

Marshall Emma

# Under the Mendips: A Tale



Emma Marshall

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# Содержание

PREFACE	5
PART I	6
CHAPTER I.	7
CHAPTER II.	16
CHAPTER III.	23
CHAPTER IV.	30
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	37

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### PREFACE

I am greatly indebted to that very interesting book, "Bristol Past and Present," for the details of the Bristol Riots, in the autumn of 1831, which are introduced into this story. It closes with the birth of the new year, 1832; and therefore the special commission appointed to try the prisoners does not come within its limits.

But anyone who may be interested in the fate of Colonel Brereton, may, by referring to "Bristol Past and Present," and other contemporary records, learn his sad and most lamentable end.

Feeling the evidence of the Court Martial was entirely against him, he forestalled his sentence with his own hand, and shot himself through the heart, on Thursday night, January the 14th, 1832.

With all the many complications of Colonel Brereton's position it is not for us to deal, nor judge him harshly for apparent failure in duty at a time when the hearts of many brave men sank within them, for looking on these things which were coming on their ancient city. But this, his last act, must ever awaken one of the saddest memories of those sad times, casting a shadow over the name of an English officer, and presenting the most painful and pathetic picture of what a man may do, who, in a moment of despair and helplessness, cannot cry to the strong for strength.

Woodside, Leigh Woods,

Clifton, Bristol

*Nov. 1, 1885.*

## PART I

An English Home: grey twilight poured  
On dewy pastures, dewy trees,  
Softer than sleep: all things in order stored;  
A haunt of ancient Peace.

*Tennyson.*

## CHAPTER I. FAIR ACRES

It was a fair morning of early summer, when the low beams of the eastern sun, threw flickering shadows across the lawn, which lay before Fair Acres Manor, nestling under the shelter of the Mendip Hills, somewhere between Wells and Cheddar.

Truth compels me to say, that the lawn was covered with daisies, and that their bright eyes looked fearlessly up into the blue sky; for mowing machines were unknown, and the old gardener, coachman, and universal out-of-door servant sharpened his scythe, only at long intervals, to lay the heads of the flowers low, so that the daisies grew and flourished, and had a good time of it.

I know that daisy-speckled turf is considered an offence in the eyes of the modern gardener. I know with what zeal the spud is used; how large bare places are regarded with delight; how seed is scattered over them, which the birds watch with cunning glances from the neighbouring shrubs and trees, and pounce down upon, as soon as the diligent master of the place, has straightened his aching back and turned it upon the scene of his labours.

The dewy lawn before Fair Acres, with its beautiful mosaic of white and gold, fringed with circles of deepest crimson here and there, would not suit the taste of the conventional gardener of these days; nor would the low, irregular building which overlooked it, be considered an attractive or fitting residence, for the sons and daughters of the small country squire in the ninth decade of the century.

But in the second decade, in which my story opens, things were different. The country squire lived a country life. He farmed his own acres, he walked over his own fields; his 'stock' were individual cows and horses to him; he could pat each one and call it by its name. His house was his home, and the restlessness of travel, and longing for excitement had not as yet, for the most part, disturbed either him or his children.

Now the resonant steam eagle, as it flies across the country side, seems to call upon the dwellers in rural districts to follow where it leads, and an isolated manorial farm like Fair Acres, and a family like the Falconers who inhabited it, are all but impossible to find nowadays.

Nor would we grumble that the stream of Progress bears us all upon its breast with the strong resistless current, of which we are scarcely conscious. The busy rush of life has its brighter side, for there are wider fields of service opened out for our sons, and the selfishness which was apt to spring from a secluded life in the heart of the hills, is counteracted by contact with many men, and many minds. Human sympathy is quickened, and love is drawn forth, and the labourers who long for work in the harvest field have the way made easy for them; tools are put into the hands of our daughters with which they may, if they will, carve their own lot in life, and none can complain now that life is wasted for lack of opportunity, for opportunities start up on every side in this active, zealous, go-a-head age in which we find ourselves.

But in spite of all such advantages and due acknowledgment of their value, it is refreshing to turn to quiet and peaceful habitations like Fair Acres, and live again a quieter and less complex life than that which we have grown to believe is necessary in these later times.

As the sun threw its level beams from the east across the lawn, thousands of diamond drops sparkled and shimmered in the light, and it touched with radiance the figure of a young girl who was standing by a white gate which led into a copse sloping upward to the crest of a hill, behind the old manor, and crowned by a belt of fir-trees.

Joyce had her hand on the latch of the gate, but paused for a moment to look back on the landscape which lay stretched out before her.

A peaceful valley was below, where the tower of Fair Acres church rose against a background of trees, now in their first fresh beauty. A few cottages with red roofs clustered round the church,

and two or three farms were sprinkled at a farther distance. A rugged outline of hills at a higher level, showed where the Ebbor rocks open out a miniature Cheddar, and on the other side of that little gorge lay the open country, where the city of the deep springs lies, with its noble cathedral, and quaint Close, and stately baronial Palace – the beautiful cathedral village of Wells.

Joyce Falconer was looking forth upon life as upon this goodly landscape. She was in the fresh spring-time of seventeen summers. Her father called her Sunshine, and her brothers Birdie; while her mother, who was a plain, practical person, and who indulged in no flights of fancy, would say, "Joyce is the child's name; and what can suit her better? I don't like nick-names."

Nevertheless the nick-names held their own, and as Joyce stood by the white gate, a voice was heard resounding from the lawn below:

"Hallo, Sunshine!"

"Father, come up the hill. It is so lovely this morning."

The squire advanced with steady, even footsteps. He was a fine, stalwart man, dressed in a stout suit of corduroy, and with leggings buttoned up to his knees. He carried a gun under his arm – more from habit than from any idea of using it just then – and close at his heels walked, with sedate and leisurely bearing, his chief friend and companion, a large retriever, Duke; while two little terriers, Nip and Pip, bustled about in every direction, scenting with their sharp noses, and occasionally turning upon each other to have a playful passage of arms which, though accompanied by ominous growls, meant nothing but fun.

"I am up first to-day, daddy!" Joyce exclaimed, as she went down the gentle descent and linked her arm in her father's. "I am first, and is not it beautiful to be alive on such a day?"

The squire paused, and putting his arm round his daughter's waist, he said, looking down at her with eyes of loving pride:

"Beautiful! yes," thinking, though he did not say so, that the most beautiful thing in all that beautiful world was his little Sunshine, his darling Joyce.

"I hope the weather will keep fine for the hay," he said; "but the glass went up with a gallop yesterday; still, it looks fair enough this morning."

"When are we to begin to cut the grass, daddy?"

"To-morrow, in the home meadow," was the reply. "I am going into Wells to-day, for the magistrates' meeting."

"May I come, father?"

"Well, I've no objection, if mother has not," was the answer. "You must ask her leave."

"I expect she will let me come. She is sure to have some shopping to do; and you don't like commissions at shops, daddy."

The squire gave a significant shrug of his broad shoulders, and then the two began to thread their way through the copse, and came out at last on the side of the grass-covered hill, up which Joyce skipped with the light step of a young fawn, with Nip and Pip scuffling along with her in the highest glee, while the squire and Duke followed more slowly.

As she stood there in the light of the morning, Joyce Falconer was a fair picture of happy, joyous maidenhood. Her figure was lithe and supple, and though I am afraid her lilac cotton frock would be despised as only fit for a maid-servant in these days, it became her well. It was made with a full skirt and a loose body, cut rather low at the neck, with sleeves which were large on the shoulder, gradually tightening to the wrist, and displayed to advantage a well-rounded arm. Joyce's shoes were thick; but though, perhaps, a trifle clumsy, they did not spoil the symmetry of her pretty ankle and high-arched instep. Snowy "tuckers" of crimped muslin were sewn into the neck and wrists of her gown, and she wore an apron with a bib; an old-fashioned apron, guiltless of bows or lace.

Her abundant chestnut hair was gathered on the top of her small head, and fell in curls on either side of her smooth white brow; not concealed now by the large Dunstable straw bonnet, which was

hanging to her arm by the strings, and left the gentle breeze of the morning free, to play amongst the clustering curls, at their own sweet will.

Joyce's features were regular, and her complexion rosy and healthy. Indeed, everything about her seemed to tell of youth and the full enjoyment of the gifts which God had given her.

"A perfect little rustic!" her aunt in the Vicar's close at Wells called her sometimes, and would suggest to her father that a year or two at a "finishing school" would be an advantage.

But the squire could not bring himself to part from his only daughter, and her education had been, I am afraid, sadly neglected.

"Well, little one," Mr. Falconer said, as he seated himself on a rough wooden bench, "what is this?" touching the cover of a book that peeped from her apron pocket.

"It is a book, father, Charlotte lent me: Mrs. Hemans' poems."

"Ah! poetry is a good thing when it is kept in its right place."

"I have been learning a long poem called 'Edith,' and I repeat it when I am darning stockings, picking up a stitch for every word. Don't you understand, father?"

"I never darned a stocking," he said, laughing.

"Ah! happy father! Mother has now given me six pairs of Melville's new socks, to strengthen the heels. In and out, in and out with the long needle; I have to try very hard not to grumble, so I say 'Edith' as a comfort, and to help me on."

'The woods – oh! solemn are the boundless woods  
Of the great Western world when day declines,  
And louder sounds the roll of distant floods,  
More deep the rustling of the solemn pines;  
When darkness gathers o'er the stilly air,  
And mystery seems o'er every leaf to brood,  
Awful it is for human heart to bear  
The weight and burden of the solitude.'

"Father," she said, suddenly stopping, "you are thinking of something that troubles you. I know it by the deep line on your forehead, between your eyes. May I know, father?"

"Well, Sunshine, I am troubled about Melville; he wants to go and see the world, he says. I have given him as good an education as befits his station in life. He has made little use of it; and the bills for the last term at Oxford have been enormous."

"How shameful!" Joyce exclaimed.

"Things are so different from what they were when I was a boy," the squire said. "Why, I never dreamed of anything beyond doing my duty here. I took the farming business off your grandfather's shoulders before I was five-and-twenty. I was his steward, as Melville ought to be mine, and leave me free. As it is, I have to pay Watson, and look into everything myself, when I have a son of three-and-twenty, who ought to do all this for me. I suppose it can't be helped," the squire said, stretching out his legs, and taking up the gun which had been resting against the bench, "and as far as I can see the younger boys will be very little, if any, better than Melville."

"Oh! yes, father. Ralph will do anything you wish, I know; and Hal and Bunny are very good at school. Remember what the master said of them at Christmas."

"Yes, yes; they are good little fellows. Then there is poor Piers; he must always be an anxiety, poor boy!"

"I don't think any of us can be happier than Piers," Joyce said. "He never complains because he is lame; and he is as contented as possible, making his collection of moths and butterflies, and bird's eggs, and things. No, father, don't be unhappy about Piers."

"Do you think, Joyce, I ever forget that it was my carelessness which made the boy a cripple? I never forget it."

