YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

CHANTRY HOUSE

Charlotte Yonge

Chantry House

Yonge C.

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Содержание

Charlotte M. Yonge
Chantry House

CHAPTER I
A NURSERY PROSE

‘And if it be the heart of man
  Which our existence measures,
Far longer is our childhood’s span
  Than that of manly pleasures.

‘For long each month and year is then,
  Their thoughts and days extending,
But months and years pass swift with men
  To time’s last goal descending.’

Isaac Williams.

The united force of the younger generation has been brought upon me to record, with the aid of diaries and letters, the circumstances connected with Chantry House and my two dear elder brothers. Once this could not have been done without more pain than I could brook, but the lapse of time heals wounds, brings compensations, and, when the heart has ceased from aching and yearning, makes the memory of what once filled it a treasure to be brought forward with joy and thankfulness. Nor would it be well that some of those mentioned in the coming narrative should be wholly forgotten, and their place know them no more.

To explain all, I must go back to a time long before the morning when my father astonished us all by exclaiming, ‘Poor old James Winslow! So Chantry House is came to us after all!’ Previous to that event I do not think we were aware of the existence of that place, far less of its being a possible inheritance, for my parents would never have permitted themselves or their family to be unsettled by the notion of doubtful contingencies.

My father, John Edward Winslow, was a barrister, and held an appointment in the Admiralty Office, which employed him for many hours of the day at Somerset House. My mother, whose maiden name was Mary Griffith, belonged to a naval family. Her father had been lost in a West Indian hurricane at sea, and her uncle, Admiral Sir John Griffith, was the hero of the family, having been at Trafalgar and distinguished himself in cutting out expeditions. My eldest brother bore his name. The second was named after the Duke of Clarence, with whom my mother had once danced at a ball on board ship at Portsmouth, and who had been rather fond of my uncle. Indeed, I believe my father’s appointment had been obtained through his interest, just about the time of Clarence’s birth.

We three boys had come so fast upon each other’s heels in the Novembers of 1809, 10, and 11, that any two of us used to look like twins. There is still extant a feeble water-coloured drawing of the trio, in nankeen frocks, and long white trowsers, with bare necks and arms, the latter twined together, and with the free hands, Griffith holding a bat, Clarence a trap, and I a ball. I remember the emulation we felt at Griffith’s privilege of eldest in holding the bat.

The sitting for that picture is the only thing I clearly remember during those earlier days. I have no recollection of the disaster, which, at four years old, altered my life. The catastrophe, as others have described it, was that we three boys were riding cock-horse on the balusters of the second floor

of our house in Montagu Place, Russell Square, when we indulged in a general *mêlée*, which resulted in all tumbling over into the vestibule below. The others, to whom I served as cushion, were not damaged beyond the power of yelling, and were quite restored in half-an-hour, but I was undermost, and the consequence has been a curved spine, dwarfed stature, an elevated shoulder, and a shortened, nearly useless leg.

What I do remember, is my mother reading to me Miss Edgeworth's *Frank and the little do Trusty*, as I lay in my crib in her bedroom. I made one of my nieces hunt up the book for me the other day, and the story brought back at once the little crib, or the watered blue moreen canopy of the big four-poster to which I was sometimes lifted for a change; even the scrawly pattern of the paper, which my weary eyes made into purple elves perpetually pursuing crimson ones, the foremost of whom always turned upside down; and the knobs in the Marseilles counterpane with which my fingers used to toy. I have heard my mother tell that whenever I was most languid and suffering I used to whine out, 'O do read *Frank and the little dog Trusty*,' and never permitted a single word to be varied, in the curious childish love of reiteration with its soothing power.

I am afraid that any true picture of our parents, especially of my mother, will not do them justice in the eyes of the young people of the present day, who are accustomed to a far more indulgent government, and yet seem to me to know little of the loyal veneration and submission with which we have, through life, regarded our father and mother. It would have been reckoned disrespectful to address them by these names; they were through life to us, in private, papa and mamma, and we never presumed to take a liberty with them. I doubt whether the petting, patronising equality of terms on which children now live with their parents be equally wholesome. There was then, however, strong love and self-sacrificing devotion; but not manifested in softness or cultivation of sympathy. Nothing was more dreaded than spoiling, which was viewed as idle and unjustifiable self-gratification at the expense of the objects thereof. There were an unlucky little pair in Russell Square who were said to be 'spoilt children,' and who used to be mentioned in our nursery with bated breath as a kind of monsters or criminals. I believe our mother laboured under a perpetual fear of spoiling Griff as the eldest, Clarence as the beauty, me as the invalid, Emily (two years younger) as the only girl, and Martyn as the after-thought, six years below our sister. She was always performing little acts of conscientiousness, little as we guessed it.

Thus though her unremitting care saved my life, and was such that she finally brought on herself a severe and dangerous illness, she kept me in order all the time, never wailed over me nor weakly pitied me, never permitted resistance to medicine nor rebellion against treatment, enforced little courtesies, insisted on every required exertion, and hardly ever relaxed the rule of Spartan fortitude in herself as in me. It is to this resolution on her part, carried out consistently at whatever present cost to us both, that I owe such powers of locomotion as I possess, and the habits of exertion that have been even more valuable to me.

When at last, after many weeks, nay months, of this watchfulness, she broke down, so that her life was for a time in danger, the lack of her bracing and tender care made my life very trying, after I found myself transported to the nursery, scarcely understanding why, accused of having by my naughtiness made ray poor mamma so ill, and discovering for the first time that I was a miserable, naughty little fretful being, and with nobody but Clarence and the housemaid to take pity on me.

Nurse Gooch was a masterful, trustworthy woman, and was laid under injunctions not to indulge Master Edward. She certainly did not err in that respect, though she attended faithfully to my material welfare; but woe to me if I gave way to a little moaning; and what I felt still harder, she never said 'good boy' if I contrived to abstain.

I hear of carpets, curtains, and pictures in the existing nurseries. They must be palaces compared with our great bare attic, where nothing was allowed that could gather dust. One bit of drugget by the fireside, where stood a round table at which the maids talked and darned stockings, was all that hid the bare boards; the walls were as plain as those of a workhouse, and when the London

sun did shine, it glared into my eyes through the great unshaded windows. There was a deal table for the meals (and very plain meals they were), and two or three big presses painted white for our clothes, and one cupboard for our toys. I must say that Gooch was strictly just, and never permitted little Emily, nor Griff—though he was very decidedly the favourite,—to bear off my beloved woolly dog to be stabled in the houses of wooden bricks which the two were continually constructing for their menagerie of maimed animals.

Griff was deservedly the favourite with every one who was not, like our parents, conscientiously bent on impartiality. He was so bright and winning, he had such curly tight-rolled hair with a tinge of auburn, such merry bold blue eyes, such glowing dimpled cheeks, such a joyous smile all over his face, and such a ringing laugh; he was so strong, brave, and sturdy, that he was a boy to be proud of, and a perfect king in his own way, making every one do as he pleased. All the maids, and Peter the footman, were his slaves, every one except nurse and mamma, and it was only by a strong effort of principle that they resisted him; while he dragged Clarence about as his devoted though not always happy follower.

Alas! for Clarence! Courage was not in him. The fearless infant boy chiefly dwells in conventional fiction, and valour seldom comes before strength. Moreover, I have come to the opinion that though no one thought of it at the time, his nerves must have had a terrible and lasting shock at the accident and at the sight of my crushed and deathly condition, which occupied every one too much for them to think of soothing or shielding him. At any rate, fear was the misery of his life. Darkness was his horror. He would scream till he brought in some one, though he knew it would be only to scold or slap him. The housemaid's closet on the stairs was to him an abode of wolves. Mrs. Gatty's tale of *The Tiger in the Coal-box* is a transcript of his feelings, except that no one took the trouble to reassure him; something undefined and horrible was thought to wag in the case of the eight-day clock; and he could not bear to open the play cupboard lest 'something' should jump out on him. The first time he was taken to the Zoological Gardens, the monkeys so terrified him that a bystander insisted on Gooch's carrying him away lest he should go into fits, though Griffith was shouting with ecstasy, and could hardly forgive the curtailment of his enjoyment.

Clarence used to aver that he really did see 'things' in the dark, but as he only shuddered and sobbed instead of describing them, he was punished for 'telling fibs,' though the housemaid used to speak under her breath of his being a 'Sunday child.' And after long penance, tied to his stool in the corner, he would creep up to me and whisper, 'But, Eddy, I really did!'

However, it was only too well established in the nursery that Clarence's veracity was on a par with his courage. When taxed with any misdemeanour, he used to look round scared and bewildered, and utter a flat demur. One scene in particular comes before me. There were strict laws against going into shops or buying dainties without express permission from mamma or nurse; but one day when Clarence had by some chance been sent out alone with the good natured housemaid, his fingers were found sticky.

'Now, Master Clarence, you've been a naughty boy, eating of sweets,' exclaimed stern Justice in a mob cap and frills.

'No—no—' faltered the victim; but, alas! Mrs. Gooch had only to thrust her hand into the little pocket of his monkey suit to convict him on the spot.

The maid was dismissed with a month's wages, and poor Clarence underwent a strange punishment from my mother, who was getting about again by that time, namely, a drop of hot sealing-wax on his tongue, to teach him practically the doom of the false tongue. It might have done him good if there had been sufficient encouragement to him to make him try to win a new character, but it only added a fresh terror to his mind; and nurse grew fond of manifesting her incredulity of his assertions by always referring to Griff or to me, or even to little Emily. What was worse, she used to point him out to her congeners in the Square or the Park as 'such a false child.'

He was a very pretty little fellow, with a delicately rosy face, wistful blue eyes, and soft, light, wavy hair, and perhaps Gooch was jealous of his attracting more notice than Griffith, and thought he posed for admiration, for she used to tell people that no one could guess what a child he was for slyness; so that he could not bear going out with her, and sometimes bemoaned himself to me.

There must be a good deal of sneaking in the undeveloped nature, for in those days I was ashamed of my preference for Clarence, the naughty one. But there was no helping it, he was so much more gentle than Griff, and would always give up any sport that incommoded me, instead of calling me a stupid little ape, and becoming more boisterous after the fashion of Griff. Moreover, he fetched and carried for me unweariedly, and would play at spillekins, help to put up puzzles, and enact little dramas with our wooden animals, such as Griff scorned as only fit for babies. Even nurse allowed Clarence's merits towards me and little Emily, but always with the sigh: 'If he was but as good in other respects, but them quiet ones is always sly.'

Good Nurse Gooch! We all owe much to her staunch fidelity, strong discipline, and unselfish devotion, but nature had not fitted her to deal with a timid, sensitive child, of highly nervous temperament. Indeed, persons of far more insight might have been perplexed by the fact that Clarence was exemplary at church and prayers, family and private,—whenever Griff would let him, that is to say,—and would add private petitions of his own, sometimes of a startling nature. He never scandalised the nursery, like Griff, by unseemly pranks on Sundays, nor by innovations in the habits of Noah's ark, but was as much shocked as nurse when the lion was made to devour the elephant, or the lion and wolf fought in an embrace fatal to their legs. Bible stories and Watt's hymns were more to Clarence than even to me, and he used to ask questions for which Gooch's theology was quite insufficient, and which brought the invariable answers, 'Now, Master Clarry, I never did! Little boys should not ask such questions!' 'What's the use of your pretending, sir! It's all falseness, that's what it is! I hates hypercrīting!' 'Don't worrit, Master Clarence; you are a very naughty boy to say such things. I shall put you in the corner!'

Even nurse was scared one night when Clarence had a frightful screaming fit, declaring that he saw 'her—her—all white,' and even while being slapped reiterated, '*her*, Lucy!'

Lucy was a kind elder girl in the Square gardens, a protector of little timid ones. She was known to be at that time very ill with measles, and in fact died that very night. Both my brothers sickened the next day, and Emily and I soon followed their example, but no one had it badly except Clarence, who had high fever, and very much delirium each night, talking to people whom he thought he saw, so as to make nurse regret her severity on the vision of Lucy.

CHAPTER II
SCHOOLROOM DAYS

'In the loom of life-cloth pleasure,
Ere our childish days be told,
With the warp and woof enwoven,
Glitters like a thread of gold.'—

Jean Ingelow.

Looking back, I think my mother was the leading spirit in our household, though she never for a moment suspected it. Indeed, the chess queen must be the most active on the home board, and one of the objects of her life was to give her husband a restful evening when he came home to the six o'clock dinner. She also had to make both ends meet on an income which would seem starvation at the present day; but she was strong, spirited, and managing, and equal to all her tasks till the long attendance upon me, and the consequent illness, forced her to spare herself—a little—a very little.

Previously she had been our only teacher, except that my father read a chapter of the Bible with us every morning before breakfast, and heard the Catechism on a Sunday. For we could all read long before young gentlefolks nowadays can say their letters. It was well for me, since books with a small quantity of type, and a good deal of frightful illustration, beguiled many of my weary moments. You may see my special favourites, bound up, on the shelf in my bedroom. Crabbe's *Tales*, *Frank*, *the Parent's Assistant*, and later, Croker's *Tales from English History*, Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*, *Tales of a Grandfather*, and the *Rival Crusoes* stand pre-eminent—also *Mrs. Leicester's School*, with the ghost story cut out.

Fairies and ghosts were prohibited as unwholesome, and not unwisely. The one would have been enervating to me, and the other would have been a definite addition to Clarence's stock of horrors. Indeed, one story had been cut out of Crabbe's *Tales*, and another out of an Annual presented to Emily, but not before Griff had read the latter, and the version he related to us probably lost nothing in the telling; indeed, to this day I recollect the man, wont to slay the harmless cricket on the hearth, and in a storm at sea pursued by a gigantic cockroach and thrown overboard. The night after hearing this choice legend Clarence was found crouching beside me in bed for fear of the cockroach. I am afraid the vengeance was more than proportioned to the offence!

Even during my illness that brave mother struggled to teach my brothers' daily lessons, and my father heard them a short bit of Latin grammar at his breakfast (five was thought in those days to be the fit age to begin it, and fathers the fit teachers thereof). And he continued to give this morning lesson when, on our return from airing at Ramsgate after our recovery from the measles, my mother found she must submit to transfer us to a daily governess.

