerked a bit of a bow to his patron, and then swung round, fully obscuring him from Richard.

Richard fixed his eyes on the floor, while the Bantam in rudest Doric commenced his narrative. Knowing what was to come, and thoroughly nerved to confute the main incident, Richard barely listened to his barbarous locution: but when the recital arrived at the point where the Bantam affirmed he had seen "T'm Baak'll wi's owen hoies," Richard faced him, and was amazed to find himself being mutely addressed by a series of intensely significant grimaces, signs, and winks.

"What do you mean? Why are you making those faces at me?" cried the boy indignantly.

Farmer Blaize leaned round the Bantam to have a look at him, and beheld the stolidest mask ever given to man.

"Bain't makin' no faces at nobody," growled the sulky elephant.

The farmer commanded him to face about and finish.

"A see T'm Baak'll," the Bantam recommenced, and again the contortions of a horrible wink were directed at Richard. The boy might well believe this churl was lying, and he did, and was emboldened to exclaim—

"You never saw Tom Bakewell set fire to that rick!"

The Bantam swore to it, grimacing an accompaniment.

"I tell you," said Richard, "I put the lucifers there myself!"

The suborned elephant was staggered. He meant to telegraph to the young gentleman that he was loyal and true to certain gold pieces that had been given him, and that in the right place and at the right time he should prove so. Why was he thus suspected? Why was he not understood?

“A thowt I see ‘un, then,” muttered the Bantam, trying a middle course.

This brought down on him the farmer, who roared, “Thought! Ye thought! What d’ye mean? Speak out, and don’t be thinkin’. Thought? What the devil’s that?”

“How could he see who it was on a pitch-dark night?” Richard put in.

“Thought!” the farmer bellowed louder. “Thought—Devil take ye, when ye took ye oath on’t. Hulloo! What are ye screwin’ yer eye at Mr. Feverel for?—I say, young gentleman, have you spoke to this chap before now?”

“I?” replied Richard. “I have not seen him before.”

Farmer Blaize grasped the two arms of the chair he sat on, and glared his doubts.

“Come,” said he to the Bantam, “speak out, and ha’ done wi’t. Say what ye saw, and none o’ yer thoughts. Damn yer thoughts! Ye saw Tom Bakewell fire that there rick!” The farmer pointed at some musk-pots in the window. “What business ha’ you to be a-thinkin’? You’re a witness? Thinkin’ an’t ev’dence. What’ll ye say to morrow before magistrate! Mind! what you says today, you’ll stick by to-morrow.”

Thus adjured, the Bantam hitched his breech. What on earth the young gentleman meant he was at a loss to speculate. He could not believe that the young gentleman wanted to be transported, but if he had been paid to help that, why, he would. And considering that this day’s evidence rather bound him down to the morrow’s, he determined, after much ploughing and harrowing through obstinate shocks of hair, to be not altogether positive as to the person. It is possible that he became thereby more a mansion of truth than he previously had been; for the night, as he said, was so dark that you could not see your hand before your face; and though, as he expressed it, you might be mortal sure of a man, you could not identify him upon oath, and the party he had taken for Tom Bakewell, and could have sworn to, might have been the young gentleman present, especially as he was ready to swear it upon oath.

So ended the Bantam.

No sooner had he ceased, than Farmer Blaize jumped up from his chair, and made a fine effort to lift him out of the room from the point of his toe. He failed, and sank back groaning with the pain of the exertion and disappointment.

“They’re liars, every one!” he cried. “Liars, perj’rers, bribers, and c’rrupters!—Stop!” to the Bantam, who was slinking away. “You’ve done for yerself already! You swore to it!”

“A din’t!” said the Bantam, doggedly.

“You swore to’t!” the farmer vociferated afresh.

The Bantam played a tune upon the handle of the door, and still affirmed that he did not; a double contradiction at which the farmer absolutely raged in his chair, and was hoarse, as he called out a third time that the Bantam had sworn to it.

“Noa!” said the Bantam, ducking his poll. “Noa!” he repeated in a lower note; and then, while a sombre grin betokening idiotic enjoyment of his profound casuistical quibble worked at his jaw:

“Not up’n o-ath!” he added, with a twitch of the shoulder and an angular jerk of the elbow.

Farmer Blaize looked vacantly at Richard, as if to ask him what he thought of England’s peasantry after the sample they had there. Richard would have preferred not to laugh, but his dignity gave way to his sense of the ludicrous, and he let fly a shout. The farmer was in no laughing mood. He turned a wide eye back to the door, “Lucky for’m,” he exclaimed, seeing the Bantam had vanished, for his fingers itched to break that stubborn head. He grew very puffy, and addressed Richard solemnly:

“Now, look ye here, Mr. Feverel! You’ve been a-tampering with my witness. It’s no use denyin’! I say y’ ‘ave, sir! You, or some of ye. I don’t care about no Feverel! My witness there has been bribed.

The Bantam's been bribed," and he shivered his pipe with an energetic thump on the table—"bribed! I knows it! I could swear to't!"—

"Upon oath?" Richard inquired, with a grave face.

"Ay, upon oath!" said the farmer, not observing the impertinence.

"I'd take my Bible oath on't! He's been corrupted, my principal witness! Oh! it's dam cunnin', but it won't do the trick. I'll transport Tom Bakewell, sure as a gun. He shall travel, that man shall. Sorry for you, Mr. Feverel—sorry you haven't seen how to treat me proper—you, or yours. Money won't do everything—no! it won't. It'll c'rrupt a witness, but it won't clear a felon. I'd ha' 'soused you, sir! You're a boy and'll learn better. I asked no more than payment and apology; and that I'd ha' taken content—always provided my witnesses weren't tampered with. Now you must stand yer luck, all o' ye."

Richard stood up and replied, "Very well, Mr. Blaize."

"And if," continued the farmer, "Tom Bakewell don't drag you into't after 'm, why, you're safe, as I hope ye'll be, sincere!"

"It was not in consideration of my own safety that I sought this interview with you," said Richard, head erect.

"Grant ye that," the farmer responded. "Grant ye that! Yer bold enough, young gentleman—comes of the blood that should be! If y' had only ha' spoke trewth!—I believe yer father—believe every word he said. I do wish I could ha' said as much for Sir Austin's son and heir."

"What!" cried Richard, with an astonishment hardly to be feigned, "you have seen my father?"

But Farmer Blaize had now such a scent for lies that he could detect them where they did not exist, and mumbled gruffly,

"Ay, we knows all about that!"

The boy's perplexity saved him from being irritated. Who could have told his father? An old fear of his father came upon him, and a touch of an old inclination to revolt.

"My father knows of this?" said he, very loudly, and staring, as he spoke, right through the farmer. "Who has played me false? Who would betray me to him? It was Austin! No one knew it but Austin. Yes, and it was Austin who persuaded me to come here and submit to these indignities. Why couldn't he be open with me? I shall never trust him again!"

"And why not you with me, young gentleman?" said the farmer. "I sh'd trust you if ye had."

Richard did not see the analogy. He bowed stiffly and bade him good afternoon.

Farmer Blaize pulled the bell. "Company the young gentleman out, Lucy," he waved to the little damsel in the doorway. "Do the honours. And, Mr. Richard, ye might ha' made a friend o' me, sir, and it's not too late so to do. I'm not cruel, but I hate lies. I whipped my boy Tom, bigger than you, for not bein' above board, only yesterday,—ay! made 'un stand within swing o' this chair, and take's measure. Now, if ye'll come down to me, and speak trewth before the trial—if it's only five minutes before't; or if Sir Austin, who's a gentleman, 'll say there's been no tamperin' with any o' my witnesses, his word for't—well and good! I'll do my best to help off Tom Bakewell. And I'm glad, young gentleman, you've got a conscience about a poor man, though he's a villain. Good afternoon, sir."

Richard marched hastily out of the room, and through the garden, never so much as deigning a glance at his wistful little guide, who hung at the garden gate to watch him up the lane, wondering a world of fancies about the handsome proud boy.

CHAPTER X

To have determined upon an act something akin to heroism in its way, and to have fulfilled it by lying heartily, and so subverting the whole structure built by good resolution, seems a sad downfall if we forget what human nature, in its green weedy spring, is composed of. Young Richard had quitted his cousin Austin fully resolved to do his penance and drink the bitter cup; and he had drunk it; drained many cups to the dregs; and it was to no purpose. Still they floated before him, brimmed, trebly bitter. Away from Austin's influence, he was almost the same boy who had slipped the guinea into Tom Bakewell's hand, and the lucifers into Farmer Blaize's rick. For good seed is long ripening; a good boy is not made in a minute. Enough that the seed was in him. He chafed on his road to Raynham at the scene he had just endured, and the figure of Belthorpe's fat tenant burnt like hot copper on the tablet of his brain, insufferably condescending, and, what was worse, in the right. Richard, obscured as his mind's eye was by wounded pride, saw that clearly, and hated his enemy for it the more.

Heavy Benson's tongue was knelling dinner as Richard arrived at the Abbey. He hurried up to his room to dress. Accident, or design, had laid the book of Sir Austin's aphorisms open on the dressing-table. Hastily combing his hair, Richard glanced down and read—

“The Dog returneth to his vomit: the Liar must eat his Lie.”

Underneath was interjected in pencil: “The Devil's mouthful!”

Young Richard ran downstairs feeling that his father had struck him in the face.

Sir Austin marked the scarlet stain on his son's cheekbones. He sought the youth's eye, but Richard would not look, and sat conning his plate, an abject copy of Adrian's succulent air at that employment. How could he pretend to the relish of an epicure when he was painfully endeavouring to masticate The Devil's mouthful?

Heavy Benson sat upon the wretched dinner. Hippias usually the silent member, as if awakened by the unnatural stillness, became sprightly, like the goatsucker owl at night and spoke much of his book, his digestion, and his dreams, and was spared both by Algernon and Adrian. One inconsequent dream he related, about fancying himself quite young and rich, and finding himself suddenly in a field cropping razors around him, when, just as he had, by steps dainty as those of a French dancing-master, reached the middle, he to his dismay beheld a path clear of the blood, thirsty steel-crop, which he might have taken at first had he looked narrowly; and there he was.

Hippias's brethren regarded him with eyes that plainly said they wished he had remained there. Sir Austin, however, drew forth his note-book, and jotted down a reflection. A composer of aphorisms can pluck blossoms even from a razor-prop. Was not Hippias's dream the very counterpart of Richard's position? He, had he looked narrowly, might have taken the clear path: he, too, had been making dainty steps till he was surrounded by the grinning blades. And from that text Sir Austin preached to his son when they were alone. Little Clare was still too unwell to be permitted to attend the dessert, and father and son were soon closeted together.

It was a strange meeting. They seemed to have been separated so long. The father took his son's hand; they sat without a word passing between them. Silence said most. The boy did not understand his father: his father frequently thwarted him: at times he thought his father foolish: but that paternal pressure of his hand was eloquent to him of how warmly he was beloved. He tried once or twice to steal his hand away, conscious it was melting him. The spirit of his pride, and old rebellion, whispered him to be hard, unbending, resolute. Hard he had entered his father's study: hard he had met his father's eyes. He could not meet them now. His father sat beside him gently; with a manner that was almost meekness, so he loved this boy. The poor gentleman's lips moved. He was praying internally to God for him.

By degrees an emotion awoke in the boy's bosom. Love is that blessed wand which wins the waters from the hardness of the heart. Richard fought against it, for the dignity of old rebellion. The tears would come; hot and struggling over the dams of pride. Shamefully fast they began to fall. He could no longer conceal them, or check the sobs. Sir Austin drew him nearer and nearer, till the beloved head was on his breast.

An hour afterwards, Adrian Harley, Austin Wentworth, and Algernon Feverel were summoned to the baronet's study.