"No one else thinks of it, dear daddy," Joyce said, slipping her hand into her father's, as it rested on his knee. "No one else thinks of it; and you know the colt had been broken in, and –"

"The child ought never to have put his legs across it, Joyce; and I lifted him on, and told him not to be a coward. Ah!" said the squire, suddenly starting to his feet. "I cannot speak of it; I dare not."

He began an abrupt descent the way that they had come. Nip and Pip, who had been sleeping with their noses on their paws, and one eye open, raced off, while Duke drew himself into a standing position, and walked demurely down the steep bit of turf, with the brush of his tail waving from side to side as he went.

Joyce did not follow immediately. Her bright face was clouded with the sympathy she felt for her father. It all came back to her: the group before the Manor, the child of eight years old, saying, "I am afraid of riding Rioter, father." Then the father's answer, "Afraid! Don't be a coward, Piers; you have a good seat enough for such a little chap. Here, let me put you on." The boy's white, set face, as he grasped the reins; and Rioter was off like lightning. "His brothers rode long before they were his age," the squire had said; "it won't do to tie him to his mother's apron strings, because he happens to be the youngest." Then the sound of returning horse's feet, and Rioter rushed up the side drive to the stables riderless. Another minute and old Thomas appeared with a lifeless burden in his arms, which the squire took from him, with a groan of remorse, as he turned into the house with him and said to his wife, "I have killed the boy."

But Piers was not killed. His injuries were life-long, but his life was spared.

Whether it was from an instinctive feeling, that his father considered himself the cause of his lameness and generally invalided condition, or whether the latent buoyancy of his nature asserted itself above all the privations which the accident had brought upon him, or whether both of these causes were at work within him, certain it is that Piers was the most cheerful and most uncomplaining member of the squire's household, and never allowed any one to pity him, or to treat him as an object of compassion. Joyce was right when she said that no one was happier than Piers. Every bird and insect had a charm for him, and were his friends and companions. Books of natural history were rare; but Bewick's Birds sufficed for Piers' needs. The "Natural History of Selborne" and old Isaak Walton's "Angler" were also amongst the boy's scanty library, and keen perception and acute observation supplied the place of extraneous help; and Piers was content.

The cloud soon cleared from Joyce's face as a well-known whistle was heard from the copse, and Joyce answered it with a clear note of welcome:

"Here, Piers."

Then the quick, even thud of crutches, and Piers came in sight.

In a moment Joyce was springing down the grassy hill-side, and, with a hardly perceptible touch on her brother's shoulder, she joined him as he came up.

"I say, Joyce, if you go to Wells to-day with father, will you take this little sparrow-hawk to old Plume's to be stuffed? Here, rummage in my pocket, left-hand side – there he is! He is a perfect specimen, and a pretty rare one. The stable-boy found him lying on his back under the dove-cot. Perhaps he got the worst of it in a fight. Anyhow, he is dead, and I have a nice nook for him in my big case."

"Poor dear little birdie," Joyce said, stroking the soft feathers. "Oh! Piers, why must everything die? It seems so hard. And this is the puzzle, that we – you and I – may die to-day, next week, any day; and yet we don't really behave as if we believed it. I feel on a morning like this, for instance, so full of life, it is so delicious to live, and as if I never could die. It is so beautiful to be living, so sad to be dead! To think, Piers, of this little bird singing sweetly –"

"Sparrow-hawks don't sing very sweetly; they chirrup and whistle," Piers interrupted.

"Ah, well, he thought he sang sweetly, and so did his mother; so it came to the same thing. Poor little sweet." And Joyce held the little lifeless bird against her rounded chin and pressed her lips upon it.

Suddenly Piers said:

"What is wrong about Melville; there's something fresh, for I heard my mother talking about it before I was up."

"He says he won't come here and take care of the farm. He wants to travel."

"Well, I don't blame him for that," said Piers.

"But his debts have hampered father dreadfully I know, and he does so detest his fine gentleman airs. It seems to me," said Joyce, vehemently, "to be ashamed of a father like ours is – Oh! I have no word bad enough, and Melville *is* ashamed, and he does not like mother looking after the dairy and the butter."

"Well," said Piers, tapping his crutch upon the ground, "I think mother does fidget and worry too much in the house and about the place; but it is her way, and no one could alter it."

"I don't know that I wish to alter it," Joyce said, hotly. "Mother has done so much for us, and I hate to think she is slighted by her children. Melville *does* slight her, and when he talks in that drawling, affected voice, and ties his starched cravats twenty times, and flings them down again if the bow is crooked. I despise *him*, and that is the truth."

Piers shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, we must go back to breakfast," he said; "I am hungry, and it must be nearly eight o'clock."

The brother and sister walked slowly towards the house, and as they crossed the lawn, from which the sun had kissed away all the dewdrops, a bell over the stables rang, and a little alert figure appeared in the porch.

"Joyce, Joyce! What are you dawdling for? It is past eight o'clock. Getting your feet drenched with the dew, I'll warrant. No, don't bring any dead birds here, Piers; I won't have it. The house is just like a pigsty with all your rubbish. Take it round to the back kitchen. I have a pretty hard morning's work before me, and you must lend a hand, Joyce, I can tell you."

"Father said I was to go with him to Wells, mother, and do your shopping."

"Well, that won't be till eleven o'clock. There's time enough first to help me to give out the stores and get the linen aired for the boys' room and the spare bedroom, and you forget, I suppose, that your brothers are coming home for the holidays on Friday, and this is Wednesday. I shall be all behindhand, if I don't look out. I wish Melville's fine gentleman visitor farther!"

Mrs. Falconer spoke rapidly, and in rather a high key. Her accent was decidedly provincial, and she did not measure out her words with the slow precision which her eldest son Melville considered a mark of *bon ton*.

Mrs. Falconer was the daughter of a large farmer in a neighbouring county, and the squire had married her in haste, though he had never repented at leisure.

She was thoroughly loyal-hearted and true as a wife and mother; brusque and blunt, holding all fine things and fine people in supreme contempt. And yet, according to the perversity of women-kind, she spoiled and indulged the son whose love of fine things seemed likely to be his bane, and brought perpetual trouble upon his good and honourable father.

To make bread and cakes, to skim milk, churn butter, at a pinch, and make all the sweet, cooling drinks for the summer, and elderberry wine for the winter, were domestic duties in which Mrs. Falconer gloried. She would put on a large apron and a pair of dusting-gloves every morning and go the round of the parlours, and rub the old mahogany chair-backs and bureau with vigour, sprinkle the tea-leaves on stated days, and follow one of her stout maid-servants, as they swept the carpets on their knees, with dustpan and brush, and remove every suspicion of "fluff" from every corner or crevice where it might be supposed to accumulate.

While her children were young these household duties which their mother took upon herself, were considered as a matter of course, but with added years came added wisdom, to some of them at least, and Melville, her eldest son, and her great darling and idol, began to show unmistakable signs of annoyance, at his mother's household accomplishments.

He was at home now, and a stormy scene the night before had deepened the lines on the squire's brow; and hard things Melville had said were as sharp swords to his mother's soul. She was not particularly sensitive, it is true; by no means thin-skinned, or laying herself out – as is the fashion of some women of her temperament, to take offence. Still, Melville had succeeded the night before in wounding her in her tenderest place, reminding her that while his father's pedigree could be stretched out to meet the royal blood of the Saxon kings, the race of sturdy yeomen, from which his mother came, had no blue blood in their veins and were sons of the soil.

There is an old saying that "sharper than a serpent's tooth is an ungrateful child;" and Mrs. Falconer was still smarting from the wound given her the evening before, when she began to dispense the excellent breakfast, laid in a large, cool hall at the back of the manor, which was connected, by a square opening in the thick wall, with the kitchen.

The squire, who was generally so jovial and cheery, ate his cold pressed beef and drank his glass of "home-brew" in silence. He professed to be engrossed with a Bath paper several days old, and did not invite conversation.

Piers played with some bread-and-milk his mother set before him: his appetite was never good; but Joyce despatched hot rolls and ham with a great appetite, which I am afraid would shock some of our modern notions nowadays.

Tea and coffee were not the staple beverages at breakfast in those times; but when the heavier part of the meal was over Joyce handed her father a fragrant cup, with some thin toast done to a turn, for which Mrs. Falconer called from the kitchen through the window, communicating with it, and fitted with a sliding shutter, which was promptly closed when the tray had been received from the hands of one of the maids.

"So you are thinking of going into Wells to-day, Arthur?" Mrs. Falconer said when, breakfast drawing to a conclusion, she began to pile the plates together, and put all the scraps on one, for the benefit of Nip and Pip, who had been lying in the window-seat for the past half-hour in a state of suppressed excitement, with their noses on their paws, and their eyes fixed upon that end of the table where their mistress presided.

The noise made by the piling up of the plates was now a decided movement, and Nip and Pip began to wriggle and leap, and finally subside on their hind legs as Joyce called out: "Trust, Nip! trust, Pip!" and then, after what she considered a due time spent in an erect position, the plate was put down before them, and its contents vanished in a twinkling.

"Well, Joyce, will you be ready by eleven o'clock?" Mr. Falconer asked as he left the room.

Joyce was silent, and her mother said:

"Yes, yes, she shall be ready; if she is brisk she can get through all I want." Then Mrs. Falconer began to put all the silver into a wooden bowl, and rubbed it herself with the washleather when it was dried.

She had just finished this part of her daily routine when the door opened and her son Melville came in. His appearance would be ridiculous in the eyes of the dandies of to-day, but in his own, at least, it was as near perfection as possible.

His hair was curled in tight and very-much-oiled curls on his forehead and round his ears. He wore a high neckcloth, tied evidently with much care, supporting his retreating chin. His coat was of Lincoln green, very short in the waist, with large silver buttons, and turned back with a wide collar to display two waistcoats, the white one only showing an edge beyond the darker one of deep salmon-colour, which opened to set off a frilled shirt. The trousers were tight, and caught at the ankles by straps, and his shoes were tied with large bows. The servile imitators of "the first gentleman in

Europe" followed in his steps with as much precision as possible, and Melville Falconer spared no pains to let the county folk of Somersetshire see what the real scion of *bon ton* looked like.

Melville had a pleasant, weak face; he was almost entirely forgetful of the interests or tastes of anyone but himself, and he had never given up his own wishes for the sake of another in his life.

He had a ridiculous idea of his own importance, and a supreme contempt for what he called old-fashioned usage; from the vantage-ground of superior wisdom he looked down on the county gentry of Somersetshire, who, in those days, did not frequent London in the season, or tread hard on the heels of the nobility in all their customs, as is now the case.

The great mercantile wealth which rose into colossal importance, when railway traffic brought the small towns near the large ones, and the large ones near the metropolis, had not begun to overshadow the land; the tide of speculation had not set in; and there was less hastening to be rich and desire to display all that riches could give. It was a time of comparative stagnation, which preceded the great rush, which was to bear on its tide, as the stream of progress and discovery gathered strength, the next generation with relentless power. Of all that lay outside Fair Acres, Mrs. Falconer was almost indifferent, if not ignorant. She liked things as they were, and was averse to change, lest that change should be for the worse. Her tongue, which was a sharp one, had been swift to condemn the establishment of the schools in her neighbourhood, and she resisted all invitations from her husband to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Hannah More. Teaching lads and lasses to read and write was, in the opinion of Mrs. Falconer, a crying evil. They had enough learning if they kept their church once a week, and as to arithmetic, if they could count their own fingers it was enough; and she, for one, would never take a servant who had schooling. "A pack of nonsense," she called it; and she would tell Mrs. Hannah More so if only she had the chance. Mrs. Falconer turned from her occupation at the table, when her son entered.