Old Miss Newton's attainments could not have been great, for her answers to my inquiries were decidedly funny, and prefaced *sotto voce* with, 'What a child it is!' But she was a good kindly lady, who had the faculty of teaching, and of forestalling rebellion; and her little thin corkscrew curls, touched with gray, her pale eyes, prim black silk apron, and sandalled shoes, rise before me full of happy associations of tender kindness and patience. She was wise, too, in her own simple way. When nurse would have forewarned her of Clarence's failings in his own hearing, she cut the words short by declaring that she should like never to find out which was the naughty one. And when habit was too strong, and he had denied the ink spot on the atlas, she persuasively wiled out a confession not only to her but to mamma, who hailed the avowal as the beginning of better things, and kissed instead of punishing.

Clarence's queries had been snubbed into reserve, and I doubt whether Miss Newton's theoretic theology was very much more developed than that of Mrs. Gooch, but her practice and devotion were admirable, and she fostered religious sentiment among us, introducing little books which were welcome in the restricted range of Sunday reading. Indeed, Mrs. Sherwood's have some literary merit, and her *Fairchild Family* indulged in such delicious and eccentric acts of naughtiness as quite atoned for all the religious teaching, and fascinated Griff, though he was apt to be very impatient of certain little affectionate lectures to which Clarence listened meekly. My father and mother were both of the old-fashioned orthodox school, with minds formed on Jeremy Taylor, Blair, South, and Secker, who thought it their duty to go diligently to church twice on Sunday, communicate four times a year (their only opportunities), after grave and serious preparation, read a sermon to their household on Sunday evenings, and watch over their children's religious instruction, though in a reserved undemonstrative manner. My father always read one daily chapter with us every morning, one Psalm at family prayers, and my mother made us repeat a few verses of Scripture before our other studies began; besides which there was special teaching on Sunday, and an abstinence from amusements, such as would now be called Sabbatarian, but a walk in the Park with papa was so much esteemed that it made the day a happy and honoured one to those who could walk.

There was little going into society, comparatively, for people in our station,—solemn dinner-parties from time to time—two a year, did we give, and then the house was turned upside down,—and now and then my father dined out, or brought a friend home to dinner; and there were so-called morning calls in the afternoon, but no tea-drinking. For the most part the heads of the family dined alone at six, and afterwards my father read aloud some book of biography or travels, while we children were expected to employ ourselves quietly, threading beads, drawing, or putting up puzzles, and listen or not as we chose, only not interrupt, as we sat at the big, central, round, mahogany table. To this hour I remember portions of Belzoni's Researches and Franklin's terrible American adventures, and they bring back tones of my father's voice. As an authority 'papa' was seldom invoked, except on very serious occasions, such as Griffith's audacity, Clarence's falsehood, or my obstinacy; and then the affair was formidable, he was judicial and awful, and, though he would graciously forgive on signs of repentance, he never was sympathetic. He had not married young, and there were forty years or more between him and his sons, so that he had left too far behind him the feelings of boyhood to make himself one with us, even if he had thought it right or dignified to do so,—yet I cannot describe the depth of the respect and loyalty he inspired in us nor the delight we felt in a word of commendation or a special attention from him.

The early part of Miss Newton's rule was unusually fertile in such pleasures, and much might have been spared, could Clarence have been longer under her influence; but Griff grew beyond her management, and was taunted by 'fellows in the Square' into assertions of manliness, such as kicking his heels, stealing her odd little fringed parasol, pitching his books into the area, keeping her in misery with his antics during their walks, and finally leading Clarence off after Punch into the Rookery of St. Giles's, where she could not follow, because Emily was in her charge.

This was the crisis. She had to come home without the boys, and though they arrived long before any of the authorities knew of their absence, she owned with tears that she could not conscientiously be responsible any longer for Griffith,—who not only openly defied her authority, but had found out how little she knew, and laughed at her. I have reason to believe also that my mother had discovered that she frequented the preachings of Rowland Hill and Baptist Noel; and had confiscated some unorthodox tracts presented to the servants, thus being alarmed lest she should implant the seeds of dissent.

Parting with her after four years under her was a real grief. Even Griff was fond of her; when once emancipated, he used to hug her and bring her remarkable presents, and she heartily loved her tormentor. Everybody did. It remained a great pleasure to get her to spend an evening with us while the elders were gone out to dinner; nor do I think she ever did us anything but good, though I am

afraid we laughed at ‘Old Newton’ as we grew older and more conceited. We never had another governess. My mother read and enforced diligence on Emily and me, and we had masters for different studies; the two boys went to school; and when Martyn began to emerge from babyhood, Emily was his teacher.

CHAPTER III
WIN AND SLOW

'The rude will shuffle through with ease enough:
Great schools best suit the sturdy and the rough.'

Cowper.

At school Griffith was very happy, and brilliantly successful, alike in study and sport, though sports were not made prominent in those days, and triumphs in them were regarded by the elders with doubtful pride, lest they should denote a lack of attention to matters of greater importance. All his achievements were, however, poured forth by himself and Clarence to Emily and me, and we felt as proud of them as if they had been our own.

Clarence was industrious, and did not fail in his school work, but when he came home for the holidays there was a cowed look about him, and private revelations were made over my sofa that made my flesh creep. The scars were still visible, caused by having been compelled to grasp the bars of the grate bare-handed; and, what was worse, he had been suspended outside a third story window by the wrists, held by a schoolfellow of thirteen!

'But what was Griff about?' I demanded, with hot tears of indignation.

'Oh, Win!—that's what they call him, and me Slow—he said it would do me good. But I don't think it did, Eddy. It only makes my heart beat fit to choke me whenever I go near the passage window.'

I could only utter a vain wish that I had been there and able to fight for him, and I attacked Griff on the subject on the first opportunity.

'Oh!' was his answer, 'it is only what all fellows have to bear if there's no pluck in them. They tried it on upon me, you know, but I soon showed them it would not do'—with the cock of the nose, the flash of the eyes, the clench of the fist, that were peculiarly Griff's own; and when I pleaded that he might have protected Clarence, he laughed scornfully. 'As to Slow, wretched being, a fellow can't help bullying him. It comes as natural as to a cat with a mouse.' On further and reiterated pleadings, Griff declared, first, that it was the only thing to do Slow any good, or make a man of him; and next, that he heartily wished that Winslow junior had been Miss Clara at once, as the fellows called him —it was really hard on him (Griff) to have such a sneaking little coward tied to him for a junior!

I particularly resented the term Slow, for Clarence had lately been the foremost of us in his studies; but the idea that learning had anything to do with the matter was derided, and as time went on, there was vexation and displeasure at his progress not being commensurate with his abilities. It would have been treason to schoolboy honour to let the elders know that though a strong, high-spirited popular boy like 'Win' might venture to excel big bullying dunces, such fair game as poor 'Slow' could be terrified into not only keeping below them, but into doing their work for them. To him Cowper's 'Tirocinium' had only too much sad truth.

As to his old failing, there were no special complaints, but in those pre-Arnoldian times no lofty code of honour was even ideal among schoolboys, or expected of them by masters; shuffling was thought natural, and allowances made for faults in indolent despair.

My mother thought the Navy the proper element of boyhood, and her uncle the Admiral promised a nomination,—a simple affair in those happy days, involving neither examination nor competition. Griffith was, however, one of those independent boys who take an aversion to whatever is forced on them as their fate. He was ready and successful with his studies, a hero among his comrades, and preferred continuing at school to what he pronounced, on the authority of the nautical

tales freely thrown in our way, to be the life of a dog, only fit for the fool of the family; besides, he had once been out in a boat, tasted of sea-sickness, and been laughed at. My father was gratified, thinking his brains too good for a midshipman, and pleased that he should wish to tread in his own steps at Harrow and Oxford, and thus my mother could not openly regret his degeneracy when all the rest of us were crazy over *Tom Cringle's Log*, and ready to envy Clarence when the offer was passed on to him, and he appeared in the full glory of his naval uniform. Not much choice had been offered to him. My mother would have thought it shameful and ungrateful to have no son available, my father was glad to have the boy's profession fixed, and he himself was rejoiced to escape from the miseries he knew only too well, and ready to believe that uniform and dirk would make a man of him at once, with all his terrors left behind. Perhaps the chief drawback was that the ladies *would* say, 'What a darling!' affording Griff endless opportunities for the good-humoured mockery by which he concealed his own secret regrets. Did not even Selina Clarkson, whose red cheeks, dark blue eyes, and jetty profusion of shining curls, were our notion of perfect beauty, select the little naval cadet for her partner at the dancing master's ball?

In the first voyage, a cruise in the Pacific, all went well. The good Admiral had carefully chosen ship and captain; there were an excellent set of officers, a good tone among the midshipmen, and Clarence, who was only twelve years old, was constituted the pet of the cockpit. One lad in especial, Coles by name, attracted by Clarence's pleasant gentleness, and impelled by the generosity that shields the weak, became his guardian friend, and protected him from all the roughnesses in his power. If there were a fault in that excellent Coles, it was that he made too much of a baby of his *protégé*, and did not train him to shift for himself: but wisdom and moderation are not characteristics of early youth. At home we had great enjoyment of his long descriptive letters, which came under cover to our father at the Admiralty, but were chiefly intended for my benefit. All were proud of them, and great was my elation when I heard papa relate some fact out of them with the preface, 'My boy tells me, my boy Clarence, in the *Calypso*; he writes a capital letter.'

How great was our ecstasy when after three years and a half we had him at home again; handsome, vigorous, well-grown, excellently reported of, fully justifying my mother's assurances that the sea would make a man of him. There was Griffith in the fifth form and a splendid cricketer, but Clarence could stand up to him now, and Harrovian exploits were tame beside stories of sharks and negroes, monkeys and alligators. There was one in particular, about a whole boat's crew sitting down on what they thought was a fallen tree, but which suddenly swept them all over on their faces, and turned out to be a boa-constrictor, and would have embraced one of them if he had not had the sail of the boat coiled round the mast, and palmed off upon him, when he gorged it contentedly, and being found dead on the next landing, his skin was used to cover the captain's sea-chest. Clarence declined to repeat this tale and many others before the elders, and was displeased with Emily for referring to it in public. As to his terrors, he took it for granted that an officer of H.M.S. *Calypso*, had left them behind, and in fact, he naturally forgot and passed over what he had not been shielded from, while his hereditary love of the sea really made those incidental to his profession much more endurable than the bullying he had undergone at school.

We were very happy that Christmas, and very proud of our boys. One evening we were treated to a box at the pantomime, and even I was able to go to it. We put our young sailor and our sister in the forefront, and believed that every one was as much struck with them as with the wonderful transformations of Goody-Two-Shoes under the wand of Harlequin. Brother-like, we might tease our one girl, and call her an affected little pussy cat, but our private opinion was that she excelled all other damsels with her bright blue eyes and pretty curling hair, which had the same chestnut shine as Griff's —enough to make us correct possible vanity by terming it red, though we were ready to fight any one else who presumed to do so. Indeed Griff had defended its hue in single combat, and his eye was treated for it with beefsteak by Peter in the pantry. We were immensely, though silently, proud of her in her white embroidered cambric frock, red sash and shoes, and coral necklace, almost an heirloom,

for it had been brought from Sicily in Nelson's days by my mother's poor young father. How parents and doctors in these days would have shuddered at her neck and arms, bare, not only in the evening, but by day! When she was a little younger she could so shrink up from her clothes that Griff, or little Martyn, in a mischievous mood, would put things down her back, to reappear below her petticoats.

Once it was a dead wasp, which descended harmlessly the length of her spine! She was a good-humoured, affectionate, dear sister, my valued companion, submitting patiently to be eclipsed when Clarence was present, and everything to me in his absence. Sturdy little Martyn too, was held by us to be the most promising of small boys. He was a likeness of Clarence, only stouter, hardier, and without the delicate, girlish, wistful look; imitating Griff in everything, and rather a heavy handful to Emily and me when left to our care, though we were all the more proud of his high spirit, and were fast becoming a mutual admiration society.

What then were our feelings when Griff, always fearless, dashed to the rescue of a boy under whom the ice had broken in St. James' Park, and held him up till assistance came? Martyn, who was with him, was sent home to fetch dry clothes and reassure my mother, which he did by dashing upstairs, shouting, 'Where's mamma? Here's Griff been into the water and pulled out a boy, and they don't know if he is drowned; but he looks—oh!'

Even after my mother had elicited that Martyn's *he* meant the boy, and not Griff, she could not rest without herself going to see that our eldest was unhurt, greet him, and bring him home. What happy tears stood in her eyes, how my father shook hands with him, how we drank his health after dinner, and how ungrateful I was to think Clarence deserved his name of Slow for having stayed at home to play chess with me because my back was aching, when he might have been winning the like honours! How red and gruff and shy the hero looked, and how he entreated no one to say any more about it!

He would not even look publicly at the paragraph about it in the paper, only vituperating it for having made him into 'a juvenile Etonian,' and hoping no one from Harrow would guess whom it meant.

I found that paragraph the other day in my mother's desk, folded over the case of the medal of the Royal Humane Society, which Griff affected to despise, but which, when he was well out of the way, used to be exhibited on high days and holidays. It seems now like the boundary mark of the golden days of our boyhood, and unmitigated hopes for one another.

CHAPTER IV
UBI LAPSUS, QUID FECI

'Clarence is come—false, fleeting, perjured Clarence.'

King Richard III.

There was much stagnation in the Navy in those days in the reaction after the great war; and though our family had fair interest at the Admiralty, it was seven months before my brother went to sea again. To me they were very happy months, with my helper of helpers, companion of companions, who made possible to me many a little enterprise that could not be attempted without him. My father made him share my studies, and thus they became doubly pleasant. And oh, ye boys! who murmur at the Waverley Novels as a dry holiday task, ye may envy us the zest and enthusiasm with which we devoured them in their freshness. Strangely enough, the last that we read together was the *Fair Maid of Perth*.