Adrian came last. There was a style of affable omnipotence about the wise youth as he slung himself into a chair, and made an arch of the points of his fingers, through which to gaze on his blundering kinsmen. Careless as one may be whose sagacity has foreseen, and whose benevolent efforts have forestalled, the point of danger at the threshold, Adrian crossed his legs, and only intruded on their introductory remarks so far as to hum half audibly at intervals,

“Ripton and Richard were two pretty men,”

in parody of the old ballad. Young Richard's red eyes, and the baronet's ruffled demeanour, told him that an explanation had taken place, and a reconciliation. That was well. The baronet would now pay cheerfully. Adrian summed and considered these matters, and barely listened when the baronet called attention to what he had to say: which was elaborately to inform all present, what all present very well knew, that a rick had been fired, that his son was implicated as an accessory to the fact, that the perpetrator was now imprisoned, and that Richard's family were, as it seemed to him, bound in honour to do their utmost to effect the man's release.

Then the baronet stated that he had himself been down to Belthorpe, his son likewise: and that he had found every disposition in Blaize to meet his wishes.

The lamp which ultimately was sure to be lifted up to illumine the acts of this secretive race began slowly to disspread its rays; and, as statement followed statement, they saw that all had known of the business: that all had been down to Belthorpe: all save the wise youth Adrian, who, with due deference and a sarcastic shrug, objected to the proceeding, as putting them in the hands of the man Blaize. His wisdom shone forth in an oration so persuasive and aphoristic that had it not been based on a plea against honour, it would have made Sir Austin waver. But its basis was expediency, and the baronet had a better aphorism of his own to confute him with.

“Expediency is man's wisdom, Adrian Harley. Doing right is God's.”

Adrian curbed his desire to ask Sir Austin whether an attempt to counteract the just working of the law was doing right. The direct application of an aphorism was unpopular at Raynham.

“I am to understand then,” said he, “that Blaize consents not to press the prosecution.”

“Of course he won't,” Algernon remarked. “Confound him! he'll have his money, and what does he want besides?”

“These agricultural gentlemen are delicate customers to deal with. However, if he really consents”—

“I have his promise,” said the baronet, fondling his son.

Young Richard looked up to his father, as if he wished to speak. He said nothing, and Sir Austin took it as a mute reply to his caresses; and caressed him the more. Adrian perceived a reserve in the boy's manner, and as he was not quite satisfied that his chief should suppose him to have been the only idle, and not the most acute and vigilant member of the family, he commenced a cross-examination of him by asking who had last spoken with the tenant of Belthorpe?

“I think I saw him last,” murmured Richard, and relinquished his father's hand.

Adrian fastened on his prey. “And left him with a distinct and satisfactory assurance of his amicable intentions?”

“No,” said Richard.

“Not?” the Feverels joined in astounded chorus.

Richard sidled away from his father, and repeated a shamefaced “No.”

“Was he hostile?” inquired Adrian, smoothing his palms, and smiling.

“Yes,” the boy confessed.

Here was quite another view of their position. Adrian, generally patient of results, triumphed strongly at having evoked it, and turned upon Austin Wentworth, reproving him for inducing the boy to go down to Belthorpe. Austin looked grieved. He feared that Richard had faded in his good resolve.

“I thought it his duty to go,” he observed.

“It was!” said the baronet, emphatically.

“And you see what comes of it, sir,” Adrian struck in. “These agricultural gentlemen, I repeat, are delicate customers to deal with. For my part I would prefer being in the hands of a policeman. We are decidedly collared by Blaize. What were his words, Ricky? Give it in his own Doric.”

“He said he would transport Tom Bakewell.”

Adrian smoothed his palms, and smiled again. Then they could afford to defy Mr. Blaize, he informed them significantly, and made once more a mysterious allusion to the Punic elephant, bidding his relatives be at peace. They were attaching, in his opinion, too much importance to Richard’s complicity. The man was a fool, and a very extraordinary arsonite, to have an accomplice at all. It was a thing unknown in the annals of rick-burning. But one would be severer than law itself to say that a boy of fourteen had instigated to crime a full-grown man. At that rate the boy was ‘father of the man’ with a vengeance, and one might hear next that ‘the baby was father of the boy.’ They would find common sense a more benevolent ruler than poetical metaphysics.

When he had done, Austin, with his customary directness, asked him what he meant.

“I confess, Adrian,” said the baronet, hearing him expostulate with Austin’s stupidity, “I for one am at a loss. I have heard that this man, Bakewell, chooses voluntarily not to inculcate my son. Seldom have I heard anything that so gratified me. It is a view of innate nobleness in the rustic’s character which many a gentleman might take example from. We are bound to do our utmost for the man.” And, saying that he should pay a second visit to Belthorpe, to inquire into the reasons for the farmer’s sudden exposition of vindictiveness, Sir Austin rose.

Before he left the room, Algernon asked Richard if the farmer had vouchsafed any reasons, and the boy then spoke of the tampering with the witnesses, and the Bantam’s “Not upon oath!” which caused Adrian to choke with laughter. Even the baronet smiled at so cunning a distinction as that involved in swearing a thing, and not swearing it upon oath.

“How little,” he exclaimed, “does one yeoman know another! To elevate a distinction into a difference is the natural action of their minds. I will point that out to Blaize. He shall see that the idea is native born.”

Richard saw his father go forth. Adrian, too, was ill at ease.

“This trotting down to Belthorpe spoils all,” said he. “The affair would pass over to-morrow—Blaize has no witnesses. The old rascal is only standing out for more money.”

“No, he isn’t,” Richard corrected him. “It’s not that. I’m sure he believes his witnesses have been tampered with, as he calls it.”

“What if they have, boy?” Adrian put it boldly. “The ground is cut from under his feet.”

“Blaize told me that if my father would give his word there had been nothing of the sort, he would take it. My father will give his word.”

“Then,” said Adrian, “you had better stop him from going down.”

Austin looked at Adrian keenly, and questioned him whether he thought the farmer was justified in his suspicions. The wise youth was not to be entrapped. He had only been given to understand that the witnesses were tolerably unstable, and, like the Bantam, ready to swear lustily, but not upon the Book. How given to understand, he chose not to explain, but he reiterated that the chief should not be allowed to go down to Belthorpe.

Sir Austin was in the lane leading to the farm when he heard steps of some one running behind him. It was dark, and he shook off the hand that laid hold of his cloak, roughly, not recognizing his son.

“It’s I, sir,” said Richard panting. “Pardon me. You mustn’t go in there.”

“Why not?” said the baronet, putting his arm about him.

“Not now,” continued the boy. “I will tell you all to-night. I must see the farmer myself. It was my fault, sir. I-I lied to him—the Liar must eat his Lie. Oh, forgive me for disgracing you, sir. I did it—I hope I did it to save Tom Bakewell. Let me go in alone, and speak the truth.”

“Go, and I will wait for you here,” said his father.

The wind that bowed the old elms, and shivered the dead leaves in the air, had a voice and a meaning for the baronet during that half-hour’s lonely pacing up and down under the darkness, awaiting his boy’s return. The solemn gladness of his heart gave nature a tongue. Through the desolation flying overhead—the wailing of the Mother of Plenty across the bare-swept land—he caught intelligible signs of the beneficent order of the universe, from a heart newly confirmed in its grasp of the principle of human goodness, as manifested in the dear child who had just left him; confirmed in its belief in the ultimate victory of good within us, without which nature has neither music nor meaning, and is rock, stone, tree, and nothing more.

In the dark, the dead leaves beating on his face, he had a word for his note-book: “There is for the mind but one grasp of happiness: from that uppermost pinnacle of wisdom, whence we see that this world is well designed.”

CHAPTER XI

Of all the chief actors in the Bakewell Comedy, Master Ripton Thompson awaited the fearful morning which was to decide Tom's fate, in dolefullest mood, and suffered the gravest mental terrors. Adrian, on parting with him, had taken casual occasion to speak of the position of the criminal in modern Europe, assuring him that International Treaty now did what Universal Empire had aforetime done, and that among Atlantic barbarians now, as among the Scythians of old, an offender would find precarious refuge and an emissary haunting him.

In the paternal home, under the roofs of Law, and removed from the influence of his conscienceless young chief, the staggering nature of the act he had put his hand to, its awful felonious aspect, overwhelmed Ripton. He saw it now for the first time. "Why, it's next to murder!" he cried out to his amazed soul, and wandered about the house with a prickly skin. Thoughts of America, and commencing life afresh as an innocent gentleman, had crossed his disordered brain. He wrote to his friend Richard, proposing to collect disposable funds, and embark, in case of Tom's breaking his word, or of accidental discovery. He dared not confide the secret to his family, as his leader had sternly enjoined him to avoid any weakness of that kind; and, being by nature honest and communicative, the restriction was painful, and melancholy fell upon the boy. Mama Thompson attributed it to love.

The daughters of parchment rallied him concerning Miss Clare Forey. His hourly letters to Raynham, and silence as to everything and everybody there, his nervousness, and unwonted propensity to sudden inflammation of the cheeks, were set down for sure signs of the passion. Miss Letitia Thompson, the pretty and least parchmenty one, destined by her Papa for the heir of Raynham, and perfectly aware of her brilliant future, up to which she had, since Ripton's departure, dressed and grimaced, and studied cadences (the latter with such success, though not yet fifteen, that she languished to her maid, and melted the small factotum footman)—Miss Letty, whose insatiable thirst for intimations about the young heir Ripton could not satisfy, tormented him daily in revenge, and once, quite unconsciously, gave the lad a fearful turn; for after dinner, when Mr. Thompson read the paper by the fire, preparatory to sleeping at his accustomed post, and Mama Thompson and her submissive female brood sat tasking the swift intricacies of the needle, and emulating them with the tongue, Miss Letty stole behind Ripton's chair, and introduced between him and his book the Latin initial letter, large and illuminated, of the theme she supposed to be absorbing him, as it did herself. The unexpected vision of this accusing Captain of the Alphabet, this resplendent and haunting A. fronting him bodily, threw Ripton straight back in his chair, while Guilt, with her ancient indecision what colours to assume on detection, flew from red to white, from white to red, across his fallen chaps. Letty laughed triumphantly. Amor, the word she had in mind, certainly has a connection with Arson.