"Breakfast!" she exclaimed. "No, indeed; breakfast is over and done with. I can't keep the things about half the morning."

The prototype of the fine gentleman seated himself in a chair at the table, and said in a drawling voice, suppressing a yawn:

"Joyce, get me some clean plates, and go and order a rasher of bacon; and let the eggs be poached; and –"

But Mrs. Falconer pushed Joyce aside:

"No," she said; "your sister has something else to do than wait on you. I'll get your breakfast; and if you have to wait an hour, it will serve you right; lie-a-beds don't generally have sharp appetites."

"Nay, mother," Melville said, "do not let the want of appetite be laid to my door, with so many other sins; I am particularly hungry this morning. And I beseech you, do not do servant's work for *me*."

Mrs. Falconer's face betrayed that she felt the thrust.

"Servant's work must be done for folks too lazy to do it for themselves," she said, as she let the heavy door swing behind her, and repaired to the kitchen to prepare, far too carefully, a breakfast for her son.

Joyce hesitated a moment, and then said:

"It always vexes mother when you are late, Melville. I wish you would get up earlier."

"My dear little sister, I should have vexed mother if I had come down at six. She is out of temper with me, and so is my father, simply because I desire to get a little education, to fit me for my position here, you know, when I come into the place."

"Oh, Melville, you have had every advantage; you ought to know everything. But Aunt Letitia was quite right – the money spent upon you at Oxford was wasted."

"Thanks for your high opinion. I ought to be vastly grateful for it. But to speak of other things: I have bidden a friend to stay here for a week. He will like country air, and to drink milk and curds-and-whey. He arrives at Wells by the Bath mail; and I shall drive in with you and my father, and hire a post-chaise at the Swan to bring him out."

"I hope he is not a fine gentleman," Joyce said.

"He is a very fine gentleman indeed," was the answer; "and, Joyce, persuade mother *not* to put on that big bib, and make herself look like a housekeeper. It will appal Arundel, and make him feel out of his element."

"If he is to feel that, what does he come for?" Joyce said, angrily. "We want no upstarts here."

"Upstarts! that is fine talking. Arundel comes of one of the oldest families in England. Not older than ours; though, unhappily, we live as if we had sprung from the gutter, and do not get any proper respect."

"Respect!" exclaimed Joyce, indignantly. "Respect! As if father were not respected as a justice! and as if *you*— " Joyce stopped; she felt too indignant to go on.

"My dear little sister," Melville said, with a grand air of pity – "my dear little sister, you are only ignorant. If you knew a little more of the habits and customs of the higher classes, you would not talk so foolishly."

"I do not wish to know more about them if you have got *your* habits from associating with them."

Melville smiled, and did not betray the least irritation.

"My dear," he said, "facts are stubborn things. Does it never strike you, that though my father dines at the houses of the gentry in the county, sits on the bench, and rides to cover, you and my mother are not invited to accompany him. The truth is my good mother dislikes the usages of *genteel* life."

Melville used that objectionable word with emphasis. *Genteel* was in those days used as some of us now use words which are scarcely more significant, though generally accepted – "Good form," "A 1," and so forth.

"It is," Melville continued, grandly, "the result of early associations; and so we eat heavy one o'clock meals and nine o'clock suppers, instead of dining at three or four o'clock; and my mother, instead of receiving company in the house, works in it like a servant. It is a vast pity, my dear. It keeps the family down, and destroys your chances in life. So I advise you to try to alter things. Now Arundel is coming, I want to dine at a less outlandish hour, and I – "

Whatever Mr. Melville Falconer wanted Joyce did not stay to hear. She left the large hall by one door as her mother entered by the other, bearing in her hand a tray of delicately prepared breakfast for her son, who was wholly unworthy of her attentions, and would have been better without them.

"Thank you, mother," Melville said. "I hope the toast is not dried up. There is so much skill even in the poaching of an egg."

"There are two ways of doing everything," was Mrs. Falconer's rejoinder. "Now I must be quick, for I have a deal of work upstairs."

"Why should you have work, mother?"

"Why did you invite a fine gentleman here? You had better answer that question. The best room must be got ready, and the feather bed laid before the fire."

"A fire in this weather!" exclaimed Melville.

"No one ever sleeps in my house in an unaired bed; and never will, while I am mistress of it, that I can tell you. I hope your fine gentleman is not one to scoff at plain people."

"Arundel is far too well bred to make invidious remarks. But for all that, things may strike him as a little odd. I was going to suggest that we should dine at four o'clock while he is here, and that the boys should not sit down with us elders. It is not the custom in great houses."

"It is the custom here, and mine is *not* a great house: it is a comfortable English home, where there is no waste, and no extravagance, and no show. I'll warrant your grand friend never slept in a better bed nor between finer sheets than he will to-night. They are as sweet as lavender can make them, and – "

Melville shrugged his shoulders.

"Nay, spare me, mother, and let us leave the arrangements of bed-chambers to the fitting people. And, if I might suggest it, let all things wear their best appearance when Arundel arrives, including the mistress of the mansion. It is a pity when one so young and comely-looking as my mother should pay such scant heed to the little feminine ornaments which are – Phaugh! what is this? Positively a red ant crawling from the bread-trencher. What a beast! Quick! catch it, mother. I hope we shall have no red ants when Arundel is here."

Mrs. Falconer darted down upon the ant with her forefinger, and speedily despatched it, exclaiming there was a perfect plague of ants in the larder, and she did not know how to be rid of them.

"Disgusting!" said her son, carefully covering the body of the ant with a leaf which had garnished the pat of butter. "It is enough to make one sick. I must have a little brandy to settle myself, or rather, my breakfast, before I start."

Mrs. Falconer made no response to this request. But the spirit-stand was in the sideboard, and when his mother was gone Melville helped himself to a pretty strong dram, and then lounged about till it was time to mount the "four-wheel" and drive into Wells.

## CHAPTER II. THE CITY OF THE DEEP SPRINGS

The squire's high "four-wheel" drew up before the door of the Swan Hotel at Wells about twelve o'clock that day. Mr. Falconer was well-known there, and there was a general rush to meet him. The landlord came briskly to the side of the vehicle to assist Miss Joyce to alight, while the ostler and stable-boy ran to the head of the mare; and in the dark entrance below the portico the landlady and a waiter with a napkin over his arm, were in readiness.

"Good-day to you," said the squire, in a cheery voice.

"We are proud to see you, sir. Nice weather for the hay. Will you please to walk in, sir? and Mrs. Maltby will receive your orders for dinner."

"Thank ye kindly. Dinner for two at one o'clock. My daughter will go up to the Liberty, to her aunt's."

"Here, you fellow," exclaimed the prototype of the first gentleman in Europe. "Here, can't you get the carriage nearer the pavement? I don't care to set my foot in that puddle."

The ostler backed the horse, and the landlord advanced to give Melville his arm, while a knot of people had assembled in Saddler Street, watching with some curiosity the movements of the smart young gentleman in the back seat.

The squire, provoked at the tone in which his son had spoken, vanished within the dark lobby of the inn, while Joyce said, laughing:

"Melville, surely you don't want to be helped from the carriage!"

"Look at 'im, now," said a poor woman, who was carrying a basket of vegetables to one of the Canon's houses; "did ye ever see the like? His shoes are made of paper; and, lor! what bows!"

"Take care; you'll be heard," said an old man, who was leaning on his stick. "Take care. Don't 'ee chatter like a magpie. You'll be heard, Peggy Loxley."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the woman, "I know why you are affrighted; I know. You've got your 'nephew' up to-day afore the justices, and you don't want to affront one of the justices; I see."

The old man shook his stick at the woman, and meantime Melville had accomplished his descent without splashing his shoes or the edge of his trowsers.

"I shall want a post-chaise ready, in the afternoon, after the Bath mail arrives," he said. "I expect a friend by the coach."

"Very good, sir," said the landlord, who now reappeared; "very good. The squire has ordered dinner for two at one o'clock."

"Where are you off to, Joyce?" Melville said.

"I am going to do some shopping, and to wait at Aunt Letitia's for father." Then Joyce drew a little nearer Melville. "Why can't your friend ride with you in the back seat?"

"Why? Because I don't choose to let him jog over the roads in such a rough conveyance."

Joyce's lip curled.

"It is good enough for father and for me," she said, "and ought to be good enough for you."

Melville arranged his hair, and touched the ends of his lace cravat.

"My dear child, don't make a scene before witnesses, I beseech you."

Joyce waited to hear no more, but tripped away, turning, through a quaint archway, to the Cathedral Green, where the cathedral stood before her in all its majesty.

The great west front of Wells Cathedral has few rivals, and dull indeed must be the heart that does not respond in some measure to its grandeur.

Involuntarily Joyce said, "How beautiful!" and then, leaving the road, she passed through a turnstile and pursued her way under the shadow of a row of limes, which skirted the wide expanse of turf before the cathedral.

The blue sky of the summer day over-arched the stately church, and a few white clouds sailed above the central tower. There were no jarring sounds of wheels, no tread of many feet, no traffic which could tell of trade. Although it was high noontide, the stillness was profound: the jackdaw's cry, the distant voices of children in the market-square, the rustle of the leaves in the trees, and a faint murmur of tinkling water, only seemed to make the quiet more quiet, the silence more complete.

The great west door was open, and Joyce walked towards it, and passed under it into the cool shadows of the nave. She had often done this before, going out from the north porch into the Close again, but to-day there seemed, she scarcely knew why, the stirring of a new life within her.

It was the moment, perhaps, of crossing the barrier which divides childhood from womanhood; the pause which comes in most young lives, when there is, as it were, a hush before the dawn of the coming day.

Joyce had been silent during the drive from Fair Acres; her father had invited no conversation, and a glance now and then at his profile as he sat on the high box seat at her side, had convinced Joyce that the lines of care on his forehead were not traced there without a reason.

The fop, who condescended to sit in the back seat of the cumbrous vehicle, indulged in sundry grumbles at the bad road, the dust, the slow pace of Mavis the mare, the heat, and such like trifles, which were, however, sufficient to disturb the serenity of Melville Falconer.

Joyce had felt ashamed and annoyed as she had never done before; and when a neighbouring squire jogged past on horseback with his son, and looked back with a smile at the highly-decorated figure in the back seat, Joyce felt sure they were laughing at him! Why could not Melville wear a short riding coat like Charlie Paget, and top-boots, and bear himself like a country gentleman, instead of bringing down London fashions into the heart of Somersetshire, and finding fault with everything in his own home; bring his fine friends there without warning, and behave as if he were indeed monarch of all he surveyed.

Joyce's sweet young face was shadowed with the awakening sense of responsibility and the longing to do something, which might smooth the rough places in her father's life, which her brother apparently made without the slightest compunction.