Clarence and his friend Coles longed to sail together again, but Coles was shelved; and when Clarence's appointment came at last, it was to the brig *Clotho*, Commander Brydone, going out in the Mediterranean Fleet, under Sir Edward Codrington. My mother did not like brigs, and my father did not like what he heard of the captain; but there had been jealous murmurs about appointments being absorbed by sons of officials—he durst not pick and choose; and the Admiral pronounced that if the lad had been spoilt on board the *Calypso*, it was time for him to rough it—a dictum whence there was no appeal.

Half a year later the tidings of the victory of Navarino rang through Europe, and were only half welcome to the conquerors; but in our household it is connected with a terrible recollection. Though more than half a century has rolled by, I shrink from dwelling on the shock that fell on us when my father returned from Somerset House with such a countenance that we thought our sailor had fallen; but my mother could brook the fact far less than if her son had died a gallant death. The *Clotho* was on her way home, and Midshipman William Clarence Winslow was to be tried by court-martial for insubordination, disobedience, and drunkenness. My mother was like one turned to stone. She would hardly go out of doors; she could scarcely bring herself to go to church; she would have had my father give up his situation if there had been any other means of livelihood. She could not talk; only when my father sighed, 'We should never have put him into the Navy,' she hotly replied,

'How was I to suppose that a son of mine would be like that?'

Emily cried all day and all night. Some others would have felt it a relief to have cried too. In more furious language than parents in those days tolerated, Griff wrote to me his utter disbelief, and how he had punched the heads of fellows who presumed to doubt that it was not all a rascally, villainous plot.

When the time came my father went down by the night mail to Portsmouth. He could scarcely bear to face the matter; but, as he said, he could not have it on his conscience if the boy did anything desperate for want of some one to look after him. Besides, there might be some explanation.

'Explanation,' said my mother bitterly. 'That there always is!'

The 'explanation' was this—I have put together what came out in evidence, what my father and the Admiral heard from commiserating officers, and what at different times I learned from Clarence himself. Captain Brydone was one of the rough old description of naval men, good sailors and stern disciplinarians, but wanting in any sense of moral duties towards their ship's company. His lieutenant was of the same class, soured, moreover, by tardy promotion, and prejudiced against a gentleman-like, fair-faced lad, understood to have interest, and bearing a name that implied it. Of the other two

midshipmen, one was a dull lad of low stamp, the other a youth of twenty, a born bully, with evil as well as tyrannical propensities;—the crew conforming to severe discipline on board, but otherwise wild and lawless. In such a ship a youth with good habits, sensitive conscience, and lack of moral or physical courage, could not but lead a life of misery, losing every day more of his self-respect and spirit as he was driven to the evil he loathed, dreading the consequences, temporal and eternal, with all his soul, yet without resolution or courage to resist.

As every one knows, the battle of Navarino came on suddenly, almost by mistake; and though it is perhaps no excuse, the hurly-burly and horror burst upon him at unawares. Though the English loss was comparatively very small, the *Clotho* was a good deal exposed, and two men were killed—one so close to Clarence that his clothes were splashed with blood. This entirely unnerved him; he did not even know what he did, but he was not to be found when required to carry an order, and was discovered hidden away below, shuddering, in his berth, and then made some shallow excuse about misunderstanding orders. Whether this would have been brought up against him under other circumstances, or whether it would have been remembered that great men, including Charles V. and Henri IV., have had their *moment de peur*, I cannot tell; but there were other charges. I cannot give date or details. There is no record among the papers before me; and I can only vaguely recall what could hardly be read for the sense of agony, was never discussed, and was driven into the most oblivious recesses of the soul fifty years ago. There was a story about having let a boat's crew, of which he was in charge, get drunk and over-stay their time. One of them deserted; and apparently prevarication ran to the bounds of perjury, if it did not overpass them. (N.B.—Seeing seamen flogged was one of the sickening horrors that haunted Clarence in the *Clotho*.) Also, when on shore at Malta with the young man whose name I will not record—his evil genius—he was beguiled or bullied into a wine-shop, and while not himself was made the cat's-paw of some insolent practical joke on the lieutenant; and when called to account, was so bewildered and excited as to use unpardonable language.

Whatever it might have been in detail, so much was proved against him that he was dismissed his ship, and his father was recommended to withdraw him from the service, as being disqualified by want of nerve. Also, it was added more privately, that such vicious tendencies needed home restraint. The big bully, his corrupter, bore witness against him, but did not escape scot free, for one of the captains spoke to him in scathing tones of censure.

Whenever my mother was in trouble, she always re-arranged the furniture, and a family crisis was always heralded by a revolution of chairs, tables, and sofas. She could not sit still under suspense, and, during these terrible days the entire house underwent a setting to rights. Emily attended upon her, and I sat and dusted books. No doubt it was much better for us than sitting still. My father's letter came by the morning mail, telling us of the sentence, and that he and our poor culprit, as he said, would come home by the Portsmouth coach in the evening.

One room was already in order when Sir John Griffith kindly came to see whether he could bring any comfort to a spirit which would infinitely have preferred death to dishonour, and was, above all, shocked at the lack of physical courage. Never had I liked our old Admiral so well as when I heard how his chief anger was directed against the general mismanagement, and the cruelty of blighting a poor lad's life when not yet seventeen. His father might have been warned to remove him without the public scandal of a court-martial and dismissal.

'The guilt and shame would have been all the same to us,' said my mother.

'Come, Mary, don't be hard on the poor fellow. In quiet times like these a poor boy can't look over the wall where one might have stolen a horse, ay, or a dozen horses, when there was something else to think about!'

'You would not have forgiven such a thing, sir.'

'It never would have happened under me, or in any decently commanded ship!' he thundered. 'There wasn't a fault to be found with him in the *Calypso*. What possessed Winslow to let him sail

with Brydone? But the service is going,' etc. etc., he ran on—forgetting that it was he himself who had been unwilling, perhaps rightly, to press the Duke of Clarence for an appointment to a crack frigate for his namesake. However, when he took leave he repeated, as he kissed my mother, 'Mind, Mary, don't be set against the lad. That's the way to make 'em desperate, and he is a mere boy, after all.'

Poor mother, it was not so much hardness as a wounded spirit that made her look so rigid. It might have been better if the return could have been delayed so as to make her yearn after her son, but there was nowhere for him to go, and the coach was already on its way. How strange it was to feel the wonted glow at Clarence's return coupled with a frightful sense of disgrace and depression.

The time was far on in October, and it was thus quite dark when the travellers arrived, having walked from Charing Cross, where the coach set them down. My father came in first, and my mother clung to him as if he had been absent for weeks, while all the joy of contact with my brother swept over me, even though his hand hung limp in mine, and was icy cold like his cheeks. My father turned to him with one of the little set speeches of those days. 'Here is our son, Mary, who has promised me to do his utmost to retrieve his character, as far as may be possible, and happily he is still young.'

My mother's embrace was in a sort of mechanical obedience to her husband's gesture, and her voice was not perhaps meant to be so severe as it sounded when she said, 'You are very cold—come and warm yourself.'

They made room for him by the fire, and my father stood up in front of it, giving particulars of the journey. Emily and Martyn were at tea in the nursery, in a certain awe that hindered them from coming down; indeed, Martyn seems to have expected to see some strange transformation in his brother. Indeed, there was alteration in the absence of the blue and gold, and, still more, in the loss of the lightsome, hopeful expression from the young face.

There is a picture of Ary Scheffer's of an old knight, whose son had fled from the battle, cutting the tablecloth in two between himself and the unhappy youth. Like that stern baron's countenance was that with which my mother sat at the head of the dinner-table, and we conversed by jerks about whatever we least cared for, as if we could hide our wretchedness from Peter. When the children appeared each gave Clarence the shyest of kisses, and they sat demurely on their chairs on either side of my father to eat their almonds and raisins, after which we went upstairs, and there was the usual reading. It is curious, but though none of us could have told at the time what it was about, on turning over not long ago a copy of Head's *Pampas and Andes*, one chapter struck me with an intolerable sense of melancholy, such as the bull chases of South America did not seem adequate to produce, and by and by I remembered that it was the book in course of being read at that unhappy period. My mother went on as diligently as ever with some of those perpetual shirts which seemed to be always in hand except before company, when she used to do tambour work for Emily's frocks.

Clarence sat the whole time in a dark corner, never stirring, except that he now and then nodded a little. He had gone through many wakeful, and worse than wakeful, nights of wretched suspense, and now the worst was over.

Family prayers took place, chill good-nights were exchanged, and nobody interfered with his helping me up to my bedroom as usual; but there was something in his face to which I durst not speak, though perhaps I looked, for he exclaimed, 'Don't, Ned!' wrung my hand, and sped away to his own quarters higher up. Then came a sound which made me open my door to listen. Dear little Emily! She had burst out of her own room in her dressing-gown, and flung herself upon her brother as he was plodding wearily upstairs in the dark, clinging round his neck sobbing, 'Dear, dear Clarry! I can't bear it! I don't care. You're my own dear brother, and they are all wicked, horrid people.'

That was all I heard, except hushings on Clarence's part, as if the opening of my door and the thread of light from it warned him that there was risk of interruption. He seemed to be dragging her up to her own room, and I was left with a pang at her being foremost in comforting him.

My father enacted that he should be treated as usual. But how could that be when papa himself did not know how changed were his own ways from his kindly paternal air of confidence? All trust

had been undermined, so that Clarence could not cross the threshold without being required to state his object, and, if he overstayed the time calculated, he was cross-examined, and his replies received with a sigh of doubt.

He hung about the house, not caring to do much, except taking me out in my Bath chair or languidly reading the most exciting books he could get;—but there was no great stock of sensation then, except the Byronic, and from time to time one of my parents would exclaim, 'Clarence, I wonder you can find nothing more profitable to occupy yourself with than trash like that!'

He would lay down the book without a word, and take up Smith's *Wealth of Nations* or Smollett's *England*—the profitable studies recommended, and speedily become lost in a dejected reverie, with fixed eyes and drooping lips.

CHAPTER V
A HELPING HAND

'Though hawks can prey through storms and winds,
The poor bee in her hive must dwell.'—

Henry Vaughan.

In imagination the piteous dejection of our family seems to have lasted for ages, but on comparison of dates it is plain that the first lightening of the burthen came in about a fortnight's time.

The firm of Frith and Castleford was coming to the front in the Chinese trade. The junior partner was an old companion of my father's boyhood; his London abode was near at hand, and he was a kind of semi-godfather to both Clarence and me, having stood proxy for our nominal sponsors. He was as good and open-hearted a man as ever lived, and had always been very kind to us; but he was scarcely welcome when my father, finding that he had come up alone to London to see about some repairs to his house, while his family were still in the country, asked him to dine and sleep—our first guest since our misfortune.

My mother could hardly endure to receive any one, but she seemed glad to see my father become animated and like himself while Roman Catholic Emancipation was vehemently discussed, and the ruin of England hotly predicted. Clarence moped about silently as usual, and tried to avoid notice, and it was not till the next morning—after breakfast, when the two gentlemen were in the dining-room, nearly ready to go their several ways, and I was in the window awaiting my classical tutor—that Mr. Castleford said,—

'May I ask, Winslow, if you have any plans for that poor boy?'

'Edward?' said my father, almost wilfully misunderstanding. 'His ambition is to be curator of something in the British Museum, isn't it?'

Mr. Castleford explained that he meant the other, and my father sadly answered that he hardly knew; he supposed the only thing was to send him to a private tutor, but where to find a fit one he did not know and besides, what could be his aim? Sir John Griffith had said he was only fit for the Church, 'But one does not wish to dispose of a tarnished article there.'

'Certainly not,' said Mr. Castleford; and then he spoke words that rejoiced my heart, though they only made my father groan, bidding him remember that it was not so much actual guilt as the accident of Clarence's being in the Navy that had given so serious a character to his delinquencies. If he had been at school, perhaps no one would ever have heard of them, 'Though I don't say,' added the good man, casting a new light on the subject, 'that it would have been better for him in the end.' Then, quite humbly, for he knew my mother especially had a disdain for trade, he asked what my father would think of letting him give Clarence work in the office for the present. 'I know,' he said, 'it is not the line your family might prefer, but it is present occupation; and I do not think you could well send a youth who has seen so much of the world back to schooling. Besides, this would keep him under your own eye.'

My father was greatly touched by the kindness, but he thought it right to set before Mr. Castleford the very worst side of poor Clarence; declaring that he durst not answer for a boy who had never, in spite of pains and punishments, learnt to speak truth at home or abroad, repeating Captain Brydone's dreadful report, and even adding that, what was most grievous of all, there was an affectation of piety about him that could scarcely be anything but self-deceit and hypocrisy. 'Now,' he said, 'my eldest son, Griffith, is just a boy, makes no profession, is not—as I am afraid you have seen—exemplary at church, when Clarence sits as meek as a mouse, but then he is always above-

board, frank and straightforward. You know where to have a high-spirited fellow, who will tame down, but you never know what will come next with the other. I sometimes wonder for what error of mine Providence has seen fit to give me such a son.'

Just then an important message came for Mr. Winslow, and he had to hurry away, but Mr. Castleford still remained, and presently said,—

'Edward, I should like to know what your eyes have been trying to say all this time.'

'Oh, sir,' I burst out, 'do give him a chance. Indeed he never means to do wrong. The harm is not in him. He would have been the best of us all if he had only been let alone.'

Those were exactly my own foolish words, for which I could have beaten myself afterwards; but Mr. Castleford only gave a slight grave smile, and said, 'You mean that your brother's real defect is in courage, moral and physical.'

'Yes,' I said, with a great effort at expressing myself. 'When he is frightened, or bullied, or browbeaten, he does not know what he is doing or saying. He is quite different when he is his own self; only nobody can understand.'

Strange that though the favoured home son and nearly sixteen years old, it would have been impossible to utter so much to one of our parents. Indeed the last sentence felt so disloyal that the colour burnt in my cheeks as the door opened; but it only admitted Clarence, who, having heard the front door shut, thought the coast was clear, and came in with a load of my books and dictionaries.

'Clarence,' said Mr. Castleford, and the direct address made him start and flush, 'supposing your father consents, should you be willing to turn your mind to a desk in my counting-house?'

He flushed deeper red, and his fingers quivered as he held by the table. 'Thank you, sir. Anything—anything,' he said hesitatingly.