But the delivery of a letter into Master Ripton's hands, furnished her with other and likelier appearances to study. For scarce had Ripton plunged his head into the missive than he gave way to violent transports, such as the healthy-minded little damsel, for all her languishing cadences, deemed she really could express were a downright declaration to be made to her. The boy did not stop at table. Quickly recollecting the presence of his family, he rushed to his own room. And now the girl's ingenuity was taxed to gain possession of that letter. She succeeded, of course, she being a huntress with few scruples and the game unguarded. With the eyes of amazement she read this foreign matter:

"Dear Ripton,—If Tom had been committed I would have shot old Blaize. Do you know my father was behind us that night when Clare saw the ghost and heard all we said before the fire burst out. It is no use trying to conceal anything from him. Well as you are in an awful state I will tell you all about it. After you left Ripton I had a conversation with Austin and he persuaded me to go down to old Blaize and ask him to help off Tom. I went for I would have done anything for Tom after what he said to Austin and I defied the old churl to do his worst. Then he said if my father paid the money and nobody had tampered with his witnesses he would not mind if Tom did get off and he had his

chief witness in called the Bantam very like his master I think and the Bantam began winking at me tremendously as you say, and said he had sworn he saw Tom Bakewell but not upon oath. He meant not on the Bible. He could swear to it but not on the Bible. I burst out laughing and you should have seen the rage old Blaize was in. It was splendid fun. Then we had a consultation at home Austin Rady my father Uncle Algernon who has come down to us again and your friend in prosperity and adversity R.D.F. My father said he would go down to old Blaize and give him the word of a gentleman we had not tampered with his witnesses and when he was gone we were all talking and Rady says he must not see the farmer. I am as certain as I live that it was Rady bribed the Bantam. Well I ran and caught up my father and told him not to go in to old Blaize but I would and eat my words and tell him the truth. He waited for me in the lane. Never mind what passed between me and old Blaize. He made me beg and pray of him not to press it against Tom and then to complete it he brought in a little girl a niece of his and says to me, she's your best friend after all and told me to thank her. A little girl twelve years of age. What business had she to mix herself up in my matters. Depend upon it Ripton, wherever there is mischief there are girls I think. She had the insolence to notice my face, and ask me not to be unhappy. I was polite of course but I would not look at her. Well the morning came and Tom was had up before Sir Miles Papworth. It was Sir Miles gout gave us the time or Tom would have been had up before we could do anything. Adrian did not want me to go but my father said I should accompany him and held my hand all the time. I shall be careful about getting into these scrapes again. When you have done anything honourable you do not mind but getting among policemen and magistrates makes you ashamed of yourself. Sir Miles was very attentive to my father and me and dead against Tom. We sat beside him and Tom was brought in, Sir Miles told my father that if there was one thing that showed a low villain it was rick-burning. What do you think of that. I looked him straight in the face and he said to me he was doing me a service in getting Tom committed and clearing the country of such fellows and Rady began laughing. I hate Rady. My father said his son was not in haste to inherit and have estates of his own to watch and Sir Miles laughed too. I thought we were discovered at first. Then they began the examination of Tom. The Tinker was the first witness and he proved that Tom had spoken against old Blaize and said something about burning his rick. I wished I had stood in the lane to Bursley with him alone. Our country lawyer we engaged for Tom cross-questioned him and then he said he was not ready to swear to the exact words that had passed between him and Tom. I should think not. Then came another who swore he had seen Tom lurking about the farmer's grounds that night. Then came the Bantam and I saw him look at Rady. I was tremendously excited and my father kept pressing my hand. Just fancy my being brought to feel that a word from that fellow would make me miserable for life and he must perjure himself to help me. That comes of giving way to passion. My father says when we do that we are calling in the devil as doctor. Well the Bantam was told to state what he had seen and the moment he began Rady who was close by me began to shake and he was laughing I knew though his face was as grave as Sir Miles. You never heard such a rigmarole but I could not laugh. He said he thought he was certain he had seen somebody by the rick and it was Tom Bakewell who was the only man he knew who had a grudge against Farmer Blaize and if the object had been a little bigger he would not mind swearing to Tom and would swear to him for he was dead certain it was Tom only what he saw looked smaller and it was pitch-dark at the time. He was asked what time it was he saw the person steal away from the rick and then he began to scratch his head and said supper-time. Then they asked what time he had supper and he said nine o'clock by the clock and we proved that at nine o'clock Tom was drinking in the ale-house with the Tinker at Bursley and Sir Miles swore and said he was afraid he could not commit Tom and when he heard that Tom looked up at me and I say he is a noble fellow and no one shall sneer at Tom while I live. Mind that. Well Sir Miles asked us to dine with him and Tom was safe and I am to have him and educate him if I like for my servant and I will. And I will give money to his mother and make her rich and he shall never repent he knew me. I say Rip. The Bantam must have seen me. It was when I went to stick in the lucifers. As we were all going home from Sir Miles's at night he has lots of red-

faced daughters but I did not dance with them though they had music and were full of fun and I did not care to I was so delighted and almost let it out. When we left and rode home Rady said to my father the Bantam was not such a fool as he was thought and my father said one must be in a state of great personal exaltation to apply that epithet to any man and Rady shut his mouth and I gave my pony a clap of the heel for joy. I think my father suspects what Rady did and does not approve of it. And he need not have done it after all and might have spoilt it. I have been obliged to order him not to call me Ricky for he stops short at Rick so that everybody knows what he means. My dear Austin is going to South America. My pony is in capital condition. My father is the cleverest and best man in the world. Clare is a little better. I am quite happy. I hope we shall meet soon my dear Old Rip and we will not get into any more tremendous scrapes will we.—I remain,

"Your sworn friend,

"RICHARD DORIA FEVEREL."

"P.S. I am to have a nice River Yacht. Good-bye, Rip. Mind you learn to box. Mind you are not to show this to any of your friends on pain of my displeasure.

"N.B. Lady B. was so angry when I told her that I had not come to her before. She would do anything in the world for me. I like her next best to my father and Austin. Good-bye old Rip."

Poor little Letitia, after three perusals of this ingenuous epistle, where the laws of punctuation were so disregarded, resigned it to one of the pockets of her brother Ripton's best jacket, deeply smitten with the careless composer. And so ended the last act of the Bakewell Comedy, in which the curtain closes with Sir Austin's pointing out to his friends the beneficial action of the System in it from beginning to end.

CHAPTER XII

Laying of ghosts is a public duty, and, as the mystery of the apparition that had frightened little Clare was never solved on the stage of events at Raynham, where dread walked the Abbey, let us go behind the scenes a moment. Morally superstitious as the baronet was, the character of his mind was opposed to anything like spiritual agency in the affairs of men, and, when the matter was made clear to him, it shook off a weight of weakness and restored his mental balance; so that from this time he went about more like the man he had once been, grasping more thoroughly the great truth, that This World is well designed. Nay, he could laugh on hearing Adrian, in reminiscence of the ill luck of one of the family members at its first manifestation, call the uneasy spirit, Algernon's Leg.

Mrs. Doria was outraged. She maintained that her child had seen —. Not to believe in it was almost to rob her of her personal property. After satisfactorily studying his old state of mind in her, Sir Austin, moved by pity, took her aside one day and showed her that her Ghost could write words in the flesh. It was a letter from the unhappy lady who had given Richard birth,—brief cold lines, simply telling him his house would be disturbed by her no more. Cold lines, but penned by what heart-broken abnegation, and underlying them with what anguish of soul! Like most who dealt with him, Lady Feverel thought her husband a man fatally stern and implacable, and she acted as silly creatures will act when they fancy they see a fate against them: she neither petitioned for her right nor claimed it: she tried to ease her heart's yearning by stealth, and, now she renounced all. Mrs. Doria, not wanting in the family tenderness and softness, shuddered at him for accepting the sacrifice so composedly: but he bade her to think how distracting to this boy would be the sight of such relations between mother and father. A few years, and as man he should know, and judge, and love her. "Let this be her penance, not inflicted by me!" Mrs. Doria bowed to the System for another, not opining when it would be her turn to bow for herself.

Further behind the scenes we observe Rizzio and Mary grown older, much disenchanted: she discrowned, dishevelled,—he with gouty fingers on a greasy guitar. The Diaper Sandoe of promise lends his pen for small hires. His fame has sunk; his bodily girth has sensibly increased. What he can do, and will do, is still his theme; meantime the juice of the juniper is in requisition, and it seems that those small hires cannot be performed without it. Returning from her wretched journey to her wretcheder home, the lady had to listen to a mild reproof from easy-going Diaper,—a reproof so mild that he couched it in blank verse: for, seldom writing metrically now, he took to talking it. With a fluent sympathetic tear, he explained to her that she was damaging her interests by these proceedings; nor did he shrink from undertaking to elucidate wherefore. Pluming a smile upon his succulent mouth, he told her that the poverty she lived in was utterly unbefitting her gentle nurture, and that he had reason to believe—could assure her—that an annuity was on the point of being granted her by her husband. And Diaper broke his bud of a smile into full flower as he delivered this information. She learnt that he had applied to her husband for money. It is hard to have one's prop of self-respect cut away just when we are suffering a martyr's agony at the stake. There was a five minutes' tragic colloquy in the recesses behind the scenes,—totally tragic to Diaper, who had fondly hoped to bask in the warm sun of that annuity, and re-emerge from his state of grub. The lady then wrote the letter Sir Austin held open to his sister. The atmosphere behind the scenes is not wholesome, so, having laid the Ghost, we will return and face the curtain.

That infinitesimal dose of The World which Master Ripton Thompson had furnished to the System with such instantaneous and surprising effect was considered by Sir Austin to have worked well, and to be for the time quite sufficient, so that Ripton did not receive a second invitation to Raynham, and Richard had no special intimate of his own age to rub his excessive vitality against, and wanted none. His hands were full enough with Tom Bakewell. Moreover, his father and he were heart in heart. The boy's mind was opening, and turned to his father affectionately reverent. At this

period, when the young savage grows into higher influences, the faculty of worship is foremost in him. At this period Jesuits will stamp the future of their chargin' flocks; and all who bring up youth by a System, and watch it, know that it is the malleable moment. Boys possessing any mental or moral force to give them a tendency, then predestinate their careers; or, if under supervision, take the impress that is given them: not often to cast it off, and seldom to cast it off altogether.

In Sir Austin's Note-book was written: "Between Simple Boyhood and Adolescence—The Blossoming Season—on the threshold of Puberty, there is one Unselfish Hour—say, Spiritual Seed-time."

He took care that good seed should be planted in Richard, and that the most fruitful seed for a youth, namely, Example, should be of a kind to germinate in him the love of every form of nobleness.

"I am only striving to make my son a Christian," he said, answering them who persisted in expostulating with the System. And to these instructions he gave an aim: "First be virtuous," he told his son, "and then serve your country with heart and soul." The youth was instructed to cherish an ambition for statesmanship, and he and his father read history and the speeches of British orators to some purpose; for one day Sir Austin found him leaning cross-legged, and with his hand to his chin, against a pedestal supporting the bust of Chatham, contemplating the hero of our Parliament, his eyes streaming with tears.

People said the baronet carried the principle of Example so far that he only retained his boozing dyspeptic brother Hippias at Raynham in order to exhibit to his son the woeful retribution nature wreaked upon a life of indulgence; poor Hippias having now become a walking complaint. This was unjust, but there is no doubt he made use of every illustration to disgust or encourage his son that his neighbourhood afforded him, and did not spare his brother, for whom Richard entertained a contempt in proportion to his admiration of his father, and was for flying into penitential extremes which Sir Austin had to soften.

The boy prayed with his father morning and night.

"How is it, sir," he said one night, "I can't get Tom Bakewell to pray?"

"Does he refuse?" Sir Austin asked.

"He seems to be ashamed to," Richard replied. "He wants to know what is the good? and I don't know what to tell him."

"I'm afraid it has gone too far with him," said Sir Austin, "and until he has had some deep sorrows he will not find the divine want of Prayer. Strive, my son, when you represent the people, to provide for their education. He feels everything now through a dull impenetrable rind. Culture is half-way to heaven. Tell him, my son, should he ever be brought to ask how he may know the efficacy of Prayer, and that his prayer will be answered, tell him (he quoted The Pilgrim's Scrip):

"Who rises from Prayer a better man, his prayer is answered."

"I will, sir," said Richard, and went to sleep happy.

Happy in his father and in himself, the youth now lived. Conscience was beginning to inhabit him, and he carried some of the freightage known to men; though in so crude a form that it overweighed him, now on this side, now on that.

The wise youth Adrian observed these further progressionary developments in his pupil, soberly cynical. He was under Sir Austin's interdict not to banter him, and eased his acrid humours inspired by the sight of a felonious young rick-burner turning saint, by grave affectations of sympathy and extreme accuracy in marking the not widely-distant dates of his various changes. The Bread-and-water phase lasted a fortnight: the Vegetarian (an imitation of his cousin Austin), little better than a month: the religious, somewhat longer: the religious-propagandist (when he was for converting the heathen of Lobourne and Burnley, and the domestics of the Abbey, including Tom Bakewell), longer still, and hard to bear;—he tried to convert Adrian! All the while Tom was being exercised like a raw recruit. Richard had a drill-sergeant from the nearest barracks down for him, to give him a proper pride in himself, and marched him to and fro with immense satisfaction, and nearly broke his heart

trying to get the round-shouldered rustic to take in the rudiments of letters: for the boy had unbounded hopes for Tom, as a hero in grain.