As Joyce stood in the cathedral, not far from the north porch, her head raised towards the belfry-tower, which the great inverted arches support, a ray of sunshine entering at a window in the south transept touched her figure, and illuminated it with a subdued and chastened beauty. Her head was thrown back, and the high coal-scuttle or gipsy bonnet did not hide the sweet face, which, when she had walked demurely down the nave, had been hardly visible.

The little quaint figure was motionless, and the old verger turned twice to look at it, with a strange and curious thrill of admiration. Presently the cloister door opposite opened, and the Dean's swift footsteps were heard approaching, with a regular pit-pat, on the floor of the nave.

He, like the verger, was attracted by Joyce's attitude and the rapt expression on her fair face.

"Why, it's Falconer's little girl!" he thought. "She is generally all smiles and sunshine; now she looks like a nun."

As the Dean passed her, Joyce started. The brightest colour came to her face, and she turned hastily towards the north porch.

The Dean, with old-fashioned and chivalrous courtesy, held the little door, which was cut out of the big one for ordinary use, to let her pass, and then he said:

"Miss Falconer, I think. I hope your good father is well. Is he in Wells to-day?"

"Yes, sir," Joyce replied, bright smiles rippling over her face. "Yes, sir; on magistrates' business."

"Ah, ah! I heard there was some bad case brought in from Mendip. The good lady at Barley Wood will have to learn that much prating about religion ain't what we want. It's like the crackling of thorns under the pot. Let us see you at the Deanery before long; make my compliments to your good

father and Mrs. Falconer." And then the Dean ambled away, his thin, black-stockinged legs beneath the decanal coat and apron giving him the appearance of a black stork.

Joyce now hastened towards the Vicar's Close, where her aunt, her father's only sister, lived.

The Vicar's Close at Wells is a sight to delight the heart of the antiquary and the lover of ancient buildings and olden times.

It is entered from the north end of the cathedral by a wide, low gateway, and on either side of a fairly broad footway stands a row of small, picturesque houses with twisted chimneys and low doorways, round which the clematis and honeysuckle climb at their own sweet will. The Vicar's Close, at the further end, is closed in by a small chapel, which entirely blocks the entrance, for any but foot passengers, who obtain egress into the North Liberty by some uneven stone steps at the side of the chapel, leading into the road a few feet above the level of the Close.

If Wells is quiet outside the Vicar's Close, it is quiet indeed within it. Since the summer day when Joyce went into the little garden before a house half-way up on the right side, the hand of the modern Wells builder and plasterer may have marred the complete effect, with stucco and sash-windows; but for the most part the houses in the second decade of the century were guiltless of plate glass and white-wash, and their antique frontage was, even more than now, one of the most picturesque features of the city of Wells.

Joyce had scarcely touched the bright brass handle of the bell when the door opened, and a girl of two or three and twenty sprang out.

"Oh, Joyce, how glad I am to see you! Come in Aunt Letitia, here is Joyce."

Miss Falconer was in the parlour on the right-hand side of the little, low-roofed lobby, and rose somewhat feebly from her chair by the wide grate, which was gay with pots of flowers and evergreens.

"Well, my child, welcome. Have you come to Wells with your father?"

"Yes, auntie; and I am come here for dinner, and after dinner may Charlotte come and do some shopping with me? I have a long list of commissions at the china shop and at Wilmott's."

"Charlotte will be pleased to accompany you, dear child; and when you have taken off your bonnet, come and tell me home news."

There were not many stairs to ascend to Charlotte's bedroom, which looked into the gardens at the back of two other houses of some pretension, between the Vicar's Close and the Deanery.

Charlotte curled herself up in the deep window-seat, and watched her cousin as she laid aside her large bonnet, smoothed her hair, and arranged her white pelerine over her pelisse. Charlotte had a genuine, if rather romantic, admiration for her cousin Joyce. Though a good girl, she was somewhat given to sentiment and languishing, complained of being fatigued, of headaches, and low spirits. She fed upon romance and poetry – the poetry of albums and keepsakes, which was then fashionable. Of course she had a hero who figured in her day-dreams; and she would spend hours at the little window of the sitting-room to catch a sight of him as he passed along the Close. Charlotte would have been much better for some active employment; but Miss Falconer was getting old and feeble in health, and if Charlotte was obedient and gentle, she was well satisfied. So she worked covers in cross-stitch for the chairs, knitted her own stockings, read all the light literature which came in her way, and played on the cabinet piano which stood against the wall in the sitting-room, with its crimson silk front gathered into the centre by a large rosette, and displaying, when open, a very narrow keyboard with very yellow keys.

"How sweetly pretty you look to-day, Joyce. I can't help saying so. Don't be angry. I want to read you some verses I have written, called, 'The Drooping Rosebud.'" And Charlotte took out of her pocket the crumpled page of a copy-book.

"You had better not read it now, Charlotte; Aunt Letitia will expect us to go downstairs."

"Only the first verse," Charlotte said, and then she began:

"She bent her head in sorrow,

The pretty fragile rose;  
She languished for the morrow,  
Where light and gladness grows  
She languished for a rain drop  
To cheer her thirsty heart:  
She was so sad and weary;  
In joy she had no part.

'As the raindrop to the rosebud,  
So is his smile to me;  
As – "'

Here Charlotte stopped and blushed. "You know who I mean by the rosebud, and who the raindrop is?"

Joyce laughed merrily.

"Oh, Charlotte, you must not come to me for sympathy. I can't understand such sentiment. You have never spoken to Mr. Bamfylde in your life."

"*Not spoken*; no, but there is such a thing as the language of eyes. Joyce, you don't understand."

"No, I don't; and I think, Charlotte, it is nonsense to waste your thoughts on Mr. Bamfylde, who probably has never given you a thought in his life."

"I am not so sure about *thoughts*, dear. However, I see you don't care about it, or my verses, or me."

"Come, Charlotte, don't be silly! Of course I care about you, but I don't think I am poetical or romantic. Indeed, we ought to go downstairs."

"You must go first, and I will follow," said poor Charlotte, putting "The Drooping Rosebud" in her pocket again, with a sigh; and Joyce tripped downstairs alone.

"Well, my little rustic," Miss Falconer said; "come and sit down by me, and tell me the news."

"Melville came home last week," Joyce said. "He is determined to travel, and father did so want him to settle down at home and help him with the estate. But, oh! Aunt Lettice, nothing will ever make him into a farmer. He is dressed to-day, to come into Wells, like a fine gentleman. I get so angry with Melville, Aunt Lettice."

"He will come round in time, my dear. Young men are often a little difficult to manage, and then sober down so wonderfully."

"But Melville is twenty-three, nearly twenty-four, Aunt Lettice. Father has given him every advantage, and all he wished for, and now he says he cannot possibly live a country gentleman's life."

"Oxford was a poor preparation for that life, I must own," said Miss Falconer; "only it was natural perhaps, that your father should yield to your mother's wishes."

"Mother suffers the most," said Joyce hotly, "far, far the most. It makes me so angry when I think of the way mother is treated."

"My dear child, she has spoiled Melville, and this is the result."

"It would not be the result if Melville had an atom of gentleman-like feeling. Looking down on mother, who – " Joyce's voice faltered.

"It was unfortunate that your father married below him in the social scale; he was caught in the rebound, as we say. But all that is over and done with: still, we may deplore it; though no one can respect your dear mother more than I do. Marriage," said Miss Falconer, slowly and deliberately, "has not been successful in our family. Charlotte's mother, our only sister, made a very unwise marriage, and her only child has been thrown upon me to support. Not that I regret it. Charlotte is an amiable, gentle girl, and a companion to me. I have given her such advantages as I could afford, and she is fairly accomplished. I had a visitor yesterday I little expected, at her very advanced age. Mrs. Hannah

More paid her first call on our new Bishop, and was so obliging as to come on here. She was speaking of you with interest, my dear."

"Of me!" exclaimed Joyce. "What does she know of me?"

"She knows about most people in the county; and, naturally, your mother's opposition to Mrs. More's views has reached her. She forbade a dairy-maid to read, who had once been in Mrs. More's school, and when she disobeyed her, dismissed her on the spot. It was much to be regretted. Greatly as I respect your mother, I must confess this act annoyed me."

"Did Mrs. More mention it yesterday, Aunt Lettice?"

"Yes; and she said she would like to have some communication with you. She had seen you riding with your father, and was taken by your looks. She inquired what education you had, and was shocked when I told her absolutely none. I told her I had implored your father to send you to a boarding-school at Clifton, but that he was obstinate. For, with all his good qualities, Joyce, we must concede that your father *is* obstinate."

"He is determined to do what is right," said Joyce, "if that is obstinacy."

Miss Falconer smiled.

"I have known him longer than you have, little Joyce," she said. "But tell me about this proposition of Mrs. More's: is it possible to carry it out? Mrs. More has such frequent attacks of illness, that it is well to lose no time. Shall I write to Mrs. More, and propose that you should spend a week at Barley Wood?"

"Oh! I don't think mother could spare me for a week. Did Mrs. More ask Charlotte?"

"No, but I may suggest it. Probably she thinks Charlotte is in good hands; she knows that I have not neglected her education. She has refined, poetical tastes; she can work beautifully in coloured silks; she can paint flowers, and she can play on the piano very prettily. These are the accomplishments which we look for in a young gentlewoman; and –"

"I have none of them!" Joyce exclaimed; not hopelessly, but almost defiantly: "but, Aunt Lettice, I am not sure that I want them."

"Dear child, I am sure that you *do* want them," was the reply, with a smile. "There is a want of 'finish' about you; the more to be lamented –"

Miss Falconer's speech was interrupted by the appearance of the neat maid-servant, who laid the cloth, and set out, with the utmost precision, the glasses and plates and dishes.

"We will adjourn to the sitting-room after dinner," Miss Falconer said. "I am glad to be spared coming down twice in the day. It was fortunate that I was seated in this room yesterday when Mrs. More called; she could not have mounted the stairs. Oh! here is Charlotte. Now we will sit down to the table; say grace, dear Charlotte."

Charlotte obeyed, and then the cover was lifted from a fowl, done to a turn; and Patty handed round the vegetables, and poured out cider for Miss Falconer, while Charlotte had a glass of port-wine, as she had been rather "below par" for a day or two; and Joyce drank water from preference.

Before the meal was concluded, Miss Falconer had decided that she would write to Mrs. More, and propose that her niece from Fair Acres should accept her invitation to Barley Wood, at such time as might be most convenient to her to arrange it. She did not tell Joyce of this decision, but she considered by making it she was conferring a real favour on the "little rustic," whose beauty she was inwardly comparing to that of a wild rose; scarcely the drooping rose of Charlotte's poem!

The two girls set out, soon after dinner, for the market-place, where the shops were situated. The market-place at Wells is not without its picturesque features; old gabled houses skirt the north side and part of the south side, while a cross stands at the bottom of the square. Clear water, from one of the many springs, which first attracted the College of Priests, in the time of Alfred's son Edward, to found their religious house in Wells, makes soft music as it runs down the streets in crystal streams. Two quaint archways, or, as they were in old documents called, the Palace Eye and the Deanery Eye, stand at the head of the market-square, and between them are two ancient houses, one of which was

built by Bishop Beckington, and has rooms over the porch, or gateway, through which foot-passengers pass into the Cathedral Green.