'Well,' said Mr. Castleford, with the kindest of voices, 'let us have it out. What is in your mind? You know, I'm a sort of godfather to you.'

'Sir, if you would only let me have a berth on board one of your vessels, and go right away.'

'Aye, my poor boy, that's what you would like best, I've no doubt; but look at Edward's face there, and think what that would come to at the best!'

'Yes, I know I have no right to choose,' said Clarence, drooping his head as before.

"Tis not that, my dear lad,' said the good man, 'but that packing you off like that, among your inferiors in breeding and everything else, would put an end to all hope of your redeeming the past—outwardly I mean, of course—and lodge you in a position of inequality to your brothers and sister, and all—'

'That's done already,' said Clarence.

'If you were a man grown it might be so,' returned Mr. Castleford, 'but bless me, how old are you?'

'Seventeen next 1st of November,' said Clarence.

'Not a bit too old for a fresh beginning,' said Mr. Castleford cheerily. 'God helping you, you will be a brave and good man yet, my boy—' then as my master rang at the door—'Come with me and look at the old shop.'

Poor Clarence muttered something unintelligible, and I had to own for him that he never went out without accounting for himself. Whereupon our friend caused my mother to be hunted up, and explained to her that he wanted to take Clarence out with him—making some excuse about something they were to see together.

That walk enabled him to say something which came nearer to cheering Clarence than anything that had passed since that sad return, and made him think that to be connected with Mr. Castleford was the best thing that could befall him. Mr. Castleford on his side told my father that he was sure that the boy was good-hearted all the time, and thoroughly repentant; but this had the less effect because plausibility, as my father called it, was one of the qualities that specially annoyed him in Clarence, and made him fear that his friend might be taken in. However, the matter was discussed between

the elders, and it was determined that this most friendly offer should be accepted experimentally. It was impressed on Clarence, with unnecessary care, that the line of life was inferior; but that it was his only chance of regaining anything like a position, and that everything depended on his industry and integrity.

'Integrity!' commented Clarence, with a burning spot on his cheek after one of these lectures; 'I believe they think me capable of robbing the office!'

We found out, too, that the senior partner, Mr. Frith, a very crusty old bachelor, did not like the appointment, and that it was made quite against his will. 'You'll be getting your clerks next from Newgate!' was what some amiable friend reported him to have said. However, Mr. Castleford had his way, and Clarence was to begin his work with the New Year, being in the meantime cautioned and lectured on the crime and danger of his evil propensities more than he could well bear. 'Oh!' he groaned, 'it serves me right, I know that very well, but if my father only knew how I hate and abhor all those things—and how I loathed them at the very time I was dragged into them!'

'Why don't you tell him so?' I asked.

'That would make it no better.'

'It is not so bad as if you had gone into it willingly, and for your own pleasure.'

'He would only think that another lie.'

No more could be said, for the idea of Clarence's untruthfulness and depravity had become so deeply rooted in our father's mind that there was little hope of displacing it, and even at the best his manner was full of grave constrained pity. Those few words were Clarence's first approach to confidence with me, but they led to more, and he knew there was one person who did not believe the defect was in the bent of his will so much as in its strength.

All the time the prospect of the counting-house in comparison with the sea was so distasteful to him that I was anxious whenever he went out alone, or even with Griffith, who despised the notion of, as he said, sitting on a high stool, dealing in tea, so much that he was quite capable of aiding and abetting in an escape from it. Two considerations, however, held Clarence back; one, the timidity of nature which shrank from so violent a step, and the other, the strong affections that bound him to his home, though his sojourn there was so painful. He knew the misery his flight would have been to me; indeed I took care to let him see it.

And Griffith's return was like a fresh spring wind dispersing vapours. He had gained an excellent scholarship at Brazenose, and came home radiant with triumph, cheering us all up, and making a generous use of his success. He was no letter-writer, and after learning that the disaster and disgrace were all too certain, he ignored the whole, and hailed Clarence on his return as if nothing had happened. As eldest son, and almost a University man, he could argue with our parents in a manner we never presumed on. At least I cannot aver what he actually uttered, but probably it was a revised version of what he thundered forth to me. 'Such nonsense! such a shame to keep the poor beggar going about with that hang dog look, as if he had done for himself for life! Why, I've known fellows do ever so much worse of their own accord, and nothing come of it. If it was found out, there might be a row and a flogging, and there was an end of it. As to going about mourning, and keeping the whole house in doleful dumps, as if there was never to be any good again, it was utter folly, and so I've told Bill, and papa and mamma, both of them!'

How this was administered, or how they took it, there is no knowing, but Griff would neither skate nor go to the theatre, nor to any other diversion, without his brother; and used much kindly force and banter to unearth him from his dismal den in the back drawing-room. He was only let alone when there were engagements with friends, and indeed, when meetings in the streets took place, by tacit agreement, Clarence would shrink off in the crowd as if not belonging to his companion; and these were the moments that stung him into longing to flee to the river, and lose the sense of shame among common sailors: but there was always some good angel to hold him back from desperate measures —chiefly just then, the love between us three brothers, a love that never cooled throughout our lives,

and which dear old Griff made much more apparent at this critical time than in the old Win and Slow days of school. That return of his enlivened us all, and removed the terrible constraint from our meals, bringing us back, as it were, to ordinary life and natural intercourse among ourselves and with our neighbours.

CHAPTER VI
THE VALLEY OF HUMILIATION

'But when I lay upon the shore,
  Like some poor wounded thing,
I deemed I should not evermore
  Refit my wounded wing.
Nailed to the ground and fastened there,
This was the thought of my despair.'

Abp. Trench.

Clarence's debut at the office was not wholly unsuccessful. He wrote a good hand, and had a good deal of method and regularity in his nature, together with a real sense of gratitude to Mr. Castleford; and this bore him through the weariness of his new employment, and, what was worse, the cold reception he met with from the other clerks. He was too quiet and reserved for the wilder spirits, too much of a gentleman for others, and in the eyes of the managers, and especially of the senior partner, a disgraced, untrustworthy youth foisted on the office by Mr. Castleford's weak partiality. That old Mr. Frith had, Clarence used to say, a perfectly venomous way of accepting his salute, and seemed always surprised and disappointed if he came in in time, or showed up correct work. Indeed, the old man was disliked and feared by all his subordinates as much as his partner was loved; and while Mr. Castleford, with his good-natured Irish wife and merry family, lived a life as cheerful as it was beneficent, Mr. Frith dwelt entirely alone, in rooms over the office, preserving the habits formed when his income had been narrow, and mistrusting everybody.

At the end of the first month of experiment, Mr. Castleford declared himself contented with Clarence's industry and steadiness, and permanent arrangements were made, to which Clarence submitted with an odd sort of passive gratitude, such as almost angered my father, who little knew how trying the position really was, nor how a certain home-sickness for the seafaring life was tugging at the lad's heart, and making each morning's entrance at the counting-house an effort—each merchant-captain, redolent of the sea, an object of envy. My mother would have sympathised here, but Clarence feared her more than my father, and she was living in continual dread of some explosion, so that her dark curls began to show streaks of gray, and her face to lose its round youthfulness.

Lent brought the question of Confirmation. Under the influence of good Bishop Blomfield, and in the wave of evangelical revival—then at its flood height—Confirmation was becoming a more prominent subject with religious people than it had probably ever been in our Church, and it was recognised that some preparation was desirable beyond the power of repeating the Church Catechism. This was all that had been required of my father at Harrow. My mother's godfather, a dignified clergyman, had simply said, 'I suppose, my dear, you know all about it;' and as for the Admiral, he remarked, 'Confirmed! I never was confirmed anything but a post-captain!'

Our incumbent was more attentive to his duties, or rather recognised more duties, than his predecessor. He preached on the subject, and formed classes, sixteen being then the limit of age,—since the idea of the vow, having become far more prominent than that of the blessing, it was held that full development of the will and understanding was needful.

I was of the requisite age, and my father spoke to the clergyman, who called, and, as I could not attend the classes, gave me books to read and questions to answer. Clarence read and discussed the questions with me, showing so much more insight into them, and fuller knowledge of Scripture than I possessed, that I exclaimed, 'Why should you not go up for Confirmation too?'

'No,' he answered mournfully. 'I must take no more vows if I can't keep them. It would just be profane.'

I had no more to say; indeed, my parents held the same view. It was good Mr. Castleford who saw things differently. He was a clergyman's son, and had been bred up in the old orthodoxy, which was just beginning to put forth fresh shoots, and, as a quasi-godfather, he held himself bound to take an interest in our religious life, while the sponsors, whose names stood in the family Bible, and whose spoons reposed in the plate-chest, never troubled themselves on the matter. I remember Clarence leaning over me and saying, 'Mr. Castleford thinks I might be confirmed. He says it is not so much the promise we make as of coming to Almighty God for strength to keep what we are bound by already! He is going to speak to papa.'

Perhaps no one except Mr. Castleford could have prevailed over the fear of profanation in the mind of my father, who was, in his old-fashioned way, one of the most reverent of men, and could not bear to think of holy things being approached by one under a stigma, nor of exposing his son to add to his guilt by taking and breaking further pledges. However, he was struck by his friend's arguments, and I heard him telling my mother that when he had wished to wait till there had been time to prove sincerity of repentance by a course of steadiness, the answer had been that it was hard to require strength, while denying the means of grace. My mother was scarcely convinced, but as he had consented she yielded without a protest; and she was really glad that I should have Clarence at my side to help me at the ceremony. The clergyman was applied to, and consented to let Clarence attend the classes, where his knowledge, comprehension, and behaviour were exemplary, so that a letter was written to my father expressive of perfect satisfaction with him. 'There,' said my father, 'I knew it would be so! It is not *that* which I want.'

The Confirmation seemed at the time a very short and perfunctory result of our preparation; and, as things were conducted or misconducted then, involved so much crowding and distress that I recollect very little but clinging to Clarence's arm under a strong sense of my infirmities,—the painful attempt at kneeling, and the big outstretched lawn sleeves while the blessing was pronounced over six heads at once, and then the struggle back to the pew, while the silver-pokered apparitor looked grim at us, as though the maimed and halt had no business to get into the way. Yet this was a great advance upon former Confirmations, and the Bishop met my father afterwards, and inquired most kindly after his lame son.

We were disappointed, and felt that we could not attain to the feelings in the Confirmation poem in the *Christian Year*—Mr. Castleford's gift to me. Still, I believe that, though encumbered with such a drag as myself, Clarence, more than I did,

> 'Felt Him how strong, our hearts how frail,
> And longed to own Him to the death.'

But the evangelical belief that dejection ought to be followed by a full sense of pardon and assurance of salvation somewhat perplexed and dimmed our Easter Communion. For one short moment, as Clarence turned to help my father lift me up from the altar-rail, I saw his face and eyes radiant with a wonderful rapt look; but it passed only too fast, and the more than ordinary glimpse his spiritual nature had had made him all the more sad afterwards, when he said, 'I would give everything to know that there was any steadfastness in my purpose to lead a new life.'

'But you are leading a new life.'

'Only because there is no one to bully me,' he said. Still, there had been no reproach against him all the time he had been at Frith and Castleford's, when suddenly we had a great shock.

Parties were running very high, and there were scurrilous papers about, which my father perfectly abhorred; and one day at dinner, when declaiming against something he had seen, he laid

down strict commands that none should be brought into the house. Then, glancing at Clarence, something possessed him to say, 'You have not been buying any.'

'No, sir,' Clarence answered; but a few minutes later, when we were alone together, the others having left him to help me upstairs, he exclaimed, 'Edward, what is to be done? I didn't buy it; but there is one of those papers in my great-coat pocket. Pollard threw it on my desk; and there was something in it that I thought would amuse you.'

'Oh! why didn't you say so?'

'There I am again! I simply could not, with his eye on me! Miserable being that I am! Oh, where is the spirit of ghostly strength?'

'Helping you now to take it to papa in the study and explain!' I cried; but the struggle in that tall fellow was as if he had been seven years old instead of seventeen, ere he put his hand over his face and gave me his arm to come out into the hall, fetch the paper, and make his confession. Alas! we were too late. The coat had been moved, the paper had fallen out; and there stood my mother with it in her hand, looking at Clarence with an awful stony face of mute grief and reproach, while he stammered forth what he had said before, and that he was about to give it to my father. She turned away, bitterly, contemptuously indignant and incredulous; and my corroborations only served to give both her and my father a certain dread of Clarence's influence over me, as though I had been either deceived or induced to back him in deceiving them. The unlucky incident plunged him back into the depths, just as he had begun to emerge. Slight as it was, it was no trifle to him, in spite of Griffith's exclamation, 'How absurd! Is a fellow to be bound to give an account of everything he looks at as if he were six years old? Catch me letting my mother pry into my pockets! But you are too meek, Bill; you perfectly invite them to make a row about nothing!'

CHAPTER VII
THE INHERITANCE

'For he that needs five thousand pound to live
Is full as poor as he that needs but five.
But if thy son can make ten pound his measure,
Then all thou addest may be called his treasure.'

George Herbert.

It was in the spring of 1829 that my father received a lawyer's letter announcing the death of James Winslow, Esquire, of Chantry House, Earlscombe, and inviting him, as heir-at-law, to be present at the funeral and opening of the will. The surprise to us all was great. Even my mother had hardly heard of Chantry House itself, far less as a possible inheritance; and she had only once seen James Winslow. He was the last of the elder branch of the family, a third cousin, and older than my father, who had known him in times long past. When they had last met, the Squire of Chantry House was a married man, with more than one child; my father a young barrister; and as one lived entirely in the country and the other in town, without any special congeniality, no intercourse had been kept up, and it was a surprise to hear that he had left no surviving children. My father greatly doubted whether being heir-at-law would prove to avail him anything, since it was likely that so distant a relation would have made a will in favour of some nearer connection on his wife's or mother's side. He was very vague about Chantry House, only knowing that it was supposed to be a fair property, and he would hardly consent to take Griffith with him by the Western Royal Mail, warning him and all the rest of us that our expectations would be disappointed.