Richard's pride also was cast aside. He affected to be, and really thought he was, humble. Whereupon Adrian, as by accident, imparted to him the fact that men were animals, and he an animal with the rest of them.

"I an animal!" cries Richard in scorn, and for weeks he was as troubled by this rudiment of self-knowledge as Tom by his letters. Sir Austin had him instructed in the wonders of anatomy, to restore his self-respect.

Seed-Time passed thus smoothly, and adolescence came on, and his cousin Clare felt what it was to be of an opposite sex to him. She too was growing, but nobody cared how she grew. Outwardly even her mother seemed absorbed in the sprouting of the green off-shoot of the Feverel tree, and Clare was his handmaiden, little marked by him.

Lady Blandish honestly loved the boy. She would tell him: "If I had been a girl, I would have had you for my husband." And he with the frankness of his years would reply: "And how do you know I would have had you?" causing her to laugh and call him a silly boy, for had he not heard her say she would have had him? Terrible words, he knew not then the meaning of!

"You don't read your father's Book," she said. Her own copy was bound in purple velvet, gilt-edged, as decorative ladies like to have holier books, and she carried it about with her, and quoted it, and (Adrian remarked to Mrs. Doria) hunted a noble quarry, and deliberately aimed at him therewith, which Mrs. Doria chose to believe, and regretted her brother would not be on his guard.

"See here," said Lady Blandish, pressing an almondy finger-nail to one of the Aphorisms, which instanced how age and adversity must clay-enclose us ere we can effectually resist the magnetism of any human creature in our path. "Can you understand it, child?"

Richard informed her that when she read he could.

"Well, then, my squire," she touched his cheek and ran her fingers through his hair, "learn as quick as you can not to be all hither and yon with a hundred different attractions, as I was before I met a wise man to guide me."

"Is my father very wise?" Richard asked.

"I think so," the lady emphasized her individual judgment.

"Do you—" Richard broke forth, and was stopped by a beating of his heart.

"Do I—what?" she calmly queried.

"I was going to say, do you—I mean, I love him so much."

Lady Blandish smiled and slightly coloured.

They frequently approached this theme, and always retreated from it; always with the same beating of heart to Richard, accompanied by the sense of a growing mystery, which, however, did not as yet generally disturb him.

Life was made very pleasant to him at Raynham, as it was part of Sir Austin's principle of education that his boy should be thoroughly joyous and happy; and whenever Adrian sent in a satisfactory report of his pupil's advancement, which he did pretty liberally, diversions were planned, just as prizes are given to diligent school-boys, and Richard was supposed to have all his desires gratified while he attended to his studies. The System flourished. Tall, strong, bloomingly healthy, he took the lead of his companions on land and water, and had more than one bondsman in his service besides Ripton Thompson—the boy without a Destiny! Perhaps the boy with a Destiny was growing up a trifle too conscious of it. His generosity to his occasional companions was princely, but was exercised something too much in the manner of a prince; and, notwithstanding his contempt for baseness, he would overlook that more easily than an offence to his pride, which demanded an utter servility when it had once been rendered susceptible. If Richard had his followers he had also his feuds. The Papworths were as subservient as Ripton, but young Ralph Morton, the nephew of Mr. Morton, and a match for Richard in numerous promising qualities, comprising the noble science of

fisticuffs, this youth spoke his mind too openly, and moreover would not be snubbed. There was no middle course for Richard's comrades between high friendship or absolute slavery. He was deficient in those cosmopolite habits and feelings which enable boys and men to hold together without caring much for each other; and, like every insulated mortal, he attributed the deficiency, of which he was quite aware, to the fact of his possessing a superior nature. Young Ralph was a lively talker: therefore, argued Richard's vanity, he had no intellect. He was affable: therefore he was frivolous. The women liked him: therefore he was a butterfly. In fine, young Ralph was popular, and our superb prince, denied the privilege of despising, ended by detesting him.

Early in the days of their contention for leadership, Richard saw the absurdity of affecting to scorn his rival. Ralph was an Eton boy, and hence, being robust, a swimmer and a cricketer. A swimmer and a cricketer is nowhere to be scorned in youth's republic. Finding that manoeuvre would not do, Richard was prompted once or twice to entrench himself behind his greater wealth and his position; but he soon abandoned that also, partly because his chilliness to ridicule told him he was exposing himself, and chiefly that his heart was too chivalrous. And so he was dragged into the lists by Ralph, and experienced the luck of champions. For cricket, and for diving, Ralph bore away the belt: Richard's middle-stump tottered before his ball, and he could seldom pick up more than three eggs underwater to Ralph's half-dozen. He was beaten, too, in jumping and running. Why will silly mortals strive to the painful pinnacles of championship? Or why, once having reached them, not have the magnanimity and circumspection to retire into private life immediately? Stung by his defeats, Richard sent one of his dependent Papworths to Poer Hall, with a challenge to Ralph Barthrop Morton; matching himself to swim across the Thames and back, once, trice, or thrice, within a less time than he, Ralph Barthrop Morton, would require for the undertaking. It was accepted, and a reply returned, equally formal in the trumpeting of Christian names, wherein Ralph Barthrop Morton acknowledged the challenge of Richard Doria Feverel, and was his man. The match came off on a midsummer morning, under the direction of Captain Algernon. Sir Austin was a spectator from the cover of a plantation by the river-side, unknown to his son, and, to the scandal of her sex, Lady Blandish accompanied the baronet. He had invited her attendance, and she, obeying her frank nature, and knowing what *The Pilgrim's Scrip* said about prudes, at once agreed to view the match, pleasing him mightily. For was not here a woman worthy the Golden Ages of the world? one who could look upon man as a creature divinely made, and look with a mind neither tempted, nor taunted, by the Serpent! Such a woman was rare. Sir Austin did not discompose her by uttering his praises. She was conscious of his approval only in an increased gentleness of manner, and something in his voice and communications, as if he were speaking to a familiar, a very high compliment from him. While the lads were standing ready for the signal to plunge from the steep decline of greensward into the shining waters, Sir Austin called upon her to admire their beauty, and she did, and even advanced her head above his shoulder delicately. In so doing, and just as the start was given, a bonnet became visible to Richard. Young Ralph was heels in air before he moved, and then he dropped like lead. He was beaten by several lengths.

The result of the match was unaccountable to all present, and Richard's friends unanimously pressed him to plead a false start. But though the youth, with full confidence in his better style and equal strength, had backed himself heavily against his rival, and had lost his little river-yacht to Ralph, he would do nothing of the sort. It was the Bonnet had beaten him, not Ralph. The Bonnet, typical of the mystery that caused his heart those violent palpitations, was his dear, detestable enemy.

And now, as he progressed from mood to mood, his ambition turned towards a field where Ralph could not rival him, and where the Bonnet was etherealized, and reigned glorious mistress. A cheek to the pride of a boy will frequently divert him to the path where lie his subtlest powers. Richard gave up his companions, servile or antagonistic: he relinquished the material world to young Ralph, and retired into himself, where he was growing to be lord of kingdoms where Beauty was his handmaid, and History his minister and Time his ancient harper, and sweet Romance his bride;

where he walked in a realm vaster and more gorgeous than the great Orient, peopled with the heroes that have been. For there is no princely wealth, and no loftiest heritage, to equal this early one that is made bountifully common to so many, when the ripening blood has put a spark to the imagination, and the earth is seen through rosy mists of a thousand fresh-awakened nameless and aimless desires; panting for bliss and taking it as it comes; making of any sight or sound, perforce of the enchantment they carry with them, a key to infinite, because innocent, pleasure. The passions then are gambolling cubs; not the ravaging gluttons they grow to. They have their teeth and their talons, but they neither tear nor bite. They are in counsel and fellowship with the quickened heart and brain. The whole sweet system moves to music.

Something akin to the indications of a change in the spirit of his son, which were now seen, Sir Austin had marked down to be expected, as due to his plan. The blushes of the youth, his long vigils, his clinging to solitude, his abstraction, and downcast but not melancholy air, were matters for rejoicing to the prescient gentleman. "For it comes," said he to Dr. Clifford of Lobourne, after consulting him medically on the youth's behalf and being assured of his soundness, "it comes of a thoroughly sane condition. The blood is healthy, the mind virtuous: neither instigates the other to evil, and both are perfecting toward the flower of manhood. If he reach that pure—in the untainted fulness and perfection of his natural powers—I am indeed a happy father! But one thing he will owe to me: that at one period of his life he knew paradise, and could read God's handwriting on the earth! Now those abominations whom you call precocious boys—your little pet monsters, doctor!—and who can wonder that the world is what it is? when it is full of them—as they will have no divine time to look back upon in their own lives, how can they believe in innocence and goodness, or be other than sons of selfishness and the Devil? But my boy," and the baronet dropped his voice to a key that was touching to hear, "my boy, if he fall, will fall from an actual region of purity. He dare not be a sceptic as to that. Whatever his darkness, he will have the guiding light of a memory behind him. So much is secure."

To talk nonsense, or poetry, or the dash between the two, in a tone of profound sincerity, and to enunciate solemn discordances with received opinion so seriously as to convey the impression of a spiritual insight, is the peculiar gift by which monomaniacs, having first persuaded themselves, contrive to influence their neighbours, and through them to make conquest of a good half of the world, for good or for ill. Sir Austin had this gift. He spoke as if he saw the truth, and, persisting in it so long, he was accredited by those who did not understand him, and silenced them that did.

"We shall see," was all the argument left to Dr. Clifford, and other unbelievers.

So far certainly the experiment had succeeded. A comelier, bracer, better boy was nowhere to be met. His promise was undeniable. The vessel, too, though it lay now in harbour and had not yet been proved by the buffets of the elements on the great ocean, had made a good trial trip, and got well through stormy weather, as the records of the Bakewell Comedy witnessed to at Raynham. No augury could be hopefuller. The Fates must indeed be hard, the Ordeal severe, the Destiny dark, that could destroy so bright a Spring! But, bright as it was, the baronet relaxed nothing of his vigilant supervision. He said to his intimates: "Every act, every fostered inclination, almost every thought, in this Blossoming Season, bears its seed for the Future. The living Tree now requires incessant watchfulness." And, acting up to his light, Sir Austin did watch. The youth submitted to an examination every night before he sought his bed; professedly to give an account of his studies, but really to recapitulate his moral experiences of the day. He could do so, for he was pure. Any wildness in him that his father noted, any remoteness or richness of fancy in his expressions, was set down as incidental to the Blossoming Season. There is nothing like a theory for binding the wise. Sir Austin, despite his rigid watch and ward, knew less of his son than the servant of his household. And he was deaf, as well as blind. Adrian thought it his duty to tell him that the youth was consuming paper. Lady Blandish likewise hinted at his mooning propensities. Sir Austin from his lofty watch-tower of the System had foreseen it, he said. But when he came to hear that the youth was writing poetry, his wounded heart had its reasons for being much disturbed.

“Surely,” said Lady Blandish, “you knew he scribbled?”

“A very different thing from writing poetry,” said the baronet. “No Feverel has ever written poetry.”

“I don’t think it’s a sign of degeneracy,” the lady remarked. “He rhymes very prettily to me.”

A London phrenologist, and a friendly Oxford Professor of poetry, quieted Sir Austin’s fears.

The phrenologist said he was totally deficient in the imitative faculty; and the Professor, that he was equally so in the rhythmic, and instanced several consoling false quantities in the few effusions submitted to him. Added to this, Sir Austin told Lady Blandish that Richard had, at his best, done what no poet had ever been known to be capable of doing: he had, with his own hands, and in cold blood, committed his virgin manuscript to the flames: which made Lady Blandish sigh forth, “Poor boy!”