There is a delightful sense that life flows easily and peacefully at Wells by the appearance of its citizens. The master of the large shop where the two girls stopped, was standing complacently at the door, his hands in his pockets, calmly surveying the rush of the cathedral choristers across the square, for the first chime had sounded for afternoon service.

Joyce was known as Squire Falconer's daughter at Fair Acres, and treated

with respect. She was conducted to a counter at the end of the dark, low shop, where the head shopwoman waited on her. Joyce's list of commissions was for the most part of the homely and useful kind; but Charlotte was attracted by a display of gauze ribbons, then greatly in fashion, for the large loops worn on the crown of gipsy bonnets. She was not proof against buying two yards of straw-coloured ribbon with a blue edge, and when the ring was pulled down the ends of her purse again, it slipped off, for there was nothing left in it.

"Look, Joyce, what lovely ribbon! Do get some, Joyce."

But Joyce was intently examining some homely towelling, and weighing the respective merits of bird's-eye and huckaback.

"I don't want any ribbons," she said. "Yes, it is pretty, but what are you going to do with it?" Then turning to the counter: "I want a box of needles – all sizes, and half-a-dozen reels of cotton, and –"

"Joyce, I think I will go to the door while you are finishing all these dull things; and then –"

Joyce glanced at the large clock over the counter:

"Then, I think, we will go to the service, and if we are not too late –"

"Oh, yes," Charlotte said, eagerly. "Do let us go, and come back to the china-shop afterwards."

Charlotte had her own reasons for desiring to go to the cathedral. The hero of her silent worship was Mr. Bamfylde, a new minor Canon, and it was his week for doing the duty.

Joyce completed her purchases, and left orders for them to be sent to the Swan; and then, just as the last chime was ringing and the old clock struck three, the two girls passed up the nave to the choir.

The work of restoration had not been begun, and the beautiful proportions of the choir of Wells Cathedral, were disfigured by high seats and an ugly pulpit. But Joyce's eyes were not critical, and she gave herself up to the soothing and elevating influence of the place, without any very distinct idea of why it was soothing and elevating. The service was slovenly enough in those days, and the new minor Canon got through it as fast as he could. The choristers straggled in, with no regard to order, and the lay-vicars conversed freely with each other, now and then giving the head of the chorister nearest to them a sharp rap with the corner of an anthem-book, or their own knuckles, through the open desk. The boys' behaviour was a little better than that of the men, for they had a wholesome fear of being reported to the Dean and Chapter, and feeling the weight of the old Grammar School master's birch-rod.

When the service was half over there was a sound of feet and voice's in one of the side aisles, and the Dean, who was in his stall, looked sharply round. The verger hobbled out to see what his coadjutor outside the choir could be about, to allow such a disturbance. The verger was sound asleep, with his chin upon his capacious breast, and quite unconscious of the presence of the two young gentlemen who were chatting and laughing with each other, in the south transept.

The verger stumped after them, vainly endeavouring to rouse his heavy friend, and said:

"There's service going on; you mustn't make a disturbance, gentlemen; it's contrary to the Dean's wishes."

The elder of the two men answered with a laugh, but the younger said:

"Be quiet, Falconer. Don't you hear they are reading prayers?"

"Well, I am neither reading them nor saying them," was the answer. "I had enough of that at Pembroke. Now, old fellow, keep a civil tongue in your head, will you?" as the verger, angry at the contemptuous disregard of his commands, said:

"I'll turn you out, if you don't go peaceably."

Again another laugh; and the fat verger, who had now recovered from his heavy afternoon nap, came bearing down on the young men.

"You'll walk out this instant," he said, raising his staff of office. "I wonder you ain't ashamed of yourself."

"No, my good man; on the contrary, I am proud of myself."

"Proud! Yes, a popinjay like you is proud enough, I'll warrant," murmured the other verger.

"Can we get into the choir, Arundel?"

"We had better wait here," was the answer. "The service is nearly over. Come this way into the cloisters. Don't be aggressive, Falconer, and make a row."

"I hate rows as much as you do," was the answer; "but I am not inclined to knock under, to this pair of drivelling old idiots."

I cannot say how this unseemly wrangle might have ended had not the verger in charge of the Dean heard the blowing of the organ pipes, which was a warning that he was to hasten to perform his office, and conduct the Dean back to the Deanery.

Almost immediately the organ sounded, and those who had taken part in the service came out. Joyce and Charlotte were amongst the last of the very scanty congregation.

Melville, for reasons of his own, did not care to introduce his friend at that moment, and Mr. Arundel was quite unconscious that the fair face of which he caught sight, from under the shadow of the large bonnet, was that of Melville's sister.

"What a sweet face!" he thought; and then, as Joyce turned suddenly towards the spot by the font where the two gentlemen were standing, a bright blush and smile, made her look irresistibly lovely.

"Who is that young lady, Melville? She knows you." For Joyce had made a step forward, and then apparently changed her mind and went towards the north door with Charlotte.

Melville fingered his cravat, and settled his chin in its place above it. "That little girl dressed as if she came out of Noah's ark is my sister! Come, you will have another opportunity of cultivating her acquaintance, and you want to call at the Palace, don't you?"

"My mother charged me to do so; but there is no haste."

"Oh, you had better not lose time, or you may not find your legs under the Bishop's mahogany. We live some miles out, you know."

Mr. Arundel turned his head round twice to take a last look at the retreating figures, and then allowed Melville to tuck his arm in his, and walk down the cloisters with him to the Palace.

Melville was in fact very anxious to show off his intimacy with Mr. Arundel to the bishop, for he could not hide from himself the fact that the ecclesiastical *élite* of Wells had not paid him the attention he hoped to receive. The truth was that rumours of Melville's gay and careless life, and the anxiety he had given his father, had reached the ears of some in authority. Heads of colleges reported his behaviour at Oxford, and Melville had been sent down, not for what may be called serious offences; but still the character hung about him of a man who cared for nothing earnestly; reading or rowing, it was all alike. Nothing that Melville did was done with singleness of purpose, except, as his father sometimes said, with a sigh, "dress himself like a mountebank and copy London fashions."

## CHAPTER III. THE PALACE

The old baronial Palace of Wells, surrounded by its moat and reached by a drawbridge – not raised now as in olden times, – is in perfect harmony with the city in which it stands. In it, but not of it; for when once the gateway is passed, the near neighbourhood of the market-place is forgotten, such traffic as this little city knows is left behind; and the gardens of the Palace might well be supposed to be far from all human habitations, so complete is the repose which broods over it. Encircled by battlemented walls, and standing in a wide demesne, a stranger is at once struck with the unusual beauty of its surroundings.

Mr. Arundel's admiration rather disconcerted his friend.

"Come on, Arundel. Don't stare about like that; some of the family may be at the windows."

But Mr. Arundel did not heed his friend's entreaty.

"Come on; it is so like a country clodhopper to stand looking at a big house, as if you had never seen one before."

"I never have seen one before, in the least like this big house," was the reply; "and what are those ruins? It is odd, Falconer, that you never prepared me for the beautiful things I was to find in Somersetshire."

"It's a mighty damp place," Melville said. "Rheumatism and low fever haunt the servants' quarters, which are on a level with the moat; but, my dear fellow, do come on."

"Can't we cross over to that old wall? It is like a glimpse of Paradise through there."

"No, no, we must go up to the front like well-mannered folk. Come, don't be so obstinate, Arundel."

Whether Melville would have succeeded in his attempts to draw his friend towards the entrance-porch, which stood in the centre of a long line of windows of the lower story of this side of the Palace, I do not know, had not a clerical figure in knee-breeches and shovel hat, been seen advancing over the emerald turf, and approaching the two young men.

Melville began to show signs of nervousness, and the grand air which he maintained to his inferiors gave place to a rather servile and cringing manner, as he carefully removed his high narrow hat from his curled head and, bowing low, said:

"My lord, my friend Mr. Arundel is anxious to pay his respects to you."

The bishop looked with keen grey eyes at Melville, and said stiffly:

"Mr. Falconer's son, I think?"

"Yes, my lord; your lordship's humble servant," again bowing till the tails of his short-waisted coat stood up like those of a robin-redbreast.

"Arundel, Arundel," the bishop repeated; "Arundel: the name is familiar to me."

"My mother, my lord, had the honour of your lordship's acquaintance some years ago. She was Annabella Thorndeanne."

The bishop's somewhat stiff manner changed at once. He extended his hand, and said:

"To have known your mother is to bear her always in affectionate remembrance. Where is she living?"

"Since my father's death, my lord, my mother has had no settled home. She has lived within reach of me, first at Winchester, and then at Oxford. Now she will settle where I do."

"And what profession are you taking, may I inquire?"

"The law I believe; things are not yet decided, my lord; but there is some notion of a partnership in Bristol, when I have passed the needful examinations."

"Well, well, we must have lawyers, and can no more do without them than doctors, eh?" All this time Melville had fidgeted, and felt annoyed at the bishop's coldness to him. "I am alone just now in

the Palace; health, or rather the search for health, has taken the ladies to the east coast, a very distant spot – Cromer in Norfolk. But bracing was recommended, and our Western sea cannot come under that head. But will you walk round; I shall be pleased to show you over the grounds, and the gallery, where the portraits of my predecessors hang. One has the mark of a bullet in his cheek, caught in the battle of Sedgemoor. All our surroundings speak of warlike times, and there are moments now when I feel as if I would gladly pull up my drawbridge and have done with the world without. There is strife in the streets, and storms even in our little tea-cup, I can assure you."

The bishop now led the way round to the gardens at which Arundel had looked with longing eyes through the ruins. Suddenly the bishop turned sharply on Melville, looking him down from head to foot with anything but an approving glance.

"And what profession, sir, do you mean to take up? – law, like your friend – or what?"

"I am going to travel for a year, my lord."

"Travel! humph! Your good father has several sons, I think?"

"Four younger sons, my lord; so much the worse for me."

"I hope you set them a good example," said the bishop, drily. "I should venture to suggest that your father might want help with his estate."

"He has a steward, my lord, an old servant."

"Stewards mean money, don't they? and a gentleman with a small landed property cannot be overburdened with that article nowadays, more especially if he has five sons."

Melville's brow clouded, and he would fain, if he had dared, given vent to some rather uncomplimentary adjectives, of which "old meddler" was one.

"Here," said the bishop, "are the ruins of the old Hall, where, report says, the last abbot of Glastonbury was hanged. He was tried here by the king's orders, for suppression of some of the church lands which the king had seized. That," pointing to the end of the Palace, "is the part of the building which was blown down, or, rather, the roof blown in, upon one of my predecessors during the last century. Both Bishop Kidder and his wife were buried in their bed in the ruins. But not to dwell on these memories, I have pleasanter ones to recount. On that terrace walk, where we will now mount and take a view of the surrounding country, the pious Ken – that God-fearing and steadfast man – composed the hymns, which, morning and night, bring him to our minds."