Nevertheless we looked out the gentlemen's seats in *Paterson's Road Book*, and after much research, for Chantry House lay far off from the main road, we came upon—'Chantry House, Earlscombe, the seat of James Winslow, Esquire, once a religious foundation; beautifully situated on a rising ground, commanding an extensive prospect—'

'A religious foundation!' cried Emily. 'It will be a dear delicious old abbey, all Gothic architecture, with cloisters and ruins and ghosts.'

'Ghosts!' said my mother severely, 'what has put such nonsense into your head?'

Nevertheless Emily made up her mind that Chantry House would be another Melrose, and went about repeating the moonlight scene in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* whenever she thought no one was there to laugh at her.

My father and Griffith returned with the good news that there was no mistake. Chantry House was really his own, with the estate belonging to it, reckoned at £5000 a year, exclusive of a handsome provision to Miss Selby, the niece of the late Mrs. Winslow, a spinster of a certain age, who had lived with her uncle, and now proposed to remove to Bath. Mr. Winslow had, it appeared, lost his only son as a schoolboy, and his daughters, like their mother, had been consumptive. He had always been resolved that the estate should continue in the family; but reluctance to see any one take his son's place had withheld him from making any advances to my father; and for several years past he had been in broken health with failing faculties.

Of course there was much elation. Griff described as charming the place, perched on the southern slope of a wooded hill, with a broad fertile valley lying spread out before it, and the woods behind affording every promise of sport. The house, my father said, was good, odd and irregular, built at different times, but quite habitable, and with plenty of furniture, though he opined that mamma would think it needed modernising, to which she replied that our present chattels would make a great

difference; whereat my father, looking at the effects of more than twenty years of London blacks, gave a little whistle, for she was always the economical one of the pair.

Emily, with glowing cheeks and eager eyes, entreated to know whether it was Gothic, and had a cloister! Papa nipped her hopes of a cloister, but there were Gothic windows and doorway, and a bit of ruin in the garden, a fragment of the old chapel.

My father could not resign his office without notice, and, besides, he wished Miss Selby to have leisure for leaving her home of many years; after which there would be a few needful repairs. The delay was not a great grievance to any of us except little Martyn. We were much more Cockney than almost any one is in these days of railways. We were unusually devoid of kindred on both sides, my father's holidays were short, I was not a very movable commodity, and economy forbade long journeys, so that we had never gone farther than Ramsgate, where we claimed a certain lodging-house as a sort of right every summer.

Real country was as much unknown to us as the backwoods. My father alone had been born and bred to village life and habits, for my mother had spent her youth in a succession of seaport towns, frequented by men-of-war. We heard, too, that Chantry House was very secluded, with only a few cottages near at hand—a mile and a half from the church and village of Earlscombe, three from the tiny country town of Wattlesea, four from the place where the coach passed, connecting it with the civilisation of Bath and Bristol, from each of which places it was about half a day's distance, according to the measures of those times. It was a sort of banishment to people accustomed to the stream of life in London; and though the consequence and importance derived from being raised to the ranks of the Squirearchy were agreeable, they were a dear purchase at the cost of being out of reach of all our friends and acquaintances, as well as of other advantages.

To my father, however, the retirement from his many years of drudgery was really welcome, and he had preserved enough of country tastes to rejoice that it was, as he said, a clear duty to reside on his estate and look after his property. My mother saw his relief in the prospect, and suppressed her sighs at the dislocation of her life-long habits, and the loss of intercourse with the acquaintance whom separation raised to the rank of intimate friends, even her misgivings as to butchers, bakers, and grocers in the wilderness, and still worse, as to doctors for me.

'Humph!' said the Admiral, 'the boy will be all the better without them.'

And so I was; I can't say they were the subject of much regret, but I was really sorry to leave our big neighbour, the British Museum, where there were good friends who always made me welcome, and encouraged me in studies of coins and heraldry, which were great resources to me, so that I used to spend hours there, and was by no means willing to resign my ambition of obtaining an appointment there, when I heard my father say that he was especially thankful for his good fortune because it enabled him to provide for me. There were lessons, too, from masters in languages, music, and drawing, which Emily and I shared, and which she had just begun to value thoroughly. We had filled whole drawing-books with wriggling twists of foliage in B B B marking pencil, and had just been promoted to water-colours; and she was beginning to sing very prettily. I feared, too, that I should no longer have a chance of rivalling Griffith's university studies. All this, with my sister's girl friends, and those kind people who used to drop in to play chess, and otherwise amuse me, would all be left behind; and, sorest of all, Clarence, who, whatever he was in the eyes of others, had grown to be my mainstay during this last year. He it was who fetched me from the Museum, took me into the gardens, helped me up and down stairs, spared no pains to rout out whatever my fanciful pursuits required from shops in the City, and, in very truth, spoilt me through all his hours that were free from business, besides being my most perfect sympathising and understanding companion.

I feared, too, that he would be terribly lonesome, though of late he had been less haunted by longings for the sea, had made some way with his fellows, and had been commended by the managing clerk; and it was painful to find the elders did not grieve on their own account at parting with him. My mother told the Admiral that she thought it would be good for Mr. Winslow's spirits not to be

continually reminded of his trouble; and my father might be heard confiding to Mr. Castleford that the separation might be good for both her and her son, if only the lad could be trusted. To which that good man replied by giving him an excellent character; but was only met by a sigh, and 'Well, we shall see!'

Clarence was to be lodged with Peter, whose devotion would not extend to following us into barbarism, where, as he told us, he understood there was no such thing as a 'harea,' and master would have to kill his own mutton.

Peter had been tranquilly engaged to Gooch for years untold. They were to be transformed into Mr. and Mrs. Robson, with some small appointment about the Law Courts for him, and a lodging-house for her, where Clarence was to abide, my mother feeling secure that neither his health, his morals, nor his shirts could go much astray without her receiving warning thereof.

Meanwhile, by the help of an antiquarian friend of my father, Mr. Stafford, who was great in county history, I hunted up in the Museum library all I could discover about our new possession.

The Chantry of St. Cecily at Earlscombe, in Somersetshire, had, it appeared, been founded and endowed by Dame Isabel d'Oyley, in the year of grace 1434, that constant prayers might be offered for the souls of her husband and son, slain in the French wars. The poor lady's intentions, which to our Protestant minds appeared rather shocking than otherwise, had been frustrated at the break up of such establishments, when the Chantry, and the estate that maintained its clerks and bedesmen, was granted to Sir Harry Power, from whom, through two heiresses, it had come to the Fordyces, the last of whom, by name Margaret, had died childless, leaving the estate to her stepson, Philip Winslow, our ancestor.

Moreover, we learnt that a portion of the building was of ancient date, and that there was an 'interesting fragment' of the old chapel in the grounds, which our good friend promised himself the pleasure of investigating on his first holiday.

To add to our newly-acquired sense of consideration and of high pedigree, the family chariot, after taking Miss Selby to Bath, came up post to London to be touched up at the coachbuilder's, have the escutcheon altered so as to impale the Griffith coat instead of the Selby, and finally to convey us to our new abode, in preparation for which all its boxes came to be packed.

A chariot! You young ones have as little notion of one as of a British war-chariot armed with scythes. Yet people of a certain grade were as sure to keep their chariot as their silver tea-pot; indeed we knew one young couple who started in life with no other habitation, but spent their time as nomads, in visits to their relations and friends, for visits *were* visits then.

The capacities of a chariot were considerable. Within, there was a good-sized seat for the principal occupants, and outside a dickey behind, and a driving box before, though sometimes there was only one of these, and that transferable. The boxes were calculated to hold family luggage on a six months' tour. There they lay on the spare-room floor, ready to be packed, the first earnest of our new possessions—except perhaps the five-pound note my father gave each of us four elder ones, on the day the balance at the bank was made over to him. There was the imperial, a grand roomy receptacle, which was placed on the top of the carriage, and would not always go upstairs in small houses; the capbox, which fitted into a curved place in front of the windows, and could not stand alone, but had a frame to support it; two long narrow boxes with the like infirmity of standing, which fitted in below; square ones under each seat; and a drop box fastened on behind. There were pockets beneath each window, and, curious relic in name and nature of the time when every gentleman carried his weapon, there was the sword case, an excrescence behind the back of the best seat, accessible by lifting a cushion, where weapons used to be carried, but where in our peaceful times travellers bestowed their luncheon and their books.

Our chariot was black above, canary yellow below, beautifully varnished, and with our arms blazoned on each door. It was lined with dark blue leather and cloth, picked out with blue and yellow

lace in accordance with our liveries, and was a gorgeous spectacle. I am afraid Emily did not share in Mistress Gilpin's humility when

'The chaise was brought,
But yet was not allowed
To drive up to the door, lest all
Should say that she was proud!'

It was then that Emily and I each started a diary to record the events of our new life. Hers flourished by fits and starts; but I having perforce more leisure than she, mine has gone on with few interruptions till the present time, and is the backbone of this narrative, which I compile and condense from it and other sources before destroying it.

CHAPTER VIII
THE OLD HOUSE

'Your history whither are you spinning?
Can you do nothing but describe?
A house there is, and that's enough!'

Gray.

How we did enjoy our journey, when the wrench from our old home was once made. We did not even leave Clarence behind, for Mr. Castleford had given him a holiday, so that he might not appear to be kept at a distance, as if under a cloud, and might help me through our travels.

My mother and I occupied the inside of the carriage, with Emily between us at the outset; but when we were off the London stones she was often allowed to make a third on the dickey with Clarence and Martyn, whose ecstatic heels could be endured for the sake of the free air and the view.

Of course we posted, and where there were severe hills we indulged in four horses. The varieties of the jackets of our post-boys, blue or yellow, as supposed to indicate the politics of their inns, were interesting to us, as everything was interesting then. Otherwise their equipment was exactly alike—neat drab corduroy breeches and top-boots, and hats usually white, and they were all boys, though the red faces and grizzled hair of some looked as if they had faced the weather for at least fifty years.

It was a beautiful August, and the harvest fields were a sight perfectly new, filling us with rapture unspeakable. At every hill which offered an excuse, our outsiders were on their feet, thrusting in their heads and hands to us within with exclamations of delight, and all sorts of discoveries—really new to us three younger ones. Ears of corn, bearded barley, graceful oats, poppies, corn-flowers, were all delicious novelties to Emily and me, though Griff and my father laughed at our ecstasies, and my mother occasionally objected to the wonderful accumulation of curiosities thrust into her lap or the door pockets, and tried to persuade Martyn that rooks' wings, dead hedgehogs, sticks and stones of various merits, might be found at Earlscombe, until Clarence, by the judicious purchase of a basket at Salisbury, contrived to satisfy all parties and safely dispose of the treasures. The objects that stand out in my memory on that journey were Salisbury Spire, and a long hill where the hedgebank was one mass of the exquisite rose-bay willow herb—a perfect revelation to our city-bred eyes; but indeed, the whole route was like one panorama to us of *L'Allegro* and other descriptions on which we had fed. For in those days we were much more devoted to poetry than is the present generation, which has a good deal of false shame on that head.

Even dining and sleeping at an inn formed a pleasing novelty, though we did not exactly sympathise with Martyn when he dashed in at breakfast exulting in having witnessed the killing of a pig. As my father observed, it was too like realising Peter's forebodings of our return to savage life.

Demonstrations were not the fashion of these times, and there was a good deal of dull discontent and disaffection in the air, so that no tokens of welcome were prepared for us—not even a peal of bells; nor indeed should we have heard them if they had been rung, for the church was a mile and a half beyond the house, with a wood between cutting off the sound, except in certain winds. We did not miss a reception, which would rather have embarrassed us. We began to think it was time to arrive, and my father believed we were climbing the last hill, when, just as we had passed a remarkably pretty village and church, Griffith called out to say that we were on our own ground. He had made his researches with the game keeper while my father was busy with the solicitor, and could point to our boundary wall, a little below the top of the hill on the northern side. He informed us that the place we had passed was Hillside—Fordyce property,—but this was Earlscombe, our own. It was a

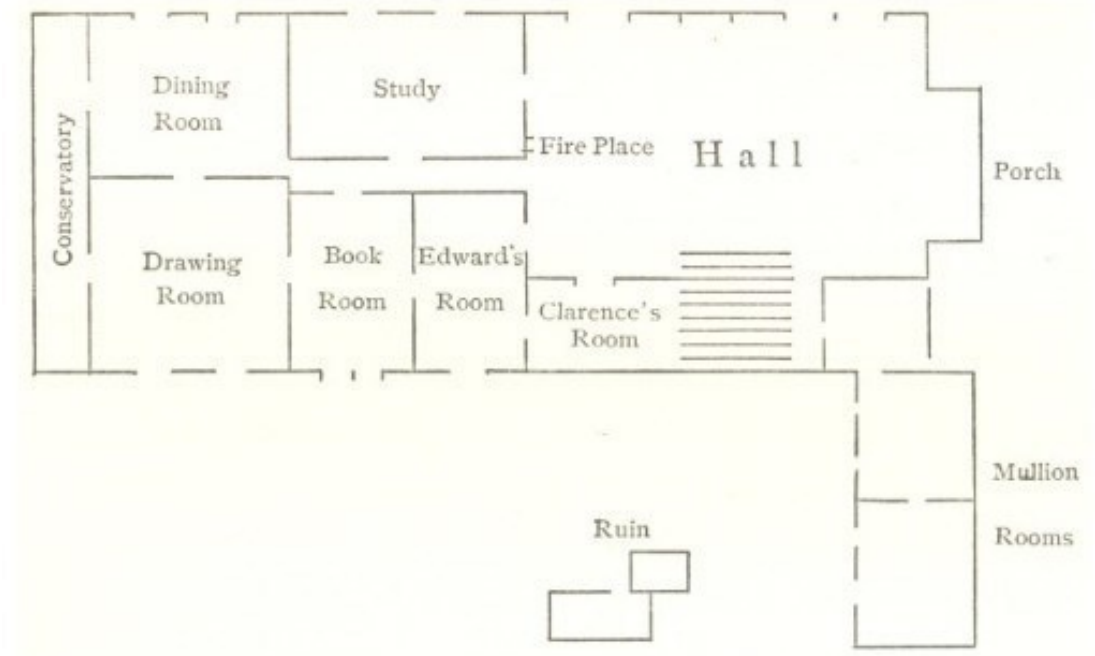
great stony bit of pasture with a few scattered trees, but after the flat summit was past, the southern side was all beechwood, where a gate admitted us into a drive cut out in a slant down the otherwise steep descent, and coming out into an open space. And there we were!