Killing one’s darling child is a painful imposition. For a youth in his Blossoming Season, who fancies himself a poet, to be requested to destroy his first-born, without a reason (though to pretend a reason cogent enough to justify the request were a mockery), is a piece of abhorrent despotism, and Richard’s blossoms withered under it. A strange man had been introduced to him, who traversed and bisected his skull with sagacious stiff fingers, and crushed his soul while, in an infallible voice, declaring him the animal he was making him feel such an animal! Not only his blossoms withered, his being seemed to draw in its shoots and twigs. And when, coupled thereunto (the strange man having departed, his work done), his father, in his tenderest manner, stated that it would give him pleasure to see those same precocious, utterly valueless, scribblings among the cinders, the last remaining mental blossoms spontaneously fell away. Richard’s spirit stood bare. He protested not. Enough that it could be wished! He would not delay a minute in doing it. Desiring his father to follow him, he went to a drawer in his room, and from a clean-linen recess, never suspected by Sir Austin, the secretive youth drew out bundle after bundle: each neatly tied, named, and numbered: and pitched them into flames. And so Farewell my young Ambition! and with it farewell all true confidence between Father and Son.

CHAPTER XIII

It was now, as Sir Austin had written it down, The Magnetic Age: the Age of violent attractions, when to hear mention of love is dangerous, and to see it, a communication of the disease. People at Raynham were put on their guard by the baronet, and his reputation for wisdom was severely criticized in consequence of the injunctions he thought fit to issue through butler and housekeeper down to the lower household, for the preservation of his son from any visible symptom of the passion. A footman and two housemaids are believed to have been dismissed on the report of heavy Benson that they were in or inclining to the state; upon which an undercook and a dairymaid voluntarily threw up their places, averring that “they did not want no young men, but to have their sex spied after by an old wretch like that,” indicating the ponderous butler, “was a little too much for a Christian woman,” and then they were ungenerous enough to glance at Benson’s well-known marital calamity, hinting that some men met their deserts. So intolerable did heavy Benson’s espionage become, that Raynham would have grown depopulated of its womankind had not Adrian interfered, who pointed out to the baronet what a fearful arm his butler was wielding. Sir Austin acknowledged it despondently. “It only shows,” said he, with a fine spirit of justice, “how all but impossible it is to legislate where there are women!”

“I do not object,” he added; “I hope I am too just to object to the exercise of their natural inclinations. All I ask from them is discreetness.”

“Ay,” said Adrian, whose discreetness was a marvel.

“No gadding about in couples,” continued the baronet, “no kissing in public. Such occurrences no boy should witness. Whenever people of both sexes are thrown together, they will be silly; and where they are high-fed, uneducated, and barely occupied, it must be looked for as a matter of course. Let it be known that I only require discreetness.”

Discreetness, therefore, was instructed to reign at the Abbey. Under Adrian’s able tuition the fairest of its domestics acquired that virtue.

Discreetness, too, was enjoined to the upper household. Sir Austin, who had not previously appeared to notice the case of Lobourne’s hopeless curate, now desired Mrs. Doria to interdict, or at least discourage, his visits, for the appearance of the man was that of an embodied sigh and groan.

“Really, Austin!” said Mrs. Doria, astonished to find her brother more awake than she had supposed, “I have never allowed him to hope.”

“Let him see it, then,” replied the baronet; “let him see it.”

“The man amuses me,” said Mrs. Doria. “You know, we have few amusements here, we inferior creatures. I confess I should like a barrel-organ better; that reminds one of town and the opera; and besides, it plays more than one tune. However, since you think my society bad for him, let him stop away.”

With the self-devotion of a woman she grew patient and sweet the moment her daughter Clare was spoken of, and the business of her life in view. Mrs. Doria’s maternal heart had betrothed the two cousins, Richard and Clare; had already beheld them espoused and fruitful. For this she yielded the pleasures of town; for this she immured herself at Raynham; for this she bore with a thousand follies, exactions, inconveniences, things abhorrent to her, and heaven knows what forms of torture and self-denial, which are smilingly endured by that greatest of voluntary martyrs—a mother with a daughter to marry. Mrs. Doria, an amiable widow, had surely married but for her daughter Clare. The lady’s hair no woman could possess without feeling it her pride. It was the daily theme of her lady’s-maid,—a natural aureole to her head. She was gay, witty, still physically youthful enough to claim a destiny; and she sacrificed it to accomplish her daughter’s! sacrificed, as with heroic scissors, hair, wit, gaiety—let us not attempt to enumerate how much! more than may be said. And she was only one of thousands; thousands who have no portion of the hero’s reward; for he may reckon on

applause, and condolence, and sympathy, and honour; they, poor slaves! must look for nothing but the opposition of their own sex and the sneers of ours. O, Sir Austin! had you not been so blinded, what an Aphorism might have sprung from this point of observation! Mrs. Doria was coolly told, between sister and brother, that during the Magnetic Age her daughter's presence at Raynham was undesirable. Instead of nursing offence, her sole thought was the mountain of prejudice she had to contend against. She bowed, and said, Clare wanted sea-air—she had never quite recovered the shock of that dreadful night. How long, Mrs. Doria wished to know, might the Peculiar Period be expected to last?

"That," said Sir Austin, "depends. A year, perhaps. He is entering on it. I shall be most grieved to lose you, Helen. Clare is now—how old?"

"Seventeen."

"She is marriageable."

"Marriageable, Austin! at seventeen! don't name such a thing. My child shall not be robbed of her youth."

"Our women marry early, Helen."

"My child shall not!"

The baronet reflected a moment. He did not wish to lose his sister.

"As you are of that opinion, Helen," said he, "perhaps we may still make arrangements to retain you with us. Would you think it advisable to send Clare—she should know discipline—to some establishment for a few months?"

"To an asylum, Austin?" cried Mrs. Doria, controlling her indignation as well as she could.

"To some select superior seminary, Helen. There are such to be found."

"Austin!" Mrs. Doria exclaimed, and had to fight with a moisture in her eyes. "Unjust! absurd!" she murmured. The baronet thought it a natural proposition that Clare should be a bride or a schoolgirl.

"I cannot leave my child." Mrs. Doria trembled. "Where she goes, I go. I am aware that she is only one of our sex, and therefore of no value to the world, but she is my child. I will see, poor dear, that you have no cause to complain of her."

"I thought," Sir Austin remarked, "that you acquiesced in my views with regard to my son."

"Yes—generally," said Mrs. Doria, and felt culpable that she had not before, and could not then, tell her brother that he had set up an Idol in his house—an Idol of flesh! more retributive and abominable than wood or brass or gold. But she had bowed to the Idol too long—she had too entirely bound herself to gain her project by subserviency. She had, and she dimly perceived it, committed a greater fault in tactics, in teaching her daughter to bow to the Idol also. Love of that kind Richard took for tribute. He was indifferent to Clare's soft eyes. The parting kiss he gave her was ready and cold as his father could desire. Sir Austin now grew eloquent to him in laudation of manly pursuits: but Richard thought his eloquence barren, his attempts at companionship awkward, and all manly pursuits and aims, life itself, vain and worthless. To what end? sighed the blossomless youth, and cried aloud, as soon as he was relieved of his father's society, what was the good of anything? Whatever he did—whichever path he selected, led back to Raynham. And whatever he did, however wretched and wayward he showed himself, only confirmed Sir Austin more and more in the truth of his previsions. Tom Bakewell, now the youth's groom, had to give the baronet a report of his young master's proceedings, in common with Adrian, and while there was no harm to tell, Tom spoke out. "He do ride like fire every day to Pig's Snout," naming the highest hill in the neighbourhood, "and stand there and stare, never movin', like a mad 'un. And then hoam agin all slack as if he'd been beaten in a race by somebody."

"There is no woman in that!" mused the baronet. "He would have ridden back as hard as he went," reflected this profound scientific humanist, "had there been a woman in it. He would shun vast expanses, and seek shade, concealment, solitude. The desire for distances betokens emptiness and undirected hunger: when the heart is possessed by an image we fly to wood and forest, like the guilty."

Adrian's report accused his pupil of an extraordinary access of cynicism.

“Exactly,” said the baronet. “As I foresaw. At this period an insatiate appetite is accompanied by a fastidious palate. Nothing but the quintessences of existence, and those in exhaustless supplies, will satisfy this craving, which is not to be satisfied! Hence his bitterness. Life can furnish no food fitting for him. The strength and purity of his energies have reached to an almost divine height, and roam through the Inane. Poetry, love, and such-like, are the drugs earth has to offer to high natures, as she offers to low ones debauchery. ‘Tis a sign, this sourness, that he is subject to none of the empiricisms that are afloat. Now to keep him clear of them!”

The Titans had an easier task in storming Olympus. As yet, however, it could not be said that Sir Austin’s System had failed. On the contrary, it had reared a youth, handsome, intelligent, well-bred, and, observed the ladies, with acute emphasis, innocent. Where, they asked, was such another young man to be found?

“Oh!” said Lady Blandish to Sir Austin, “if men could give their hands to women unsoiled—how different would many a marriage be! She will be a happy girl who calls Richard husband.”

“Happy, indeed!” was the baronet’s caustic ejaculation. “But where shall I meet one equal to him, and his match?”

“I was innocent when I was a girl,” said the lady.

Sir Austin bowed a reserved opinion.

“Do you think no girls innocent?”

Sir Austin gallantly thought them all so.

“No, that you know they are not,” said the lady, stamping. “But they are more innocent than boys, I am sure.”

“Because of their education, madam. You see now what a youth can be. Perhaps, when my System is published, or rather—to speak more humbly—when it is practised, the balance may be restored, and we shall have virtuous young men.”

“It’s too late for poor me to hope for a husband from one of them,” said the lady, pouting and laughing.

“It is never too late for beauty to waken love,” returned the baronet, and they trifled a little. They were approaching Daphne’s Bower, which they entered, and sat there to taste the coolness of a descending midsummer day.

The baronet seemed in a humour for dignified fooling; the lady for serious converse.

“I shall believe again in Arthur’s knights,” she said. “When I was a girl I dreamed of one.”

“And he was in quest of the San Greal?”

“If you like.”

“And showed his good taste by turning aside for the more tangible San Blandish?”

“Of course you consider it would have been so,” sighed the lady, ruffling.

“I can only judge by our generation,” said Sir Austin, with a bend of homage.

The lady gathered her mouth. “Either we are very mighty or you are very weak.”

“Both, madam.”

“But whatever we are, and if we are bad, bad! we love virtue, and truth, and lofty souls, in men: and, when we meet those qualities in them, we are constant, and would die for them—die for them. Ah! you know men but not women.”

“The knights possessing such distinctions must be young, I presume?” said Sir Austin.

“Old, or young!”

“But if old, they are scarce capable of enterprise?”

“They are loved for themselves, not for their deeds.”

“Ah!”

“Yes—ah!” said the lady. “Intellect may subdue women—make slaves of them; and they worship beauty perhaps as much as you do. But they only love for ever and are mated when they meet a noble nature.”

Sir Austin looked at her wistfully.

“And did you encounter the knight of your dream?”

“Not then.” She lowered her eyelids. It was prettily done.

“And how did you bear the disappointment?”

“My dream was in the nursery. The day my frock was lengthened to a gown I stood at the altar. I am not the only girl that has been made a woman in a day, and given to an ogre instead of a true knight.”

“Good God!” exclaimed Sir Austin, “women have much to bear.”

Here the couple changed characters. The lady became gay as the baronet grew earnest.

“You know it is our lot,” she said. “And we are allowed many amusements. If we fulfil our duty in producing children, that, like our virtue, is its own reward. Then, as a widow, I have wonderful privileges.”

“To preserve which, you remain a widow?”

“Certainly,” she responded. “I have no trouble now in patching and piecing that rag the world calls—a character. I can sit at your feet every day unquestioned. To be sure, others do the same, but they are female eccentrics, and have cast off the rag altogether.”