Melville Falconer had forgotten, if he had ever heard, those hymns; but Mr. Arundel said:

"My mother will be interested, indeed, my lord, to hear I have been on the spot where those hymns had birth."

"Ay," said the bishop; "and we must have her here one day and show her this fair place. One can imagine, as he gazed out on this prospect, that the saintly Ken was eager to call on every one to 'shake off dull sloth,' and rise early with the birds to offer the sacrifice of the morning."

It was indeed a fair prospect towards which the bishop waved his hand. Fields of buttercups lay like burnished gold in the summer sunshine. Beyond these fields, known as the Bishop's Fields, was a belt of copse, and further still the grassy slopes of a hill, really of no very exalted height, but from its strongly defined outline and the sudden elevation of its steep sides from the valley below it, it assumes almost mountainous proportions, and is a striking feature in the landscape as seen from Wells and its neighbourhood. A wooded height, known as Tor Hill, rises nearer to the Palace, and then the line sweeps round to the Mendip range, which shuts in Wells on the north-east, and across which a long, straight road lies in the direction of Bristol.

The bishop continued to chat pleasantly as he led his visitors along the broad terrace walk on the top of the battlemented wall. Then he passed down into the garden, and ascended a spiral stone staircase which led to a small ante-chamber, and then into the long gallery.

This room is one of the principal features of the Palace at Wells, with its long line of small, deep bay windows, and its beautiful groined roof, the walls covered with portraits of many bishops who have held the see.

Archbishop Laud looks down with a somewhat grim face, like a man who had set himself to endure hardness, and never flinch from the line he had marked out for himself. Saintry Ken, too, is there, and keen, thin-lipped Wolsey, who had not learned when he sat for that picture the bitter lesson which his old age brought him, not to put his trust in princes, or in any child of man.

The war-like bishop, too, with the hole in his cheek, had, a very unwarlike expression.

"A jolly old fellow!" Mr. Arundel remarked; "not like a man who cared to handle a musket or bayonet."

"No; appearances are deceitful at times," the bishop said. "The stairs up which we came, open into my study, from that little ante-chamber; and I confess I should take flight by them and get into the chapel if by chance the Palace is besieged."

"Not much fear of that," Melville said, "in these days."

"These days are not as quiet as they may look, young sir. It strikes me, before you are grey-headed, there will be a desperate struggle between law and anarchy – between the king and the people. The horizon is dark enough. There are graver matters pressing than gewgaws and finery and personal indulgence. We are too much given in Wells to look upon it as the world, and refuse to believe in the near approach of the storm of which there are signs already, and not far from us. But, young gentlemen, I have an appointment, and must not delay if I wish to be punctual. I shall hope to see you again, Mr. Arundel. How long will you be in our neighbourhood?"

"For a few days, my lord."

"Well, well. I shall come out to Fair Acres with my son, and pay my respects to your excellent parents, Mr. Falconer, of whom I have heard much during my short residence in Wells."

The young men felt that the time for departure had come, and taking leave of the bishop, they passed under the old gateway, and were again on the square of green turf which separated it from the cloister door.

A row of noble elms skirted the moat, and Melville proposed that they should take a turn under them. The moat was full, and the stately swans came sailing towards the sloping bank, where two girls were standing. Quaint figures now we should think they were, with the short, plain skirts of their frocks bordered with a narrow frill, thin white stockings, which sandalled shoes displayed to advantage, and little tippets crossed over their shoulders surmounted by large gipsy hats or bonnets. But nothing could destroy the symmetry of the arm and hand, which was stretched out towards the swans with a bit of bread. And Mr. Arundel exclaimed:

"There are the two girls we saw in the cathedral Falconer; one is your sister."

Before Melville could rejoin, Joyce had turned, and now came forward to her brother with heightened colour, saying:

"I think my father will be ready to go home now, Melville, and we had better go back to the Swan."

Charlotte all this time had been posing before her grand cousin and his friend, hoping to attract his attention.

"Introduce me, Falconer," Mr. Arundel said, standing with a native grace which characterised him, with his hat in his hand.

"My sister," said Melville, carelessly, "and my cousin, Miss Benson;" and he was passing on to continue his walk towards the Bishop's Fields; but Mr. Arundel did not follow him.

"Your sister says we shall be wanted at the Swan Inn, and must not linger by the live swans."

"Oh, no; we are going to Fair Acres quite independently of my father. I have ordered our carriage; you ought to come to the end of the Moat, there is a fine view of Dulcot."

But Mr. Arundel showed no intention of following his friend. "Nay," he said, "let me see the swans have the last bit of bun. See, they are coming for it. Do you always bring them buns?"

"Not always; but I had a convenient halfpenny left from the change at Willmott's, so I went to buy a stale bun at the little shop in Saddler Street."

"Happy swans to be so remembered!" Mr. Arundel said, as he watched the last wedge of the stale bun gobbled up by the master of the brood, while his wife gave him a savage peck with her black bill.

"It is a pity they are so greedy; it spoils their beauty," Joyce said. Then, with sudden recollection, she said, "Oh! Charlotte, I have forgotten to take Piers' sparrow-hawk to Mr. Plume's. I must go at once to Aunt Letitia's and fetch it. I left it in the basket there."

"Can I go and fetch the sparrow-hawk, Miss Falconer?" Mr. Arundel began.

"Come, Arundel," Melville interrupted, "you and I can stroll round this moat; we are not returning, as I told you, with Joyce."

But Mr. Arundel deliberately turned in the direction in which Joyce was hastening; and Charlotte, much to her cousin's vexation, was left with him.

A muttered exclamation, which was not fit for ears polite to hear, escaped Melville's lips, and Charlotte's soft speeches were lost on him.

"It is so nice to see you here, Cousin Melville. Won't you come and pay auntie a visit?"

Melville had particularly desired to escape a visit to the Vicar's Close, but he began to fear it was inevitable.

"Do tell me about college," Charlotte began. "I am dying to hear, because I have a special interest in college now." This was said with a smile and glance which were meant to make an impression. "And do you wear one of those sweet hoods with snow-white fur round it, Cousin Melville? They do look so pretty!"

"Well – no," drawled Melville, evasively; "I have not taken my B.A. yet."

"Mr. Bamfylde, the new minor Canon at the cathedral, wears one; and it is so charming!"

"Humph!" Melville rejoined.

What were all the minor canons in the world to him that he should care whether they wore fur-lined or silk-lined hoods at their backs?

They had reached the turnstile now leading into the Cathedral Green.

"I say," he began, "I think I must bid you good-bye here, Charlotte. I will call on Aunt Letitia another day, for I must look after the carriage. I am afraid there should be some mistake. I want a pair of greys to post with, and I should not wonder if they tried to pass off two old bays, with their bones just through their skins."

And the next minute the fine gentleman was sauntering off in the opposite direction to poor Charlotte, who went away disconsolate.

Meantime Mr. Arundel and Joyce had walked quickly to the Vicar's Close, and Joyce, having captured her basket with the dead bird, was surprised to find Mr. Arundel waiting for her at the little gate.

"Mr. Plume's shop is in New Street," she said. "It is scarcely to be called a shop, but there are a few stuffed birds in the window. We must go up the steps by the chapel into the North Liberty."

Mr. Arundel was struck with the business-like fashion in which Joyce conducted her interview with Mr. Plume.

He was a little dried-up-looking man, whose front parlour had that peculiar scent which is characteristic of rooms where stuffed animals are kept.

Mr. Plume did not confine himself to birds. A large fox, with gleaming teeth and glassy eyes, stared at the customers from a shelf in a recess by the fire-place. A badger was on another; and owls of all sizes and colours were standing, with one foot tucked up, and a certain stony stare in their great round, unshadowed eyes.

Mr. Plume did not waste words.

"Sparry-'awk," he said "sparry-'awk; it is of not great value, missie. Humph!" he continued, "it's not a rare speciment, but I'll set it up. How's the young gentleman, eh?"

"Quite well, thank you, Mr. Plume; and please have the bird ready by the next time we come into Wells. We must not stop now; but what a noise those men are making."

As she spoke, Mr. Arundel went out to the door, and Joyce, peeping through the cases in the window, saw a cart being dragged up the hill towards the Bristol Road by four rough-looking men. Another huge man sat in the cart, his head lolling upon his breast, evidently the worse for drink. A few wild-looking men and boys and a lean pony followed; and two or three women, with their hair hanging down their backs, brought up the rear; and all were shouting at the top of their voices some rhyme, the drift of which was, that the justices had got the worst of it, and that Bob was free.

"What does it all mean?" Mr. Arundel said.

"Oh, it's only some of the rough Mendip folk. One of 'em was taken up for snaring rabbits, and there was a great row. I suppose the justices have let him off – afraid to do anything else. There is a deal of ill-blood in them parts; and they say it's even worse in the cities than what it is in the country. Dear me!" said Mr. Plume, stroking the back of a stuffed spaniel which was handy. "It's a thousand pities folks can't mind their own business, instead of annoying respectable folks. Good-day to you, Miss Falconer. Good-day to you, sir."

When outside the shop Joyce paused and watched the straggling crowd wind up the steep hill.

"It is dreadful to see people like this," she said, with a sigh. "I must ask father about it; for he has been sitting on the bench to-day. I hope they are not angry with him."

"I hope not," Mr. Arundel said; "they look little better than savages, and would knock any one on the head for a trifle."

"We must make haste," Joyce said, "for father does not like to be kept waiting, and mother expects us home to tea. I dare say we shall get to Fair Acres before you do."

"Why can't we all drive together?" Mr. Arundel asked.

Joyce hesitated a moment, but only for a moment.

"You are thought too grand to drive in our four-wheel," she said, smiling.

"Grand! Who said so?"

"Melville, of course. He said you would be shocked to rumble and jolt over the roads, and that your luggage must go on the roof of the post-chaise."

Mr. Arundel laughed a merry, pleasant laugh, and said:

"I am sorry your brother should have given you such a bad account of me. Poor fellow!"

Joyce looked up quickly.

"Then you don't think exactly as Melville does?"

"No, I hope not," was the reply.

"But he is a friend of yours, is not he?"

"Yes, he is a friend – up to a certain point. Do not think me ungracious."

"Oh! no. I understand."

"Melville thinks a great deal of you, and is so proud that you have come here. I am glad you have come also, now I have seen you, though when I first heard you were coming I dreaded it; and so did mother. But I must not stop to talk any more now, except to ask you to make mother feel as you have made me feel, that you are not so very grand, after all."

The squire was seen at the door of the Crown as Joyce and Mr. Arundel turned into Saddler Street, and Joyce ran quickly towards him. Her father waved his hand impatiently.

"Come, Joyce; come, make haste!"

In another moment she had mounted to her seat by his side, and they were off at a quick trot. The good old horse knew that her head was turned homewards and went cheerily down the High Street, past the noble church of St. Cuthbert, where there was no traffic to impede its progress.

The squire was silent until they were fairly out of the town, when he said:

"So your grand brother can't ride in his father's carriage! He and his fine friend may pay for the chaise; I shall not."