The old house was placed on the widest part of a kind of shelf or natural terrace, of a sort of amphitheatre shape, with wood on either hand, but leaving an interval clear in the midst broad enough for house and gardens, with a gentle green slope behind, and a much steeper one in front, closed in by the beechwoods. The house stood as it were sideways, or had been made to do so by later inhabitants. I know this is very long-winded, but there have been such alterations that without minute description this narrative will be unintelligible.

The aspect was northwards so far as the lie of the ground was concerned, but the house stood across. The main body was of the big symmetrical Louis XIV. style—or, as it is now the fashion to call it, Queen Anne—brick, with stone quoins, big sash-windows, and a great square hall in the midst, with the chief rooms opening into it. The principal entrance had been on the north, with a huge front door and a flight of stone steps, and just space enough for a gravel coach ring before the rapid grassy descent. Later constitutions, however, must have eschewed that northern front door, and later nerves that narrow verge, and on the eastern front had been added that Gothic porch of which Emily had heard,—and a flagrantly modern Gothic porch it was, flanked by two comical little turrets, with loopholes, from which a thread-paper or Tom Thumb might have defended it. Otherwise it resembled a church porch, except for the formidable points of a sham portcullis; but there was no denying that it greatly increased the comfort of the house, with its two sets of heavy doors, and the seats on either side. The great hall door had been closed up, plastered over within, and rendered inoffensive. Towards the west there was another modern addition of drawing and dining rooms, and handsome bedchambers above, in Gothic taste, *i.e.* with pointed arches filled up with glass over the sash-windows. The drawing-room was very pretty, with a glass door at the end leading into an old-fashioned greenhouse, and two French windows to the south opening upon the lawn, which soon began to slope upwards, curving, as I said, like an amphitheatre, and was always shady and sheltered, tilting its flower-beds towards the house as if to display them. The dining-room had, in like manner, one west and two north windows, the latter commanding a grand view over the green meadow-land below, dotted with round knolls, and rising into blue hills beyond. We became proud of counting the villages and church towers we could see from thence.

There was a still older portion, more ancient than the square *corps de logis*, and built of the cream-coloured stone of the country. It was at the south-eastern angle, where the ground began sloping so near the house that this wing—if it may so be called—containing two good-sized rooms nearly on a level with the upper floor, had nothing below but some open stone vaultings, under which it was only just possible for my tall brothers to stand upright, at the innermost end. These opened into the cellars which, no doubt, belonged to the fifteenth-century structure. There seemed to have once been a door and two or three steps to the ground, which rose very close to the southern end; but this had been walled up. The rooms had deep mullioned windows east and west, and very handsome groined ceilings, and were entered by two steps down from the gallery round the upper part of the hall. There was a very handsome double staircase of polished oak, shaped like a Y, the stem of which began just opposite the original front door—making us wonder if people knew what draughts were in the days of Queen Anne, and remember Madame de Maintenon's complaint that health was sacrificed to symmetry. Not far from this oldest portion were some broken bits of wall and stumps of columns, remnants of the chapel, and prettily wreathed with ivy and clematis. We rejoiced in such a pretty and distinctive ornament to our garden, and never troubled ourselves about the desecration; and certainly ours was one of the most delightful gardens that ever existed, what with green turf, bright flowers, shapely shrubs, and the grand beech-trees enclosing it with their stately white pillars, green foliage, and the russet arcades beneath them. The stillness was wonderful to ears accustomed

to the London roar—almost a new sensation. Emily was found, as she said, 'listening to the silence;' and my father declared that no one could guess at the sense of rest that it gave him.



Of space within there was plenty, though so much had been sacrificed to the hall and staircase; and this was apparently the cause of the modern additions, as the original sitting-rooms, wainscotted and double-doored, were rather small for family requirements. One of these, once the dining-room, became my father's study, where he read and wrote, saw his tenants, and by and by acted as Justice of the Peace. The opposite one, towards the garden, was termed the book-room. Here Martyn was to do his lessons, and Emily and I carry on our studies, and do what she called keeping up her accomplishments. My couch and appurtenances abode there, and it was to be my retreat from company,—or on occasion could be made a supplementary drawing-room, as its fittings showed it had been the parlour. It communicated with another chamber, which became my own—sparing the difficulties that stairs always presented; and beyond lay, niched under the grand staircase, a tiny light closet, a passage-room, where my mother put a bed for a man-servant, not liking to leave me entirely alone on the ground floor. It led to a passage to the garden door, also to my mother's den, dedicated to housewifely cares and stores, and ended at the back stairs, descending to the servants' region. This was very old, handsomely vaulted with stone, and, owing to the fall of the ground, had ample space for light on the north side,—where, beyond the drive, the descent was so rapid as to afford Martyn infinite delight in rolling down, to the horror of all beholders and the detriment of his white duck trowsers.

I don't know much about the upper story, so I spare you that. Emily had a hankering for one of the pretty old mullioned-windowed rooms—the mullion chambers, as she named them; but Griff pounced on them at once, the inner for his repose, the outer for his guns and his studies—not smoking, for young men were never permitted to smoke within doors, nor indeed in any home society. The choice of the son and heir was undisputed, and he proceeded to settle his possessions in his new domains, where they made an imposing appearance.

CHAPTER IX
RATS

'As louder and louder, drawing near,
The gnawing of their teeth he could hear.'

Southey.

'What a ridiculous old fellow that Chapman is,' said Griff, coming in from a conference with the gaunt old man who acted as keeper to our not very extensive preserves. 'I told him to get some gins for the rats in my rooms, and he shook his absurd head like any mandarin, and said, "There baint no trap as will rid you of them kind of varmint, sir."'

'Of course,' my father said, 'rats are part of the entail of an old house. You may reckon on them.'

'Those rooms of yours are the very place for them,' added my mother. 'I only hope they will not infest the rest of the house.'

To which Griff rejoined that they perpetrated the most extraordinary noises he had ever heard from rats, and told Emily she might be thankful to him for taking those rooms, for she would have been frightened out of her little wits. He meant, he said, to get a little terrier, and have a thorough good rat hunt, at which Martyn capered about in irrepressible ecstasy.

This, however, was deferred by the unwillingness of old Chapman, of whom even Griff was somewhat in awe. His fame as a sportsman had to be made, and he had had only such practice as could be attained by shooting at a mark ever since he had been aware of his coming greatness. So he was desirous of conciliating Chapman, and not getting laughed at as the London young gentleman who could not hit a hay-stack. My father, who had been used to carrying a gun in his younger days, was much amused, in his quiet way, at seeing Griff watch Chapman off on his rounds, and then betake himself to the locality most remote from the keeper's ears to practise on the rook or crow. Martyn always ran after him, having solemnly promised not to touch the gun, and to keep behind. He was too good-natured to send the little fellow back, though he often tried to elude the pursuit, not wishing for a witness to his attempts; and he never invited Clarence, who had had some experience of curious game but never mentioned it.

Clarence devoted himself to Emily and me, tugging my garden-chair along all the paths where it would go without too much jolting, and when I had had enough, exploring those hanging woods, either with her or on his own account. They used to come home with their hands full of flowers, and this resulted in a vehement attack of botany,—a taste that has lasted all our lives, together with the *hortus siccus* to which we still make additions, though there has been a revolution there as well as everywhere else, and the Linnæan system we learnt so eagerly from Martin's *Letters* is altogether exploded and antiquated. Still, my sister refuses to own the scientific merits of the natural system, and can point to school-bred and lectured young ladies who have no notion how to discover the name or nature of a live plant.

On the Friday after our arrival the noises had been so fearful that Griff had been exasperated into going off across the hills, accompanied by his constant shadow, Martyn, in search of the professional ratcatcher of the neighbourhood, in spite of Chapman's warning—that Tom Petty was the biggest rascal in the neighbourhood, and a regular out and out poacher; and as to the noises—he couldn't 'tackle the like of they.' After revelling in the beauty of the beechwoods as long as was good for me or for Clarence, I was left in the garden to sketch the ruin, while my two companions started on one of their exploring expeditions.

It was getting late enough to think of going to prepare for the six o'clock dinner when Emily came forth alone from the path between the trees, announcing—'An adventure, Edward! We have had such an adventure.'

'Where's Clarence?'

'Gone for the doctor! Oh, no; Griff hasn't shot anybody. He is gone for the ratcatcher, you know. It is a poor little herdboy, who tumbled out of a tree; and oh! such a sweet, beautiful, young lady—just like a book!'

When Emily became less incoherent, it appeared that on coming out on the bit of common above the wood, as she and Clarence were halting on the brow of the hill to admire the view, they heard a call for help, and hurrying down in the direction whence it proceeded they saw a stunted ash-tree, beneath which were a young lady and a little child bending over a village lad who lay beneath moaning piteously. The girl, whom Emily described as the most beautiful creature she ever saw, explained that the boy, who had been herding the cattle scattered around, had been climbing the tree, a limb of which had broken with him. She had seen the fall from a distance, and hurried up; but she hardly knew what to do, for her little sister was too young to be sent in quest of assistance. Clarence thought one leg seriously injured, and as the young lady seemed to know the boy, offered to carry him home. School officers were yet in the future; children were set to work almost as soon as they could walk, and this little fellow was so light and thin as to shock Clarence when he had been taken up on his back, for he weighed quite a trifle. The young lady showed the way to a wretched little cottage, where a bigger girl had just come in with a sheaf of corn freshly gleaned poised on her head. They sent her to fetch her mother, and Clarence undertook to go for a doctor, but to the surprise and horror of Emily, there was a demur. Something was said of old Molly and her 'ile' and 'yarbs,' or perhaps Madam could step round. When Clarence, on this being translated to him, pronounced the case beyond such treatment, it was explained outside the door that this was a terribly poor family, and the doctor would not come to parish patients for an indefinite time after his summons, besides which, he lived at Wattlesea. 'Indeed mamma does almost all the doctoring with her medicine chest,' said the girl.

On which Clarence declared that he would let the doctor know that he himself would be responsible for the cost of the attendance, and set off for Wattlesea, a kind of town village in the flat below. He could not get back till dinner was half over, and came in alarmed and apologetic; but he had nothing worse to encounter than Griff's unmerciful banter (or, as you would call it, chaff) about his knight errantry, and Emily's lovely heroine in the sweetest of cottage bonnets.

Griff could be slightly tyrannous in his merry mockery, and when he found that on the ensuing day Clarence proposed to go and inquire after the patient, he made such wicked fun of the expectations the pair entertained of hearing the sweet cottage bonnet reading a tract in a silvery voice through the hovel window, that he fairly teased and shamed Clarence out of starting till the renowned Tom Petty arrived and absorbed all the three brothers, and even their father, in delights as mysterious to me as to Emily. How she shrieked when Martyn rushed triumphantly into the room where we were arranging books with the huge patriarch of all the rats dangling by his tail! Three hopeful families were destroyed; rooms, vaults, and cellars examined and cleared; and Petty declared the race to be exterminated, picturesque ruffian that he was, in his shapeless hat, rusty velveteen, long leggings, a live ferret in his pocket, and festoons of dead rats over his shoulder.

Chapman, who regarded him much as the ferret did the rat, declared that the rabbits and hares would suffer from letting 'that there chap' show his face here on any plea; and, moreover, gave a grunt very like a scoff; at the idea of slumbers in the mullion rooms (as they were called) being secured by his good offices.

And Chapman was right. The unaccountable noises broke out again—screaming, wailing, sobbing—sounds scarcely within the power of cat or rat, but possibly the effect of the wind in the old building. At any rate, Griff could not stand them, and declared that sleep was impossible when

the wind was in that quarter, so that he must shift his bedroom elsewhere, though he still wished to retain the outer apartment, which he had taken pleasure in adorning with his special possessions. My mother would scarcely have tolerated such fancies in any one else, but Griff had his privileges.

CHAPTER X
OUR TUNEFUL CHOIR

'The church has been whitewashed, but right long ago,
As the cracks and the dinginess amply doth show;
About the same time that a strange petrifaction
Confined the incumbent to mere Sunday action.
So many abuses in this place are rife,
The only church things giving token of life
Are the singing within and the nettles without—
Both equally rampant without any doubt.'

F. R. Havergal.

All Griff's teasing could not diminish—nay, rather increased—Emily's excitement in the hope of seeing and identifying the sweet cottage bonnet at church on Sunday. The distance we had to go was nearly two miles, and my mother and I drove thither in a donkey chair, which had been hunted up in London for that purpose because the 'pheeāton' (as the servants insisted on calling it) was too high for me. My father had an old-fashioned feeling about the Fourth Commandment, which made him scrupulous as to using any animal on Sunday; and even when, in bad weather, or for visitors, the larger carriage was used, he always walked. He was really angry with Griff that morning for mischievously maintaining that it was a greater breach of the commandment to work an ass than a horse.

It was a pretty drive on a road slanting gradually through the brushwood that clothed the steep face of the hillside, and passing farms and meadows full of cattle—all things quieter and stiller than ever in their Sunday repose. We knew that the living was in Winslow patronage, but that it was in the hands of one of the Selby connection, who held it, together with it is not safe to say how many benefices, and found it necessary for his health to reside at Bath. The vicarage had long since been turned into a farmhouse, and the curate lived at Wattlesea. All this we knew, but we had not realised that he was likewise assistant curate there, and only favoured Earlscombe with alternate morning and evening services on Sundays.

Still less were we prepared for the interior of the church. It had a picturesque square tower covered with ivy, and a general air of fitness for a sketch; indeed, the photograph of it in its present beautified state will not stand a comparison with our drawings of it, in those days of dilapidation in the middle of the untidy churchyard, with little boys astride on the sloping, sunken lichen-grown headstones, mullein spikes and burdock leaves, more graceful than the trim borders and zinc crosses which are pleasanter to the mental eye.