Sir Austin drew nearer to her. “You would have made an admirable mother, madam.”

This from Sir Austin was very like positive wooing.

“It is,” he continued, “ten thousand pities that you are not one.”

“Do you think so?” She spoke with humility.

“I would,” he went on, “that heaven had given you a daughter.”

“Would you have thought her worthy of Richard?”

“Our blood, madam, should have been one!”

The lady tapped her toe with her parasol. “But I am a mother,” she said. “Richard is my son. Yes! Richard is my boy,” she reiterated.

Sir Austin most graciously appended, “Call him ours, madam,” and held his head as if to catch the word from her lips, which, however, she chose to refuse, or defer. They made the coloured West a common point for their eyes, and then Sir Austin said:

“As you will not say ‘ours,’ let me. And, as you have therefore an equal claim on the boy, I will confide to you a project I have lately conceived.”

The announcement of a project hardly savoured of a coming proposal, but for Sir Austin to confide one to a woman was almost tantamount to a declaration. So Lady Blandish thought, and so said her soft, deep-eyed smile, as she perused the ground while listening to the project. It concerned Richard’s nuptials. He was now nearly eighteen. He was to marry when he was five-and-twenty. Meantime a young lady, some years his junior, was to be sought for in the homes of England, who would be every way fitted by education, instincts, and blood—on each of which qualifications Sir Austin unreservedly enlarged—to espouse so perfect a youth and accept the honourable duty of assisting in the perpetuation of the Feverels. The baronet went on to say that he proposed to set forth immediately, and devote a couple of months, to the first essay in his Coelebrite search.

“I fear,” said Lady Blandish, when the project had been fully unfolded, “you have laid down for yourself a difficult task. You must not be too exacting.”

“I know it.” The baronet’s shake of the head was piteous.

“Even in England she will be rare. But I confine myself to no class. If I ask for blood it is for untainted, not what you call high blood. I believe many of the middle classes are frequently more careful—more pure-blooded—than our aristocracy. Show me among them a God-fearing family who educate their children—I should prefer a girl without brothers and sisters—as a Christian damsel should be educated—say, on the model of my son, and she may be penniless, I will pledge her to Richard Feverel.”

Lady Blandish bit her lip. "And what do you do with Richard while you are absent on this expedition?"

"Oh!" said the baronet, "he accompanies his father."

"Then give it up. His future bride is now pinafores and bread-and-butter. She romps, she cries, she dreams of play and pudding. How can he care for her? He thinks more at his age of old women like me. He will be certain to kick against her, and destroy your plan, believe me, Sir Austin."

"Ay? ay? do you think that?" said the baronet.

Lady Blandish gave him a multitude of reasons.

"Ay! true," he muttered. "Adrian said the same. He must not see her. How could I think of it! The child is naked woman. He would despise her. Naturally!"

"Naturally!" echoed the lady.

"Then, madam," and the baronet rose, "there is one thing for me to determine upon. I must, for the first time in his life, leave him."

"Will you, indeed?" said the lady.

"It is my duty, having thus brought him up, to see that he is properly mated,—not wrecked upon the quicksands of marriage, as a youth so delicately trained might be; more easily than another! Betrothed, he will be safe from a thousand snares. I may, I think, leave him for a term. My precautions have saved him from the temptations of his season."

"And under whose charge will you leave him?" Lady Blandish inquired.

She had emerged from the temple, and stood beside Sir Austin on the upper steps, under a clear summer twilight.

"Madam!" he took her hand, and his voice was gallant and tender, "under whose but yours?"

As the baronet said this, he bent above her hand, and raised it to his lips.

Lady Blandish felt that she had been wooed and asked in wedlock. She did not withdraw her hand. The baronet's salute was flatteringly reverent. He deliberated over it, as one going through a grave ceremony. And he, the scorner of women, had chosen her for his homage! Lady Blandish forgot that she had taken some trouble to arrive at it. She received the exquisite compliment in all its unique honey-sweet: for in love we must deserve nothing or the fine bloom of fruition is gone.

The lady's hand was still in durance, and the baronet had not recovered from his profound inclination, when a noise from the neighbouring beechwood startled the two actors in this courtly pantomime. They turned their heads, and beheld the hope of Raynham on horseback surveying the scene. The next moment he had galloped away.

CHAPTER XIV

All night Richard tossed on his bed with his heart in a rapid canter, and his brain bestriding it, traversing the rich untasted world, and the great Realm of Mystery, from which he was now restrained no longer. Months he had wandered about the gates of the Bonnet, wondering, sighing, knocking at them, and getting neither admittance nor answer. He had the key now. His own father had given it to him. His heart was a lightning steed, and bore him on and on over limitless regions bathed in superhuman beauty and strangeness, where cavaliers and ladies leaned whispering upon close green swards, and knights and ladies cast a splendour upon savage forests, and tilts and tourneys were held in golden courts lit to a glorious day by ladies' eyes, one pair of which, dimly visioned, constantly distinguishable, followed him through the boskage and dwelt upon him in the press, beaming while he bent above a hand glittering white and fragrant as the frosted blossom of a May night.

Awhile the heart would pause and flutter to a shock: he was in the act of consummating all earthly bliss by pressing his lips to the small white hand. Only to do that, and die! cried the Magnetic Youth: to fling the Jewel of Life into that one cup and drink it off! He was intoxicated by anticipation. For that he was born. There was, then, some end in existence, something to live for! to kiss a woman's hand, and die! He would leap from the couch, and rush to pen and paper to relieve his swarming sensations. Scarce was he seated when the pen was dashed aside, the paper sent flying with the exclamation, "Have I not sworn I would never write again?" Sir Austin had shut that safety-valve. The nonsense that was in the youth might have poured harmlessly out, and its urgency for ebullition was so great that he was repeatedly oblivious of his oath, and found himself seated under the lamp in the act of composition before pride could speak a word. Possibly the pride even of Richard Feverel had been swamped if the act of composition were easy at such a time, and a single idea could stand clearly foremost; but myriads were demanding the first place; chaotic hosts, like ranks of stormy billows, pressed impetuously for expression, and despair of reducing them to form, quite as much as pride, to which it pleased him to refer his incapacity, threw down the powerless pen, and sent him panting to his outstretched length and another headlong career through the rosy-girdled land.

Toward morning the madness of the fever abated somewhat, and he went forth into the air. A lamp was still burning in his father's room, and Richard thought, as he looked up, that he saw the ever-vigilant head on the watch. Instantly the lamp was extinguished, the window stood cold against the hues of dawn.

Strong pulling is an excellent medical remedy for certain classes of fever. Richard took to it instinctively. The clear fresh water, burnished with sunrise, sparkled against his arrowy prow; the soft deep shadows curled smiling away from his gliding keel. Overhead solitary morning unfolded itself, from blossom to bud, from bud to flower; still, delicious changes of light and colour, to whose influences he was heedless as he shot under willows and aspens, and across sheets of river-reaches, pure mirrors to the upper glory, himself the sole tenant of the stream. Somewhere at the founts of the world lay the land he was rowing toward; something of its shadowed lights might be discerned here and there. It was not a dream, now he knew. There was a secret abroad. The woods were full of it; the waters rolled with it, and the winds. Oh, why could not one in these days do some high knightly deed which should draw down ladies' eyes from their heaven, as in the days of Arthur! To such a meaning breathed the unconscious sighs of the youth, when he had pulled through his first feverish energy.

He was off Bursley, and had lapsed a little into that musing quietude which follows strenuous exercise, when he heard a hail and his own name called. It was no lady, no fairy, but young Ralph Morton, an irruption of miserable masculine prose. Heartily wishing him abed with the rest of mankind, Richard rowed in and jumped ashore. Ralph immediately seized his arm, saying that he desired earnestly to have a talk with him, and dragged the Magnetic Youth from his water-dreams, up and down the wet mown grass. That he had to say seemed to be difficult of utterance, and Richard,

though he barely listened, soon had enough of his old rival's gladness at seeing him, and exhibited signs of impatience; whereat Ralph, as one who branches into matter somewhat foreign to his mind, but of great human interest and importance, put the question to him:

"I say, what woman's name do you like best?"

"I don't know any," quoth Richard, indifferently. "Why are you out so early?"

In answer to this, Ralph suggested that the name of Mary might be considered a pretty name.

Richard agreed that it might be; the housekeeper at Raynham, half the women cooks, and all the housemaids enjoyed that name; the name of Mary was equivalent for women at home.

"Yes, I know," said Ralph. "We have lots of Marys. It's so common. Oh! I don't like Mary best. What do you think?"

Richard thought it just like another.

"Do you know," Ralph continued, throwing off the mask and plunging into the subject, "I'd do anything on earth for some names—one or two. It's not Mary, nor Lucy. Clarinda's pretty, but it's like a novel. Claribel, I like. Names beginning with 'Cl' I prefer. The 'Cl's' are always gentle and lovely girls you would die for! Don't you think so?"

Richard had never been acquainted with any of them to inspire that emotion. Indeed these urgent appeals to his fancy in feminine names at five o'clock in the morning slightly surprised him, though he was but half awake to the outer world. By degrees he perceived that Ralph was changed. Instead of the lusty boisterous boy, his rival in manly sciences, who spoke straightforwardly and acted up to his speech, here was an abashed and blush-persecuted youth, who sued piteously for a friendly ear wherein to pour the one idea possessing him. Gradually, too, Richard apprehended that Ralph likewise was on the frontiers of the Realm of Mystery, perhaps further toward it than he himself was; and then, as by a sympathetic stroke, was revealed to him the wonderful beauty and depth of meaning in feminine names. The theme appeared novel and delicious, fitted to the season and the hour. But the hardship was, that Richard could choose none from the number; all were the same to him; he loved them all.

"Don't you really prefer the 'Cl's'?" said Ralph, persuasively.

"Not better than the names ending in 'a' and 'y,'" Richard replied, wishing he could, for Ralph was evidently ahead of him.

"Come under these trees," said Ralph. And under the trees Ralph unbosomed. His name was down for the army: Eton was quitted for ever. In a few months he would have to join his regiment, and before he left he must say goodbye to his friends.... Would Richard tell him Mrs. Forey's address? he had heard she was somewhere by the sea. Richard did not remember the address, but said he would willingly take charge of any letter and forward it.

Ralph dived his hand into his pocket. "Here it is. But don't let anybody see it."

"My aunt's name is not Clare," said Richard, perusing what was composed of the exterior formula. "You've addressed it to Clare herself."

That was plain to see.

"Emmeline Clementina Matilda Laura, Countess Blandish," Richard continued in a low tone, transferring the names, and playing on the musical strings they were to him. Then he said: "Names of ladies! How they sweeten their names!"

He fixed his eyes on Ralph. If he discovered anything further he said nothing, but bade the good fellow good-bye, jumped into his boat, and pulled down the tide. The moment Ralph was hidden by an abutment of the banks, Richard perused the address. For the first time it struck him that his cousin Clare was a very charming creature: he remembered the look of her eyes, and especially the last reproachful glance she gave him at parting. What business had Ralph to write to her? Did she not belong to Richard Feverel? He read the words again and again: Clare Doria Forey. Why, Clare was the name he liked best—nay, he loved it. Doria, too—she shared his own name with him. Away went

his heart, not at a canter now, at a gallop, as one who sights the quarry. He felt too weak to pull. Clare Doria Forey—oh, perfect melody! Sliding with the tide, he heard it fluting in the bosom of the hills.

When nature has made us ripe for love, it seldom occurs that the Fates are behindhand in furnishing a temple for the flame.