"I do not think the friend is fine after all," Joyce said; "he laughed at the idea of the post-chaise." The squire cracked his whip impatiently.

"He may well laugh. Ah! little Joyce, there are many graver questions at issue than the freaks of an over-indulged, reckless boy like Melville. We had a stormy scene in the court to-day. That man who was let off a month, in gaol richly deserved punishment; but there was a division on the bench and my conviction was overruled."

"Oh!" Joyce exclaimed, "I saw a crowd of rough people going up the Bristol Road; they had taken a pony out of a cart, and were dragging it up the hill, with a man in it, who was half asleep."

"Half drunk," said the squire; "that is more likely. They are a rough lot on Mendip, more like savages than the inhabitants of a civilised country."

"What is to be done to make them better, father? Has not Mrs. More tried to get the children taught?"

"Yes, she has been trying for years to make the schools succeed; but there is plenty of labour and little to show for it."

"Perhaps," said Joyce, "there is some good done, though we don't see it. It is always easier to see bad things than good ones; so easy to see faults in those about us, and to be blind to their goodness."

The squire laughed; between this father and daughter there existed a sympathetic friendship wholly independent of the natural tie of parent and child.

"You are right, Joyce, quite right; but I am afraid one does not need glasses to find out the bad things."

"Father, let us put them on to find the good ones, then," Joyce rejoined.

The squire leaned back, and let the old horse go her own pace, and her own way.

"Ah! my little Joyce, that is wise advice. Thank God, I need no spectacles to find out the good in *you*. I look to you to keep things smooth at home for the next few days, and to help me to do the same. I am quick-tempered, I know, and when I flare out, I am sorry afterwards."

"You don't often 'flare out,' as you say, to *me*, dear dad."

"What did your aunt say to you to-day? – called you her 'rustic,' I'll answer for it."

"Oh, yes, of course she did; and she wants me to pay a grand visit to Barley Wood."

"To Barley Wood! – to Mrs. Hannah More! Mother won't hear of it. Your aunt had better not meddle. What do you think about it yourself?"

"I should like to pay a visit – a *short* visit – to Barley Wood. That is quite different from going to school. But with the boys coming home, and Melville and his friend at Fair Acres, I doubt if I could be spared. It might do me good to go, father; I mean, make me all the more useful at home afterwards."

"What do you expect Mrs. Hannah More to do to you? – cut you into a pattern, as she would cut an old woman's cloak, eh? However, if you wish to go, and any more is said, I'll manage it for you. Perhaps no more *will* be said; your aunt is just as likely to forget all about it."

"Yes, I know that," Joyce said, with a little ring of disappointment in her voice.

"I'll tell you what pattern I would not have you cut into on any account; and that is poor die-away, languishing Charlotte Benson. Poor thing! if she is a specimen of boarding-schools and accomplishments, I would sooner have Jane Watson for a daughter."

"Charlotte paints flowers very well, father," Joyce said; "and she has worked a figure in Berlin wool of a woman in a red gown feeding chickens; and –"

They had been jogging along at a very leisurely pace, and the sound of fast-trotting horses made Joyce look back.

"To the right, father! quick! it's the post-chaise from the Swan."

The squire pulled up towards the high hedge, and the post-chaise dashed past, the luggage behind, and the two young men lying back in it. The gates of Fair Acres were in sight, and the carriage turned in with an imposing flourish of the post-boy's whip.

"Look here, Joyce, that is a sign of the times. That poor foolish popinjay of ours is only drifting on with the tide. He has brought another young fellow, I daresay, as idle as himself, to eat my bread and give himself airs. Well, I will put up with it for a week, and then *both* have notice to quit; nor do I desire to see either of them darken my door again. Melville shall travel if he likes, but it shall be across the water – to America, where, if a little of this nonsense is not knocked out of him, my name is not Arthur Falconer."

With this outburst of masculine indignation the squire subsided, and then quietly drove round to the stables, while the post-chaise was being unloaded at the front door; and Melville was giving the post-boy as large a "douceur" – or, as we should have it called in these days, a "tip" – as befitted the imitator of the first gentleman in Europe.

## CHAPTER IV. THE LADY OF BARLEY WOOD

There was a mixture of dignity and simplicity in the reception which Mrs. Falconer gave her son's friend which did not fail to strike him.

"We sup at nine o'clock, sir," she said, "we dine at one, and take tea at five. Thus it is to the first of these meals that I would bid you welcome, as it is close upon eight o'clock now. Will you follow me to your room? – which I hope you will find comfortable."

"I am sure I shall," said Mr. Arundel, warmly. "It is very good of you, madam, to invite me to Fair Acres."

These few words had passed in the hall; and the tap of Piers' crutches was heard approaching, while Nip and Pip came bustling about the new-comers, their short tails vibrating as if they were screwed on with a wire!

"This is our youngest child, sir – Piers," Mrs. Falconer said.

"Where is Joyce, mother?" Piers asked.

"Your sister is behind; our chaise passed her close to the gate."

"Why did not you come with her?" Piers asked, bluntly.

"Because I was not allowed to do so," Mr. Arundel said, good-temperedly. "I can tell you what you will be glad to hear, that your sister did not forget your sparrow-hawk."

Melville, who had after all been wrangling with the postboy about his gratuity in a somewhat undignified manner, now came into the hall as his father and Joyce appeared from a door under the wide staircase.

"Well," said the squire, "you seem holding a counsel here; I hope it is peace, not war. Come, Melville, show your friend to his room."

Considering how greatly the squire had been annoyed by his son's driving out in the post-chaise, he spoke kindly and pleasantly; but Melville was already assuming his grand airs.

"Here, Arundel," he said, "I will take you to your room: first door on the left, I suppose?"

"You will allow me to do as I have done all my life, Melville," said his mother. "I always go with my guests to their chambers, to see they are comfortable. Now, Mr. Arundel."

To Melville's horror, his mother put the accent on the second syllable. And as she tripped away – for her figure was still light and supple – he whispered: "He won't know who she means. Tell her, pray, not to say Arundel."

Joyce was indignant about the proceedings of the whole day, and she said:

"If you think it becoming to correct your mother, do it yourself." Then, going up to her father, she put her hand through his arm. "Come and see the last brood of chickens with me and Piers. They are lovely, dear dad."

Melville turned away with a satirical smile on his lips, thinking it was impossible to do anything with Joyce: she was content to let things remain as they were.

Meantime his friend was conducted to the "best room" Mrs. Falconer had to offer – a spacious square room, with a large four-post bed, hung with white dimity, and so high that a pair of steps by which to climb into it did not seem out of place.

The window was rather small for the size of the room, and the frames thick, but roses and honeysuckle hung their wreaths round it and perfumed the air.

Mrs. Falconer showed Mr. Arundel the high chest of drawers, and pointed to a hanging-closet, one of the top panels of which was glass, so that it might have a dim light from the room.

"I hope you will be comfortable," she said; "the sheets are well aired, and so were the mattresses and beds, by the fire. I never trust to servants, but see to those things myself. We sup at nine o'clock; and if you want anything please pull the bell."

"You are very kind," Mr. Arundel said. "I hope my visit is not inconvenient."

"Oh, no; the boys are coming home from school to-morrow. Three boys make some difference in a house; but I dare say you will be out a great deal with my son Melville." A scarcely perceptible sigh accompanied the words, and then Mrs. Falconer vanished; on the stairs she met Melville.

"I say, mother, what have you got for supper? I hope there will be something that Arundel can eat. And, by the bye, mother, his name is *Arundel*, not *Arundel*."

"Oh, is it, indeed! I don't know that it matters what a man is called. As to the supper, there's a round of beef, and a pie, and a baked custard, and plenty of bread and cheese."

"I wish you could have some made dish to-morrow. Big joints are all very well for a pack of hungry schoolboys."

Mrs. Falconer did not reply sharply, as she did sometimes. She turned and preceded Melville to his room, which was at the other end of the long passage or corridor, which ran across the house, dividing it into two parts, front and back. Melville followed her, and assumed a careless and indifferent air, throwing himself on the deep window-seat and giving a prolonged yawn.

A pack of cards lay on the drawers, with a dicebox.

"We had high words last night, Melville," his mother began; "and I was sorry –"

"Don't scold or preach any more; I am sick of it. If you'll get my father to let me travel, I'll come back in two years and settle into quite the country-gentleman; but you can't expect a fellow to bury himself here at my age with a set of rustics."

"I have heard all this before," his mother said, in a sad voice, very unlike her usual sharp tones. "What I want to ask is this: you have brought your friend here without so much as consulting your father or me. I ask a plain question, is he a well-behaved man and fit to be the associate of your sister and young brothers?"

"Fit to associate with them! His mother is an Honourable, his grandfather was a peer. Fit to associate with us, indeed, who are nothing but a pack of farmers!"

"So you said last evening. I don't care a fig for lords and ladies; nor princes either, for that matter: but this I say – if your friend teaches my boys to gamble and drink, and is not to be trusted with your sister, but may talk all kinds of rubbish to her, and you know it, you'll repent bringing him here to your latest day. I must just trust you, Melville, and if you say he is a well-behaved young man, well, I will believe you, and he is welcome to stay here."

"My good mother, you have got hold of the wrong end of the stick. The fact is Gilbert Arundel is a trifle *too* good. He has a sort of mission to reform *me*. He has helped me out of scrapes and – well, I owe him something; and so, as he is of high family, I asked him to come here, as we don't catch such folks often at Fair Acres. He said he would like a week in the country, and he is looking after some place in Bristol, which is handy; so I asked him to come on here. Now are you satisfied?"

"I know looks don't go for much," Mrs. Falconer said, "but I do like his looks very much; and his manners, too."

Mrs. Falconer hesitated, and seemed uncertain what she should say next. She was not given to much demonstration of affection at any time, but her mother's heart yearned over this shallow-pated, self-indulgent son of hers. It seemed but yesterday that he was seated on her knee and throwing his arms round her neck in his innocent childhood. But yesterday! and yet what a gulf lay between that time and this!

She could not have told why, or what innermost chord was touched, but certain it is that she drew nearer Melville, and putting her hand on his forehead, and brushing back the stiff curls, which were persuaded by pomade to lie in regular order on his head, she kissed him fondly.

"Oh! Melville," she said, "my son, my son, you know how dearly I love you. Do give up all your extravagant ways and high notions, and be a comfort to your father and me, and set your young brothers a good example."

Even Melville was a little touched.

"Yes," he said, kissing his mother in return, "yes, if you will let me off for a year, I will settle down and walk behind the plough, if you wish it then. Will that satisfy you?"

She kissed him again, and saying, "I will see what I can do with father about your travelling," she resumed her accustomed brisk manner and left him.

In spite of the large joint, and the big pie, the supper passed off pleasantly, for Gilbert Arundel listened to all the squire had to say, and showed an interest in agriculture and farming, and won golden opinions in consequence.

Before the meal was over Mr. and Mrs. Falconer were both wondering how it was that their son and their guest could be friends; except by the law of contrast, a friendship between them seemed so impossible.