The London church we had left would be a fearful shock to the present generation, but we were accustomed to decency, order, and reverence; and it was no wonder that my father was walking about the churchyard, muttering that he never saw such a place, while my brothers were full of amusement. Their spruce looks in their tall hats, bright ties, dark coats, and white trowsers strapped tight under their boots, looked incongruous with the rest of the congregation, the most distinguished members of which were farmers in drab coats with huge mother-of-pearl buttons, and long gaiters buttoned up to their knees and strapped up to their gay waistcoats over their white corduroys. Their wives and daughters were in enormous bonnets, fluttering with ribbons; but then what my mother and Emily wore were no trifles. The rest of the congregation were—the male part of it—in white or gray smock-frocks, the elderly women in black bonnets, the younger in straw; but we had not long to make our observations, for Chapman took possession of us. He was parish clerk, and was in great glory in his

mourning coat and hat, and his object was to marshal us all into our pew before he had to attend upon the clergyman; and of course I was glad enough to get as soon as possible out of sight of all the eyes not yet accustomed to my figure.

And hidden enough I was when we had been introduced through the little north chancel door into a black-curtained, black-cushioned, black-lined pew, well carpeted, with a table in the midst, and a stove, whose pipe made its exit through the floriated tracery of the window overhead. The chancel arch was to the west of us, blocked up by a wooden parcel-gilt erection, and to the east a decorated window that would have been very handsome if two side-lights had not been obscured by the two Tables of the Law, with the royal arms on the top of the first table, and over the other our own, with the Fordyce in a scutcheon of pretence; for, as an inscription recorded, they had been erected by Margaret, daughter of Christopher Fordyce, Esquire, of Chantry House, and relict of Sir James John Winslow, Kt., sergeant-at-law, A.D. 1700—the last date, I verily believe, at which anything had been done to the church. And on the wall, stopping up the southern chancel window, was a huge marble slab, supported by angels blowing trumpets, with a very long inscription about the Fordyce family, ending with this same Margaret, who had married the Winslow, lost two or three infants, and died on 1st January 1708, three years later than her husband.

Thus far I could see; but Griff was standing lifting the curtain, and showing by the working of his shoulders his amazement and diversion, so that only the daggers in my mother's eyes kept Martyn from springing up after him. What he beheld was an altar draped in black like a coffin, and on the step up to the rail, boys and girls eating apples and performing antics to beguile the waiting time, while a row of white-smocked old men occupied the bench opposite to our seat, conversing loud enough for us to hear them.

My father and Clarence came in; the bells stopped; there was a sound of steps, and in the fabric in front of us there emerged a grizzled head and the back of a very dirty surplice besprinkled with iron moulds, while Chapman's back appeared above our curtain, his desk (full of dilapidated prayer-books) being wedged in between us and the reading-desk.

The duet that then took place between him and the curate must have been heard to be credible, especially as, being so close behind the old man, we could not fail to be aware of all the remarkable shots at long words which he bawled out at the top of his voice, and I refrain from recording, lest they should haunt others as they have done by me all my life. Now and then Chapman caught up a long switch and dashed out at some obstreperous child to give an audible whack; and towards the close of the litany he stumped out—we heard his tramp the whole length of the church, and by and by his voice issued from an unknown height, proclaiming—'Let us sing to the praise and glory – in an anthem taken from the 42d chapter of Genesis.'

There was an outburst of bassoon, clarionet, and fiddle, and the performance that followed was the most marvellous we had ever heard, especially when the big butcher—fiddling all the time—declared in a mighty solo, 'I am Jo—Jo—Jo—Joseph!' and having reiterated this information four or five times, inquired with equal pertinacity, 'Doth—doth my fa-a-u-ther yet live?' Poor Emily was fairly 'convulsed;' she stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth, and grew so crimson that my mother was quite frightened, and very near putting her out at the little door of excommunication. To our last hour we shall never forget the shock of that first anthem.

The Commandments were read from the desk, Chapman's solitary response coming from the gallery; and while the second singing—four verses from Tate and Brady—was going on, we beheld the surplice stripped off,—like the slough of a May-fly, as Griff said,—when a rusty black gown was revealed, in which the curate ascended the pulpit and was lost to our view before the concluding verse of the psalm, which we had reason to believe was selected in compliment to us, as well as to Earlscombe,—

'My lot is fall'n in that blest land

Where God is truly know,
He fills my cup with liberal hand;
'Tis He—'tis He—'tis He—supports my throne.'

We had great reason to doubt how far the second line could justly be applied to the parish! but there was no judging of the sermon, for only detached sentences reached us in a sort of mumble. Griff afterwards declared churchgoing to be as good as a comedy, and we all had to learn to avoid meeting each other's eyes, whatever we might hear. When the scuffle and tramp of the departing congregation had ceased, we came forth from our sable box, and beheld the remnants of a once handsome church, mauled in every possible way, green stains on the walls, windows bricked up, and a huge singing gallery. Good bits of carved stall work were nailed anyhow into the pews; the floor was uneven; no font was visible; there was a mouldy uncared-for look about everything. The curate in riding-boots came out of the vestry,—a pale, weary-looking man, painfully meek and civil, with gray hair sleeked round his face. He 'louted low,' and seemed hardly to venture on taking the hand my father held out to him. There was some attempt to enter into conversation with him, but he begged to be excused, for he had to hurry back to Wattlesea to a funeral. Poor man! he was as great a pluralist as his vicar, for he kept a boys' school, partially day, partially boarding, and his eyes looked hungrily at Martyn.

If the 'sweet cottage bonnet' had been at church there would have been little chance of discovering her, but we found that we were the only 'quality,' as Chapman called it, or things might not have been so bad. Old James Winslow had been a mere fox-hunting squire till he became a valetudinarian; nor had he ever cared for the church or for the poor, so that the village was in a frightful state of neglect. There was a dissenting chapel, old enough to be overgrown with ivy and not too hideous, erected by the Nonconformists in the reign of the Great Deliverer, but this partook of the general decadence of the parish, and, as we found, the chapel's principal use was to serve as an excuse for not going to church.

My father always went to church twice, so he and Clarence walked to Wattlesea, where appearances were more respectable; but they heard the same sermon over again, and, as my father drily remarked, it was not a composition that would bear repetition.

He was much distressed at the state of things, and intended to write to the incumbent, though, as he said, whatever was done would end by being at his own expense, and the move and other calls left him so little in hand that he sighed over the difficulties, and declared that he was better off in London, except for the honour of the thing. Perhaps my mother was of the same opinion after a dreary afternoon, when Griff and Martyn had been wandering about aimlessly, and were at length betrayed by the barking of a little terrier, purchased the day before from Tom Petty, besieging the stable cat, who stood with swollen tail, glaring eyes, and thunderous growls, on the top of the tallest pillar of the ruins. Emily nearly cried at their cruelty. Martyn was called off by my mother, and set down, half sulky, half ashamed, to *Henry and his Bearer*; and Griff, vowing that he believed it was that brute who made the row at night, and that she ought to be exterminated, strolled off to converse with Chapman, who was a quaint compound of clerk and keeper—in the one capacity upholding his late master, in the other bemoaning Mr. Mears' unpunctualities, specially as regarded weddings and funerals; one 'corp' having been kept waiting till a messenger had been sent to Wattlesea, who finding both clergy out for the day, had had to go to Hillside, 'where they was always ready, though the old Squire would have been mad with him if he'd a-guessed one of they Fordys had ever set foot in the parish.'

The only school in the place was close to the meeting-house, 'a very dame's school indeed,' as Emily described it after a peep on Monday. Dame Dearlove, the old woman who presided, was a picture of Shenstone's schoolmistress,—black bonnet, horn spectacles, fearful birch rod, three-cornered buff 'kerchief, checked apron and all, but on meddling with her, she proved a very dragon, the antipodes of her name. Tattered copies of the *Universal Spelling-Book* served her aristocracy,

ragged Testaments the general herd, whence all appeared to be shouting aloud at once. She looked sour as verjuice when my mother and Emily entered, and gave them to understand that ‘she wasn’t used to no strangers in her school, and didn’t want ’em.’ We found that in Chapman’s opinion she ‘didn’t larn ’em nothing.’ She had succeeded her aunt, who had taught him to read ‘right off,’ but ‘her baint to be compared with she.’ And now the farmers’ children, and the little aristocracy, including his own grand-children,—all indeed who, in his phrase, ‘cared for eddication,’—went to Wattlesea.

CHAPTER XI
‘THEY FORDYS.’

‘Of honourable reckoning are you both,
And pity ’tis, you lived at odds so long.’

Shakespeare.

My father had a good deal of business in hand, and was glad of Clarence’s help in writing and accounts,—a great pleasure, though it prevented his being Griff’s companion in his exploring and essays at shooting. He had time, however, to make an expedition with me in the donkey chair to inquire after the herdboy, Amos Bell, and carry him some kitchen physic. To our horror we found him quite alone in the wretched cottage, while everybody was out harvesting; but he did not seem to pity himself, or think it otherwise than quite natural, as he lay on a little bed in the corner, disabled by what Clarence thought a dislocation. Miss Ellen had brought him a pudding, and little Miss Anne a picture-book.

He was not so dense and shy as the children of the hamlet near us, and Emily extracted from him that Miss Ellen was ‘Our passon’s young lady.’

‘Mr. Mears’!’ she exclaimed.

‘No: ourn be Passon Fordy.’

It turned out that this place was not in Earlscombe at all, but in Hillside, a different parish; and the boy, Amos, further communicated that there was old Passon Fordy, and Passon Frank, and Madam, what was Mr. Frank’s lady. Yes, he could read, he could; he went to Sunday School, and was in Miss Ellen’s class; he had been to school worky days, only father was dead, and Farmer Hartop gave him a job.

It was plain that Hillside was under a very different rule from Earlscombe; and Emily was delighted to have discovered that the sweet cottage bonnet’s owner was called Ellen, which just then was the pet Christian name of romance, in honour of the *Lady of the Lake*.

In the midst of her raptures, however, just as we were about to turn in at our own gate into the wood, we heard horses’ hoofs, and then came, careering by on ponies, a very pretty girl and a youth of about the same age. Clarence’s hand rose to his hat, and he made his eager bow; but the young lady did not vouchsafe the slightest acknowledgment, turned her head away, and urged her pony to speed.

Emily broke out with an angry disappointed exclamation. Clarence’s face was scarlet, and he said low and hoarsely, ‘That’s Lester. He was in the *Argus* at Portsmouth two years ago;’—and then, as our little sister continued her indignant exclamations, he added, ‘Hush! Don’t on any account say a word about it. I had better get back to my work. I am only doing you harm by staying here.’

At which Emily shed tears, and together we persuaded him not to curtail his holiday, which, indeed, he could not have done without assigning the reason to the elders, and this was out of the question. Nor did he venture to hang back when, as our service was to be on Sunday afternoon, my father proposed to walk to Hillside Church in the morning. They came back well pleased. There was care and decency throughout. The psalms were sung to a ‘grinder organ’—which was an advanced state of things in those days—and very nicely. Parson Frank read well and impressively, and the old parson, a fine venerable man, had preached an excellent sermon—really admirable, as my father repeated. Our party had been scarcely in time, and had been disposed of in seats close to the door, where Clarence was quite out of sight of the disdainful young lady and her squire, of whom Emily begged to hear no more.

She looked askance at the cards left on the hall table the next day—'The Rev. Christopher Fordyce,' and 'The Rev. F. C. Fordyce,' also 'Mrs. F. C. Fordyce, Hillside Rectory.'

We had found out that Hillside was a family living, and that there was much activity there on the part of the father and son—rector and curate; and that the other clerical folk, ladies especially, who called on us, spoke of Mrs. F. C. Fordyce with a certain tone, as if they were afraid of her, as Sir Horace Lester's sister,—very superior, very active, very strict in her notions,—as if these were so many defects. They were an offshoot of the old Fordyces of Chantry House, but so far back that all recollection of kindred or connection must have worn out. Their property—all in beautiful order—marched with ours, and Chapman was very particular about the boundaries. 'Old master he wouldn't have a bird picked up if it fell over on they Fordys' ground—not he! He couldn't abide passons, couldn't the old Squire—not Miss Hannah More, and all they Cheddar lot, and they Fordys least of all. My son's wife, she was for sending her little maid to Hillside to Madam Fordys' school, but, bless your heart, 'twould have been as much as my place was worth if master had known it.'

The visit was not returned till after Clarence had gone back to his London work. Sore as was the loss of him from my daily life, I could see that the new world and fresh acquaintances were a trial to him, and especially since the encounter with young Lester had driven him back into his shell, so that he would be better where he was already known and had nothing new to overcome. Emily, though not yet sixteen, was emancipated from schoolroom habits, and the dear girl was my devoted slave to an extent that perhaps I abused.

Not being 'come out,' she was left at home on the day when we set out on a regular progress in the chariot with post-horses. The britshka and pair, which were our ambition, were to wait till my father's next rents came in. Morning calls in the country were a solemn and imposing ceremony, and the head of the family had to be taken on the first circuit; nor was there much scruple as to making them in the forenoon, so several were to be disposed of before fulfilling an engagement to luncheon at the farthest point, where some old London friends had borrowed a house for the summer, and had included me in their invitation.

Here alone did I leave the carriage, but I had Cooper's *Spy* and my sketch-book as companions while waiting at doors where the inhabitants were at home. The last visit was at Hillside Rectory, a house of architecture somewhat similar to our own, but of the soft creamy stone which so well set off the vine with purple clusters, the myrtles and fuchsias, that covered it. I was wishing we had drawn up far enough off for a sketch to be possible, when, from a window close above, I heard the following words in a clear girlish voice—

'No, indeed! I'm not going down. It is only those horrid Earlscombe people. I can't think how they have the face to come near us!'

There was a reply, perhaps that the parents had made the first visit, for the rejoinder was—'Yes; grandpapa said it was a Christian duty to make an advance; but they need not have come so soon. Indeed, I wonder they show themselves at all. I am sure I would not if I had such a dreadful son.' Presently, 'I hate to think of it. That I should have thanked him. Depend upon it, he will never pay the doctor. A coward like that is capable of anything.'