Above green-flashing plunges of a weir, and shaken by the thunder below, lilies, golden and white, were swaying at anchor among the reeds. Meadow-sweet hung from the banks thick with weed and trailing bramble, and there also hung a daughter of earth. Her face was shaded by a broad straw hat with a flexible brim that left her lips and chin in the sun, and, sometimes nodding, sent forth a light of promising eyes. Across her shoulders, and behind, flowed large loose curls, brown in shadow, almost golden where the ray touched them. She was simply dressed, befitting decency and the season. On a closer inspection you might see that her lips were stained. This blooming young person was regaling on dewberries. They grew between the bank and the water. Apparently she found the fruit abundant, for her hand was making pretty progress to her mouth. Fastidious youth, which revolts at woman plumping her exquisite proportions on bread-and-butter, and would (we must suppose) joyfully have her scraggy to have her poetical, can hardly object to dewberries. Indeed the act of eating them is dainty and induces musing. The dewberry is a sister to the lotus, and an innocent sister. You eat: mouth, eye, and hand are occupied, and the undrugged mind free to roam. And so it was with the damsel who knelt there. The little skylark went up above her, all song, to the smooth southern cloud lying along the blue: from a dewy copse dark over her nodding hat the blackbird fluted, calling to her with thrice mellow note: the kingfisher flashed emerald out of green osiers: a bow-winged heron travelled aloft, seeking solitude a boat slipped toward her, containing a dreamy youth; and still she plucked the fruit, and ate, and mused, as if no fairy prince were invading her territories, and as if she wished not for one, or knew not her wishes. Surrounded by the green shaven meadows, the pastoral summer buzz, the weir-fall's thundering white, amid the breath and beauty of wild flowers, she was a bit of lovely human life in a fair setting; a terrible attraction. The Magnetic Youth leaned round to note his proximity to the weir-piles, and beheld the sweet vision. Stiller and stiller grew nature, as at the meeting of two electric clouds. Her posture was so graceful, that though he was making straight for the weir, he dared not dip a scull. Just then one enticing dewberry caught her eyes. He was floating by unheeded, and saw that her hand stretched low, and could not gather what it sought. A stroke from his right brought him beside her. The damsel glanced up dismayed, and her whole shape trembled over the brink. Richard sprang from his boat into the water. Pressing a hand beneath her foot, which she had thrust against the crumbling wet sides of the bank to save herself, he enabled her to recover her balance, and gain safe earth, whither he followed her.

CHAPTER XV

He had landed on an island of the still-vexed Bermoothes. The world lay wrecked behind him: Raynham hung in mists, remote, a phantom to the vivid reality of this white hand which had drawn him thither away thousands of leagues in an eye-twinkle. Hark, how Ariel sang overhead! What splendour in the heavens! What marvels of beauty about his enchanted brows! And, O you wonder! Fair Flame! by whose light the glories of being are now first seen....Radiant Miranda! Prince Ferdinand is at your feet.

Or is it Adam, his rib taken from his side in sleep, and thus transformed, to make him behold his Paradise, and lose it?...

The youth looked on her with as glowing an eye. It was the First Woman to him.

And she—mankind was all Caliban to her, saving this one princely youth.

So to each other said their changing eyes in the moment they stood together; he pale, and she blushing.

She was indeed sweetly fair, and would have been held fair among rival damsels. On a magic shore, and to a youth educated by a System, strung like an arrow drawn to the head, he, it might be guessed, could fly fast and far with her. The soft rose in her cheeks, the clearness of her eyes, bore witness to the body's virtue; and health and happy blood were in her bearing. Had she stood before Sir Austin among rival damsels, that Scientific Humanist, for the consummation of his System, would have thrown her the handkerchief for his son. The wide summer-hat, nodding over her forehead to her brows, seemed to flow with the flowing heavy curls, and those fire-threaded mellow curls, only half-curls, waves of hair call them, rippling at the ends, went like a sunny red-veined torrent down her back almost to her waist: a glorious vision to the youth, who embraced it as a flower of beauty, and read not a feature. There were curious features of colour in her face for him to have read. Her brows, thick and brownish against a soft skin showing the action of the blood, met in the bend of a bow, extending to the temples long and level: you saw that she was fashioned to peruse the sights of earth, and by the pliability of her brows that the wonderful creature used her faculty, and was not going to be a statue to the gazer. Under the dark thick brows an arch of lashes shot out, giving a wealth of darkness to the full frank blue eyes, a mystery of meaning—more than brain was ever meant to fathom: richer, henceforth, than all mortal wisdom to Prince Ferdinand. For when nature turns artist, and produces contrasts of colour on a fair face, where is the Sage, or what the Oracle, shall match the depth of its lightest look?

Prince Ferdinand was also fair. In his slim boating-attire his figure looked heroic. His hair, rising from the parting to the right of his forehead, in what his admiring Lady Blandish called his plume, fell away slanting silkily to the temples across the nearly imperceptible upward curve of his brows there—felt more than seen, so slight it was—and gave to his profile a bold beauty, to which his bashful, breathless air was a flattering charm. An arrow drawn to the head, capable of flying fast and far with her! He leaned a little forward, drinking her in with all his eyes, and young Love has a thousand. Then truly the System triumphed, just ere it was to fall; and could Sir Austin have been content to draw the arrow to the head, and let it fly, when it would fly, he might have pointed to his son again, and said to the world, "Match him!" Such keen bliss as the youth had in the sight of her, an innocent youth alone has powers of soul in him to experience.

"O Women!" says The Pilgrim's Scrip, in one of its solitary outbursts, "Women, who like, and will have for hero, a rake! how soon are you not to learn that you have taken bankrupts to your bosoms, and that the putrescent gold that attracted you is the slime of the Lake of Sin!"

If these two were Ferdinand and Miranda, Sir Austin was not Prospero, and was not present, or their fates might have been different.

So they stood a moment, changing eyes, and then Miranda spoke, and they came down to earth, feeling no less in heaven.

She spoke to thank him for his aid. She used quite common simple words; and used them, no doubt, to express a common simple meaning; but to him she was uttering magic, casting spells, and the effect they had on him was manifested in the incoherence of his replies, which were too foolish to be chronicled.

The couple were again mute. Suddenly Miranda, with an exclamation of anguish, and innumerable lights and shadows playing over her lovely face, clapped her hands, crying aloud, "My book! my book!" and ran to the bank.

Prince Ferdinand was at her side. "What have you lost?" he said.

"My book!" she answered, her delicious curls swinging across her shoulders to the stream. Then turning to him, "Oh, no, no! let me entreat you not to," she said; "I do not so very much mind losing it." And in her eagerness to restrain him she unconsciously laid her gentle hand upon his arm, and took the force of motion out of him.

"Indeed, I do not really care for the silly book," she continued, withdrawing her hand quickly, and reddening. "Pray, do not!"

The young gentleman had kicked off his shoes. No sooner was the spell of contact broken than he jumped in. The water was still troubled and discoloured by his introductory adventure, and, though he ducked his head with the spirit of a dabchick, the book was missing. A scrap of paper floating from the bramble just above the water, and looking as if fire had caught its edges and it had flown from one adverse element to the other, was all he could lay hold of; and he returned to land disconsolately, to hear Miranda's murmured mixing of thanks and pretty expostulations.

"Let me try again," he said.

"No, indeed!" she replied, and used the awful threat: "I will run away if you do," which effectually restrained him.

Her eye fell on the fire-stained scrap of paper, and brightened, as she cried, "There, there! you have what I want. It is that. I do not care for the book. No, please! You are not to look at it. Give it me."

Before her playfully imperative injunction was fairly spoken, Richard had glanced at the document and discovered a Griffin between two Wheatsheaves: his crest in silver: and below—O wonderment immense! his own handwriting!

He handed it to her. She took it, and put it in her bosom.

Who would have thought, that, where all else perished, Odes, Idyls, Lines, Stanzas, this one Sonnet to the stars should be miraculously reserved for such a starry fate—passing beatitude!

As they walked silently across the meadow, Richard strove to remember the hour and the mood of mind in which he had composed the notable production. The stars were invoked, as seeing and foreseeing all, to tell him where then his love reclined, and so forth; Hesper was complacent enough to do so, and described her in a couplet—

"Through sunset's amber see me shining fair,
As her blue eyes shine through her golden hair."

And surely no words could be more prophetic. Here were two blue eyes and golden hair; and by some strange chance, that appeared like the working of a divine finger, she had become the possessor of the prophecy, she that was to fulfil it! The youth was too charged with emotion to speak. Doubtless the damsel had less to think of, or had some trifling burden on her conscience, for she seemed to grow embarrassed. At last she drew up her chin to look at her companion under the nodding brim of her hat (and the action gave her a charmingly freakish air), crying, "But where are you going to? You are wet through. Let me thank you again; and, pray, leave me, and go home and change instantly."

“Wet?” replied the magnetic musser, with a voice of tender interest; “not more than one foot, I hope. I will leave you while you dry your stockings in the sun.”

At this she could not withhold a shy laugh.

“Not I, but you. You would try to get that silly book for me, and you are dripping wet. Are you not very uncomfortable?”

In all sincerity he assured her that he was not.

“And you really do not feel that you are wet?”

He really did not: and it was a fact that he spoke truth.

She pursed her dewberry mouth in the most comical way, and her blue eyes lightened laughter out of the half-closed lids.

“I cannot help it,” she said, her mouth opening, and sounding harmonious bells of laughter in his ears. “Pardon me, won’t you?”

His face took the same soft smiling curves in admiration of her.

“Not to feel that you have been in the water, the very moment after!” she musically interjected, seeing she was excused.

“It’s true,” he said; and his own gravity then touched him to join a duet with her, which made them no longer feel strangers, and did the work of a month of intimacy. Better than sentiment, laughter opens the breast to love; opens the whole breast to his full quiver, instead of a corner here and there for a solitary arrow. Hail the occasion propitious, O British young! and laugh and treat love as an honest God, and dabble not with the sentimental rouge. These two laughed, and the souls of each cried out to other, “It is I it is I.”

They laughed and forgot the cause of their laughter, and the sun dried his light river clothing, and they strolled toward the blackbird’s copse, and stood near a stile in sight of the foam of the weir and the many-coloured rings of eddies streaming forth from it.

Richard’s boat, meanwhile, had contrived to shoot the weir, and was swinging, bottom upward, broadside with the current down the rapid backwater.

“Will you let it go?” said the damsel, eying it curiously.

“It can’t be stopped,” he replied, and could have added: “What do I care for it now!”

His old life was whirled away with it, dead, drowned. His new life was with her, alive, divine.

She flapped low the brim of her hat. “You must really not come any farther,” she softly said.

“And will you go, and not tell me who you are?” he asked, growing bold as the fears of losing her came across him. “And will you not tell me before you go”—his face burned—“how you came by that—that paper?”

She chose to select the easier question for answer: “You ought to know me; we have been introduced.” Sweet was her winning off-hand affability.

“Then who, in heaven’s name, are you? Tell me! I never could have forgotten you.”

“You have, I think,” she said.

“Impossible that we could ever have met, and I forget you!”

She looked up at him.

“Do you remember Belthorpe?”

“Belthorpe! Belthorpe!” quoth Richard, as if he had to touch his brain to recollect there was such a place. “Do you mean old Blaize’s farm?”

“Then I am old Blaize’s niece.” She tripped him a soft curtsey.

The magnetized youth gazed at her. By what magic was it that this divine sweet creature could be allied with that old churl!

“Then what—what is your name?” said his mouth, while his eyes added, “O wonderful creature! How came you to enrich the earth?”

“Have you forgot the Desboroughs of Dorset, too?” she peered at him from a side-bend of the flapping brim.

“The Desboroughs of Dorset?” A light broke in on him. “And have you grown to this? That little girl I saw there!”

He drew close to her to read the nearest features of the vision. She could no more laugh off the piercing fervour of his eyes. Her volubility fluttered under his deeply wistful look, and now neither voice was high, and they were mutually constrained.