The proverb had been realised, but there could hardly have been a more involuntary or helpless listener. Presently my parents came back, escorted by both the gentlemen of the house, tall fine-looking men, the elder with snowy hair, and the dignity of men of the old school; the younger with a joyous, hearty, out-of-door countenance, more like a squire than a clergyman.

The visit seemed to have been gratifying. Mrs. Fordyce was declared to be of higher stamp than most of the neighbouring ladies; and my father was much pleased with the two clergymen, while as we drove along he kept on admiring the well-ordered fields and fences, and contrasting the pretty cottages and trim gardens with the dreary appearance of our own village. I asked why Amos Bell's home had been neglected, and was answered with some annoyance, as I pointed down the lane, that it

was on our land, though in Hillside parish. 'I am glad to have such neighbours!' observed my mother, and I kept to myself the remarks I had heard, though I was still tingling with the sting of them.

We heard no more of 'they Fordys' for some time. The married pair went away to stay with friends, and we only once met the old gentleman, when I was waiting in the street at Wattlesea in the donkey chair, while my mother was trying to match netting silk in the odd little shop that united fancy work, toys, and tracts with the post office. Old Mr. Fordyce met us as we drew up, handed her out with a grand seigneur's courtesy, and stood talking to me so delightfully that I quite forgot it was from Christian duty.

My father corresponded with the old Rector about the state of the parish, and at last went over to Bath for a personal conference, but without much satisfaction. The Earlscombe people were pronounced to be an ungrateful good-for-nothing set, for whom it was of no use to do anything; and indeed my mother made such discoveries in the cottages that she durst not let Emily fulfil her cherished scheme of visiting them. The only resemblance to the favourite heroines of religious tales that could be permitted was assembling a tiny Sunday class in Chapman's lodge; and it must be confessed that her brothers thought she made as much fuss about it as if there had been a hundred scholars.

However, between remonstrances and offers of undertaking a share of the expense, my father managed to get Mr. Mears' services dispensed with from the ensuing Lady Day, and that a resident curate should be appointed, the choice of whom was to rest with himself. It was then and there decided that Martyn should be 'brought up to the Church,' as people then used to term destination to Holy Orders. My father said he should feel justified in building a good house when he could afford it, if it was to be a provision for one of his sons, and he also felt that as he had the charge of the parish as patron, it was right and fitting to train one of his sons up to take care of it. Nor did Martyn show any distaste to the idea, as indeed there was less in it then than at present to daunt the imagination of an honest, lively boy, not as yet specially thoughtful or devout, but obedient, truthful, and fairly reverent, and ready to grow as he was trained.

CHAPTER XII
MRS. SOPHIA'S FEUD

'O'er all there hung the shadow of a fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is haunted.'—

Hood.

We had a houseful at Christmas. The Rev. Charles Henderson, a Fellow of Trinity College, Oxford, lately ordained a deacon, had been recommended to us by our London vicar, and was willing not only to take charge of the parish, but to direct my studies, and to prepare Martyn for school. He came to us for the Christmas vacation to reconnoitre and engage lodgings at a farmhouse. We liked him very much—my mother being all the better satisfied after he had shown her a miniature, and confided to her that the original was waiting till a college living should come to him in the distant future.

Admiral Griffith could not tear himself from his warm rooms and his club, but our antiquarian friend, Mr. Stafford, came with his wife, and revelled in the ceilings of the mullion room, where he would much have liked to sleep, but that its accommodations were only fit for a bachelor.

Our other visitor was Miss Selby, or rather Mrs. Sophia Selby, as she designated herself, according to the becoming fashion of elderly spinsters, which to my mind might be gracefully resumed. It irked my father to think of the good lady's solitary Christmas at Bath, and he asked her to come to us. She travelled half-way in a post-chaise, and then was met by the carriage. A very nice old lady she was, with a meek, delicate babyish face, which could not be spoilt by the cap of the period, one of the most disfiguring articles of head gear ever devised, though nobody thought so then. She was full of kindness; indeed, if she had a fault it was the abundant pity she lavished on me, and her determination to amuse me. The weather was of the kind that only the healthy and hardy could encounter, and when every one else was gone out, and I was just settling in with a new book, or an old crabbed Latin document, that Mr. Stafford had entrusted to me to copy out fairly and translate, she would glide in with her worsted work on a charitable mission to enliven poor Mr. Edward.

However, this was the means of my obtaining some curious enlightenments. A dinner-party was in contemplation, and she was dismayed at the choice of the fashionable London hour of seven, and still more by finding that the Fordyces were to be among the guests. She was too well-bred to manifest her feelings to her hosts, but alone with me, she could not refrain from expressing her astonishment to me, all the more when she heard this was reciprocity for an invitation that it had not been possible to accept. Her poor dear uncle would never hear of intercourse with Hillside. On being asked why, she repeated what Chapman had said, that he could not endure any one connected with Mrs. Hannah More and her canting, humbugging set, as the ungodly old man had chosen to call them, imbuing even this good woman with evil prejudices against their noble work at Cheddar.

'Besides this, Fordyces and Winslows could never be friends, since the Fordyces had taken on themselves to dispute the will, and say it had been improperly obtained.'

'What will?'

'Mrs. Winslow's—Margaret Fordyce that was. She was the heiress, and had every right to dispose of her property.'

'But that was more than a hundred years ago!'

'So it was, my dear; but though the law gave it to us—to my uncle's grandfather (or great-grandfather, was it?)—those Fordyces never could rest content. Why, one of them—a clergyman's son too—shot young Philip Winslow dead in a duel. They have always grudged at us. Does your papa know it, my dear Mr. Edward? He ought to be aware.'

'I do not know,' I said; 'but he would hardly care about what happened in the time of Queen Anne.'

It was curious to see how the gentle little lady espoused the family quarrel, which, after all, was none of hers.

'Well, you are London people, and the other branch, and may not feel as we do down here; but I shall always say that Madam Winslow's husband's son had every right to come before her cousin once removed.'

I asked if we were descended from her, for, having a turn for heraldry and genealogy, I wanted to make out our family tree. Mrs. Sophia was ready to hold up her hands at the ignorance of the 'other branch.' This poor heiress had lost all her children in their infancy, and bequeathed the estate to her stepson, the Fordyce male heir having been endowed by her father with the advowson of Hillside and a handsome estate there, which Mrs. Selby thought ought to have contented him, 'but some people never know when they have enough;' and, on my observing that it might have been a matter of justice, she waxed hotter, declaring that what the Winslows felt so much was the accusation of violence against the poor lady. She spoke as if it were a story of yesterday, and added, 'Indeed, they made the common people have all sorts of superstitious fancies about the room where she died—that old part of the house.' Then she added in a low mysterious voice, 'I hear that your brother Mr. Griffith Winslow could not sleep there;' and when the rats and the wind were mentioned—'Yes, that was what my poor dear uncle used to say. He always called it nonsense; but we never had a servant who would sleep there. You'll not mention it, Mr. Edward, but I could not help asking that very nice housemaid, Jane, whether the room was used, and she said how Mr. Griffith had given it up, and none of the servants could spend a night there when they are sleeping round. Of course I said all in my power to dispel the idea, and told her that there was no accounting for all the noises in old houses; but you never can reason with that class of people.'

'Did you ever hear the noises, Mrs. Selby?'

'Oh, no; I wouldn't sleep there for thousands! Not that I attach any importance to such folly,—my poor dear uncle would never hear of such a thing; but I am such a nervous creature, I should lie awake all night expecting the rats to run over me. I never knew of any one sleeping there, except in the gay times when I was a child, and the house used to be as full as, or fuller than, it could hold, for the hunt breakfast or a ball, and my poor aunt used to make up ever so many beds in the two rooms, and then we never heard of any disturbance, except what they made themselves.'

This chiefly concerned me, because home cosseting had made me old woman enough to be uneasy about unaired beds; and I knew that my mother meant to consign Clarence to the mullion chamber. So, without betraying Jane, I spoke to her, and was answered, 'Oh, sir, I'll take care of that; I'll light a fire and air the mattresses well. I wish that was all, poor young gentleman!'

To the reply that the rats were slaughtered and the wind stopped out, Jane returned a look of compassion; but the subject was dropped, as it was supposed to be the right thing to hush up, instead of fostering, any popular superstition; but it surprised me that, as all our servants were fresh importations, they should so soon have become imbued with these undefined alarms.

My father was much amused at being successor to this family feud, and said that when he had time he would look up the documents.

Mrs. Sophia was a sight when Mr. Fordyce and his son and daughter-in-law were announced; she was so comically stiff between her deference to her hosts and her allegiance to her poor dear uncle; but her coldness melted before the charms of old Mr. Fordyce, who was one of the most delightful people in the world. She even was his partner at whist, and won the game, and that she *did* like.

Parson Frank, as we naughty young ones called him, was all good-nature and geniality—a thorough clergyman after the ideas of the time, and a thorough farmer too; and in each capacity, as well as in politics, he suited my father or Mr. Henderson. His lady, in a blonde cap, exactly like the last equipment my mother had provided herself with in London, and a black satin dress, had much more style than the more gaily-dressed country dames, and far more conversation. Mr. Stafford, who had dreaded the party, pronounced her a sensible, agreeable woman, and she was particularly kind and pleasant to me, coming and talking over the botany of the country, and then speaking of my brother's kindness to poor Amos Bell, who was nearly recovered, but was a weakly child, for whom she dreaded the toil of a ploughboy in thick clay with heavy shoes.

I was sorry when, after Emily's well-studied performance on the piano, Mrs. Fordyce was summoned away from me to sing, but her music and her voice were both of a very different order from ordinary drawing-room music; and when our evening was over, we congratulated ourselves upon our neighbours, and agreed that the Fordyces were the gems of the party.

Only Mrs. Sophia sighed at us as degenerate Winslows, and Emily reserved to herself the right of believing that the daughter was 'a horrid girl.'

CHAPTER XIII
A SCRAPE

'Though bound with weakness' heavy chain
We in the dust of earth remain;
Not all remorseful be our tears,
No agony of shame or fears,
Need pierce its passion's bitter tide.'

Verses and Sonnets.

Perhaps it was of set purpose that our dinner-party had been given before Clarence's return. Griffith had been expected in time for it, but he had preferred going by way of London to attend a ball given by the daughter of a barrister friend of my father's. Selina Clarkson was a fine showy girl, with the sort of beauty to inspire boyish admiration, and Griff's had been a standing family joke, even my father condescending to tease him when the young lady married Sir Henry Peacock, a fat vulgar old man who had made his fortune in the commissariat, and purchased a baronetcy. He was allowing his young wife her full swing of fashion and enjoyment. My mother did not think it a desirable acquaintance, and was restless until both the brothers came home together, long after dark on Christmas Eve, having been met by the gig at the corner where the coach stopped. The dinner-hour had been put off till half-past six, and we had to wait for them, the coach having been delayed by setting down Christmas guests and Christmas fare. They were a contrast; Griffith looking very handsome and manly, all in a ruddy glow from the frosty air, and Clarence, though equally tall, well-made, and with more refined features, looked pale and effaced, now that his sailor tan was worn off. The one talked as eagerly as he ate, the other was shy, spiritless, and with little appetite; but as he always shrank into himself among strangers, it was the less wonder that he sat in his drooping way behind my sofa, while Griffith kept us all merry with his account of the humours of the 'Peacock at home;' the lumbering efforts of old Sir Henry to be as young and gay as his wife, in spite of gout and portliness; and the extreme delight of his lady in her new splendours—a gold spotted muslin and white plumes in a diamond agraffe. He mimicked Sir Henry's cockneyisms more than my father's chivalry approved towards his recent host, as he described the complaints he had heard against 'my Lady being refused the hentry at Halmack's, but treated like the wery canal;' and how the devoted husband 'wowed he would get up a still more hexclusive circle, and shut hout these himpertinent fashionables who regarded Halmack's as the seventh 'eaven.'

My mother shook her head at his audacious fun about Paradise and the Peri, but he was so brilliant and good-humoured that no one was ever long displeased with him. At night he followed when Clarence helped me to my room, and carefully shutting the door, Griff began. 'Now, Teddy, you're always as rich as a Jew, and I told Bill you'd help him to set it straight. I'd do it myself, but that I'm cleaned out. I'd give ten times the cash rather than see him with that hang-dog look again for just nothing at all, if he would only believe so and be rational.'

Clarence did look indescribably miserable while it was explained that he had been commissioned to receive about £20 which was owing to my father, and to discharge therewith some small debts to London tradesmen. All except the last, for a little more than four pounds, had been paid, when Clarence met in the street an old messmate, a good-natured rattle-pated youth,—one of those who had thought him harshly treated. There was a cordial greeting, and an invitation to dine at once at a hotel, where they were joined by some other young men, and by and by betook themselves to cards, when my poor brother's besetting enemy prevented him from withdrawing when he found

the points were guineas. Thus he lost the remaining amount in his charge, and so much of his own that barely enough was left for his journey. His salary was not due till Lady Day; Mr. Castleford was in the country, and no advances could be asked from Mr. Frith. Thus Griff had found him in utter despair, and had ever since been trying to cheer him and make light of his trouble. If I advanced the amount, which was no serious matter to me, Clarence could easily get Peter to pay the bill, and if my father should demand the receipt too soon, it would be easy to put him off by saying there had been a delay in getting the account sent in.

'I couldn't do that,' said Clarence.

'Well, I should not have thought you would have stuck at that,' returned Griff.

'There must be no untruth,' I broke in; 'but if without *that*, he can avoid getting into a scrape with papa—'

Clarence interrupted in the wavering voice we knew so well, but growing clearer and stronger.

'Thank you, Edward, but—but—no, I can't. There's the Sacrament to-morrow.'

'Oh—h!' said Griff, in an indescribable tone. But he will never believe you, nor let you go.'

'Better so,' said Clarence, half choked, 'than go profanely—deceiving—or not knowing whether I shall—'

Just then we heard our father wishing the other gentlemen good-night, and to our surprise Clarence opened the door, though he was deadly white and with dew starting on his forehead.

My father turned good-naturedly. 'Boys, boys, you are glad to be together, but mamma won't have you talking here all night, keeping her baby up.'

'Sir,' said Clarence, holding by the rail of the bed, 'I was waiting for you. I have something to tell you—'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.