“You see,” she murmured, “we are old acquaintances.”

Richard, with his eyes still intently fixed on her, returned, “You are very beautiful!”

The words slipped out. Perfect simplicity is unconsciously audacious. Her overpowering beauty struck his heart, and, like an instrument that is touched and answers to the touch, he spoke.

Miss Desborough made an effort to trifle with this terrible directness; but his eyes would not be gainsaid, and checked her lips. She turned away from them, her bosom a little rebellious. Praise so passionately spoken, and by one who has been a damsel’s first dream, dreamed of nightly many long nights, and clothed in the virgin silver of her thoughts in bud, praise from him is coin the heart cannot reject, if it would. She quickened her steps.

“I have offended you!” said a mortally wounded voice across her shoulder.

That he should think so were too dreadful.

“Oh no, no! you would never offend me.” She gave him her whole sweet face.

“Then why—why do you leave me?”

“Because,” she hesitated, “I must go.”

“No. You must not go. Why must you go? Do not go.”

“Indeed I must,” she said, pulling at the obnoxious broad brim of her hat; and, interpreting a pause he made for his assent to her rational resolve, shyly looking at him, she held her hand out, and said, “Good-bye,” as if it were a natural thing to say.

The hand was pure white—white and fragrant as the frosted blossom of a Maynight. It was the hand whose shadow, cast before, he had last night bent his head reverentially above, and kissed—resigning himself thereupon over to execution for payment of the penalty of such daring—by such bliss well rewarded.

He took the hand, and held it, gazing between her eyes.

“Good-bye,” she said again, as frankly as she could, and at the same time slightly compressing her fingers on his in token of adieu. It was a signal for his to close firmly upon hers.

“You will not go?”

“Pray, let me,” she pleaded, her sweet brows suing in wrinkles.

“You will not go?” Mechanically he drew the white hand nearer his thumping heart.

“I must,” she faltered piteously.

“You will not go?”

“Oh yes! yes!”

“Tell me. Do you wish to go?”

The question was a subtle one. A moment or two she did not answer, and then forswore herself, and said, Yes.

“Do you—you wish to go?” He looked with quivering eyelids under hers.

A fainter Yes responded.

“You wish—wish to leave me?” His breath went with the words.

“Indeed I must.”

Her hand became a closer prisoner.

All at once an alarming delicious shudder went through her frame. From him to her it coursed, and back from her to him. Forward and back love’s electric messenger rushed from heart to heart, knocking at each, till it surged tumultuously against the bars of its prison, crying out for its mate. They stood trembling in unison, a lovely couple under these fair heavens of the morning.

When he could get his voice it said, “Will you go?”

But she had none to reply with, and could only mutely bend upward her gentle wrist.

“Then, farewell!” he said, and, dropping his lips to the soft fair hand, kissed it, and hung his head, swinging away from her, ready for death.

Strange, that now she was released she should linger by him. Strange, that his audacity, instead of the executioner, brought blushes and timid tenderness to his side, and the sweet words, “You are not angry with me?”

“With you, O Beloved!” cried his soul. “And you forgive me, fair charity!”

“I think it was rude of me to go without thanking you again,” she said, and again proffered her hand.

The sweet heaven-bird shivered out his song above him. The gracious glory of heaven fell upon his soul. He touched her hand, not moving his eyes from her, nor speaking, and she, with a soft word of farewell, passed across the stile, and up the pathway through the dewy shades of the copse, and out of the arch of the light, away from his eyes.

And away with her went the wild enchantment. He looked on barren air. But it was no more the world of yesterday. The marvellous splendours had sown seeds in him, ready to spring up and bloom at her gaze; and in his bosom now the vivid conjuration of her tones, her face, her shape, makes them leap and illumine him like fitful summer lightnings ghosts of the vanished sun.

There was nothing to tell him that he had been making love and declaring it with extraordinary rapidity; nor did he know it. Soft flushed cheeks! sweet mouth! strange sweet brows! eyes of softest fire! how could his ripe eyes behold you, and not plead to keep you? Nay, how could he let you go? And he seriously asked himself that question.

To-morrow this place will have a memory—the river and the meadow, and the white falling weir: his heart will build a temple here; and the skylark will be its high-priest, and the old blackbird its glossy-gowned chorister, and there will be a sacred repast of dewberries. To-day the grass is grass: his heart is chased by phantoms and finds rest nowhere. Only when the most tender freshness of his flower comes across him does he taste a moment’s calm; and no sooner does it come than it gives place to keen pangs of fear that she may not be his for ever.

Erelong he learns that her name is Lucy. Erelong he meets Ralph, and discovers that in a day he has distanced him by a sphere. He and Ralph and the curate of Lobourne join in their walks, and raise classical discussions on ladies’ hair, fingering a thousand delicious locks, from those of Cleopatra to the Borgia’s. “Fair! fair! all of them fair!” sighs the melancholy curate, “as are those women formed for our perdition! I think we have in this country what will match the Italian or the Greek.” His mind flutters to Mrs. Doria, Richard blushes before the vision of Lucy, and Ralph, whose heroine’s hair is a dark luxuriance, dissents, and claims a noble share in the slaughter of men for dark-haired Wonders. They have no mutual confidences, but they are singularly kind to each other, these three children of instinct.

CHAPTER XVI

Lady Blandish, and others who professed an interest in the fortunes and future of the systematized youth, had occasionally mentioned names of families whose alliance according to apparent calculations, would not degrade his blood: and over these names, secretly preserved on an open leaf of the note-book, Sir Austin, as he neared the metropolis, distantly dropped his eye. There were names historic and names mushroomic; names that the Conqueror might have called in his muster-roll; names that had been, clearly, tossed into the upper stratum of civilized life by a millwheel or a merchant-stool. Against them the baronet had written M. or Po. or Pr.—signifying, Money, Position, Principles, favouring the latter with special brackets. The wisdom of a worldly man, which he could now and then adopt, determined him, before he commenced his round of visits, to consult and sound his solicitor and his physician thereanent; lawyers and doctors being the rats who know best the merits of a house, and on what sort of foundation it may be standing.

Sir Austin entered the great city with a sad mind. The memory of his misfortune came upon him vividly, as if no years had intervened, and it were but yesterday that he found the letter telling him that he had no wife and his son no mother. He wandered on foot through the streets the first night of his arrival, looking strangely at the shops and shows and bustle of the world from which he had divorced himself; feeling as destitute as the poorest vagrant. He had almost forgotten how to find his way about, and came across his old mansion in his efforts to regain his hotel. The windows were alight—signs of merry life within. He stared at it from the shadow of the opposite side. It seemed to him he was a ghost gazing upon his living past. And then the phantom which had stood there mocking while he felt as other men—the phantom, now flesh and blood reality, seized and convulsed his heart, and filled its unforgiving crevices with bitter ironic venom. He remembered by the time reflection returned to him that it was Algernon, who had the house at his disposal, probably giving a card-party, or something of the sort. In the morning, too, he remembered that he had divorced the world to wed a System, and must be faithful to that exacting Spouse, who, now alone of things on earth, could fortify and recompense him.

Mr. Thompson received his client with the dignity and emotion due to such a rent-roll and the unexpectedness of the honour. He was a thin stately man of law, garbed as one who gave audience to acried bishops, and carrying on his countenance the stamp of paternity to the parchment skins, and of a virtuous attachment to Port wine sufficient to increase his respectability in the eyes of moral Britain. After congratulating Sir Austin on the fortunate issue of two or three suits, and being assured that the baronet's business in town had no concern therewith, Mr. Thompson ventured to hope that the young heir was all his father could desire him to be, and heard with satisfaction that he was a pattern to the youth of the Age.

"A difficult time of life, Sir Austin!" said the old lawyer, shaking his head. "We must keep our eyes on them—keep awake! The mischief is done in a minute."

"We must take care to have seen where we planted, and that the root was sound, or the mischief will do itself in site of, or under the very spectacles of, supervision," said the baronet.

His legal adviser murmured "Exactly," as if that were his own idea, adding, "It is my plan with Ripton, who has had the honour of an introduction to you, and a very pleasant time he spent with my young friend, whom he does not forget. Ripton follows the Law. He is articled to me, and will, I trust, succeed me worthily in your confidence. I bring him into town in the morning; I take him back at night. I think I may say that I am quite content with him."

"Do you think," said Sir Austin, fixing his brows, "that you can trace every act of his to its motive?"

The old lawyer bent forward and humbly requested that this might be repeated.

“Do you”—Sir Austin held the same searching expression—“do you establish yourself in a radiating centre of intuition: do you base your watchfulness on so thorough an acquaintance with his character, so perfect a knowledge of the instrument, that all its movements—even the eccentric ones—are anticipated by you, and provided for?”

The explanation was a little too long for the old lawyer to entreat another repetition. Winking with the painful deprecation of a deaf man, Mr. Thompson smiled urbanely, coughed conciliatingly, and said he was afraid he could not affirm that much, though he was happily enabled to say that Ripton had borne an extremely good character at school.

“I find,” Sir Austin remarked, as sardonically he relaxed his inspecting pose and mien, “there are fathers who are content to be simply obeyed. Now I require not only that my son should obey; I would have him guiltless of the impulse to gainsay my wishes—feeling me in him stronger than his undeveloped nature, up to a certain period, where my responsibility ends and his commences. Man is a self-acting machine. He cannot cease to be a machine; but, though self-acting, he may lose the powers of self-guidance, and in a wrong course his very vitalities hurry him to perdition. Young, he is an organism ripening to the set mechanic diurnal round, and while so he needs all the angels to hold watch over him that he grow straight and healthy, and fit for what machinal duties he may have to perform”...

Mr. Thompson agitated his eyebrows dreadfully. He was utterly lost. He respected Sir Austin’s estates too much to believe for a moment he was listening to downright folly. Yet how otherwise explain the fact of his excellent client being incomprehensible to him? For a middle-aged gentleman, and one who has been in the habit of advising and managing, will rarely have a notion of accusing his understanding; and Mr. Thompson had not the slightest notion of accusing his. But the baronet’s condescension in coming thus to him, and speaking on the subject nearest his heart, might well affect him, and he quickly settled the case in favour of both parties, pronouncing mentally that his honoured client had a meaning, and so deep it was, so subtle, that no wonder he experienced difficulty in giving it fitly significant words.

Sir Austin elaborated his theory of the Organism and the Mechanism, for his lawyer’s edification. At a recurrence of the word “healthy” Mr. Thompson caught him up:

“I apprehended you! Oh, I agree with you, Sir Austin! entirely! Allow me to ring for my son Ripton. I think, if you condescend to examine him, you will say that regular habits, and a diet of nothing but law-reading—for other forms of literature I strictly interdict—have made him all that you instance.”

Mr. Thompson’s hand was on the bell. Sir Austin arrested him.

“Permit me to see the lad at his occupation,” said he.

Our old friend Ripton sat in a room apart with the confidential clerk, Mr. Beazley, a veteran of law, now little better than a document, looking already signed and sealed, and shortly to be delivered, who enjoined nothing from his pupil and companion save absolute silence, and sounded his praises to his father at the close of days when it had been rigidly observed—not caring, or considering, the finished dry old document that he was, under what kind of spell a turbulent commonplace youth could be charmed into stillness for six hours of the day. Ripton was supposed to be devoted to the study of Blackstone. A tome of the classic legal commentator lay extended outside his desk, under the partially lifted lid of which nestled the assiduous student’s head—law being thus brought into direct contact with his brain-pan. The office-door opened, and he heard not; his name was called, and he remained equally moveless. His method of taking in Blackstone seemed absorbing as it was novel.

“Comparing notes, I daresay,” whispered Mr. Thompson to Sir Austin. “I call that study!”

The confidential clerk rose, and bowed obsequious senility.

“Is it like this every day, Beazley?” Mr. Thompson asked with parental pride.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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