The school boys arrived the next day; the first acre of grass was cut, and the weather remained perfect. On the third day there was tea in the hay-field, and every one, from the squire downwards, was in high spirits. No one could resist Gilbert Arundel. His were the free, unrestrained good manners of the true gentleman, who can accommodate himself to every circumstance, and is neither too fine nor too fastidious for anything, which comes in his way.

Ralph, who was the grave-eyed student of the brothers, could not resist Gilbert's genial interest in his history of his success at the school at Exeter, where he was pursuing his education at one of the academies for young gentlemen, which are now a thing of the past.

Bunny and Harry buried him in the hay and nearly smothered him, and Piers found abundant cause for liking him in the attention he gave to the peculiarities of an insect which he had found under one of the haycocks. Melville was lazily indifferent to what was passing, but he liked to lie full length under a spreading oak by the hedge, and have his tea brought to him in a large mug with a coppery coloured, brilliant surface which blazed in the light and concentrated the rays in a mimic sun on its outer side.

What Mrs. Falconer called 'harvest-cakes' were freely dispersed with cider and mead, and the fields of Fair Acres had never seen a happier party collected at hay-making time than met there on this June day.

Pip and Nip, exhausted with romping and hunting for field-mice, lay close to Melville; and Duke, with his wise head erect, despising rest while his master was astir, surveyed the whole scene with lofty indifference, which rivalled Melville's.

It was about five o'clock when the unusual sound of wheels was heard in the road leading up to the house, and the squire, who was in the further part of the field, said:

"There's a carriage driving up! I think it is Mrs. More's."

"Mrs. More!" exclaimed Mrs. Falconer, sharply. "I hoped I had heard the last of the dairy-maid."

Joyce, who was at that moment seated on a haycock, with her rake thrown carelessly at her side, sprang up. "Did you say Mrs. More's carriage, father? Oh, I am afraid –" She stopped.

"Afraid of what?" Gilbert Arundel asked.

"Oh, nothing; only Aunt Letitia said Mrs. More wanted to see me, or, rather, know me. Mother does not like Mrs. More, and Mrs. More thinks her very careless about the maids' education, just as Aunt Letitia thinks she is careless about mine; here comes Sarah."

"If you please, ma'am, I was to say Mrs. More wished you to come and speak to her. She won't get out of the carriage, because her legs are too stiff."

"Come, my dear," the squire said, "make haste, and go round to the front door."

"Not I. I shall not make haste; indeed, I'll send Joyce instead. Go, Joyce, at once. Say we are having a hay-making party, and end with a supper when the last wain is carried; which, I'll be bound, she will call sinful."

Joyce had to free herself from the wisps of hay which clung to her, and to smooth her tangled curls. They were confined by combs and pins, but all had fallen out in the scrimmage in the hay, and

they now fell on either side of her flushed face. Perhaps she had never looked more lovely than at that moment when, turning to her father, she said:

"Do you really wish me to go like this, dear dad?"

"My dear, some one must go; and at once. Mrs. More is not a person to keep waiting."

Joyce did not delay a moment, but went with her quick, light step across the field, and then through a little gate which opened into a belt of low-growing shrubs, beyond which was the carriage-road from the village.

An old-fashioned *barouche*— old-fashioned even in those days — stood before the door, and sitting in it were two ladies; the elder one upright and alert, the younger leaning back as if to resign herself to the long waiting time, before any of the family appeared.

Although comparatively near neighbours in the county, Joyce never remembered to have seen Mrs. More before. Her name was familiar enough, and her schools, established on all sides, were known by every one, though it cannot be said they were approved by every one.

Mrs. More and her sister had in times past made some overtures towards Mrs. Falconer, but they were coldly repulsed, and a parcel of tracts had even been returned. Later there had been the disagreement about the dairy-maid, and the time for Mrs. Hannah More to carry the crusade into the enemy's camp was over. She had, in the year 1824, nearly numbered her four-score years; and the loss of her sisters, and repeated attacks of illness, made her more willing to rest from her labours, only taking care that the good seed sown in the days of health and vigour, should be watered and cared for, that it might yield a good harvest.

It had happened that several times during the lovely spring of this year she had met Joyce Falconer driving in the high gig with her father, or trotting by his side on the rough pony, the use of which she shared with all her young brothers. The sweet, frank face had attracted her, and she had inquired about Joyce when on a visit of ceremony at the Palace at Wells a few weeks before.

The result was, as we know, that Miss Falconer gave a melancholy account of her niece's ignorance, which she believed was entirely due to her mother's prejudices as to boarding-schools and her father's over-indulgence and excessive affection for his only daughter.

With her accustomed sympathy with all the young who were just setting forth on life's journey, Mrs. More determined to see something of Mr. Falconer's little daughter, and her aunt's letter had decided her to lose no time in paying a visit to Fair Acres.

As Joyce came up to the steps of the carriage Mrs. More held out her hand — a white, delicately-formed hand, half covered by a lace mitten.

Joyce had heard Mrs. More spoken of as an old lady of near eighty, and her surprise was written on her lovely face, as she said, simply:

"Are you Mrs. More?"

For the beautiful dark eyes were still lustrous, and the lips, parted with a smile, displayed a row of even teeth which many a young woman in these days might envy. A quantity of white hair was turned back from a round, full forehead, which was shadowed by a drawn-silk riding-hood, with a deep curtain and a wide bow under the chin. Intellect and benevolence shone on the face, which was marked by few lines, and the still young spirit lighted up the whole countenance as Mrs. More said:

"Yes, I am Mrs. More; and I have come to pay my respects to your good father and mother, and to make your acquaintance."

"A great hay-making party is in the home meadow," Joyce said. "My mother bids me present her apology; but my father will be here, I think, shortly. Will you not alight from the carriage?"

"No, thank you kindly, my dear;" and turning to Miss Frowde: "my friend thinks me over-bold to drive so great a distance as this; but a desire to convey to you an invitation in person has brought me hither, in the delightful cool of the summer afternoon."

"We must be getting home before the dew falls," Miss Frowde said, addressing Joyce for the first time; "I have to take great care of precious Mrs. More."

"Miss Frowde is kindly solicitous," the old lady said; "I should be ungrateful to disobey her orders so if I may ask for a drink of water for the horses, and a cup of cider for the post-boy, we will not delay our departure beyond a few minutes."

"I am so sorry," Joyce began, "that all the people are in the hay-field; but I will send a message for a man who will attend to the horses, if you will excuse me for a moment." She tripped away into the house, and very soon the maid, who had been left in charge, was despatched to the hay-field, while Joyce returned to the carriage with a jug of milk and two glasses on a tray, with some sweet cakes of her own making, and said:

"May I ask you, madam, to take a glass of milk, as a little refreshment?"

Hannah More beamed down upon the sweet young face with her brightest smile. She sipped the milk and told her companion to taste the lightest little cakes she ever ate; then she said:

"After all, I have not come to the real object of my call. I want your parents to spare you to me for a visit; and that you may not lack company, Miss Frowde will invite your cousin from the Close at Wells to meet you."

"Thank you, madam," Joyce said; "but I fear I cannot be spared during my little brothers' holidays. But here comes father."

The squire made the ladies in the carriage a low bow, and said the water was ordered for the horses, and he much wished Mrs. More would alight from the carriage, and take some refreshment.

"The refreshment has been brought to me by the hands of your young Hebe," Mrs. More said, smiling. "As to alighting, my limbs are stiff with age, and when once ensconced in my easy old chariot I am unwilling to leave it. But, Mr. Falconer, I came with a petition, for what is, I am sure, a precious possession: let me have your daughter at Barley Wood for a month. I hope, God willing, to return your treasure, with interest on the loan. Do not refuse me."

"Thank you kindly, madam," said the squire; "but her mother must be consulted. Her little brothers demand much of her attention in the holidays, and Joyce has to share her mother's labours in many ways. I fear she cannot be spared. What say you, my Sunshine?"

"I could not be spared yet, father; but later – " adding, with glistening eyes – "I should like to go to Barley Wood."

The squire put his arm round his daughter, and said:

"And I should like you to have the pleasure; but your mother – "

"Well, well," Mrs. More said, "then we will leave it, subject to certain conditions. The Bible meeting at Wrington comes on early in July. I shall have many excellent friends as my guests then, and the little Sunshine – I like that name vastly – might dispense a little brightness amongst us, and receive some solid good from intercourse with my friend. May I hope to see you early in July?"

"We will see about it, madam," the squire said; "and both Sunshine and I feel gratified by your kind proposal."

"Well, then, we leave it so, and I trust to you to drop me a line, my child, when your visit can be made. We shall find a corner for you and your cousin – if only a pigeonhole. You will not grumble, I dare say, but nestle in comfortably."

"The sun is getting low, dearest Mrs. More," Miss Frowde said; "we should be starting homewards."

"Yes, you are right." Then drawing from a large basket some books, Mrs. More singled out one, and, bending down towards Joyce, said:

"This is the best of books; in it is to be found treasures of riches and knowledge. Accept the Bible from me, as a token of desire that now, in the days of your youth, you may find the Pearl of great price. No one can object to *this gift*, though objection to other books may be urged."

Joyce took the Bible with a low-spoken "Thank you!" and her father glancing at it, said:

"You are very good to my little daughter, and I, at least, am grateful."

The squire had been secretly hoping that his wife would change her mind and appear, but his hopes were not realised. The carriage rolled off at a leisurely even pace; the good-byes were said, but Mrs. Falconer did not appear.

"It is a pity mother did not come," Joyce said. "What a lovely old lady Mrs. More is."

"Yes," and the squire sighed. "You have got a Bible, Joyce."

"An old one, not like this," Joyce said, "with gilt edges and such a nice purple binding; and I like to have it from Mrs. More. See, father, there are pencil marks in it."

The squire looked over Joyce's shoulder at the page on which she had opened. It was the last chapter of Proverbs, and the words were underlined: "Her price is above rubies."

"Carry the book upstairs, Joyce; you had better not display it at present. Then come back to the hay-field as fast as you can. Mother will be expecting you."

Joyce did as she was told, and hastened away with her precious book. As she turned over the pages she saw the pencil marks were frequent. It was evidently Mrs. More's way of silent instruction; and for the first time in her young life, Joyce seemed to find in the Bible, words which applied to herself.

"Be not overcome of evil," was underlined; "but overcome evil with good."

"That means I am not to let Melville's ways get the better of me, and make me cross to him and contemptuous. I must try and overcome by being kind; and then – "

She was startled by her mother's voice:

"Joyce, what are you about? come down at once. The men want some more cakes, and you may as well trudge down to the field, as I – "

Joyce ran down immediately, first hiding her Bible in the small drawer of the high chest in her room.

"I wish you had come sooner, mother, and seen Mrs. More."

"Do you? I waited till I heard the wheels in the road before I came; but now I am here, I mean to stay. I want to make some custards for supper, and whip the cream for a syllabub. Mr. Arundel shan't grumble at his fare."

"Mrs. More is a beautiful old lady," Joyce said.

"She did not give you any tracts, I hope," Mrs. Falconer said. "I won't have any cant, and rank Methodism here. You know my mind, Joyce."

"Yes, mother," Joyce said, gently. "But I should like to pay a visit to Barley Wood. Do you think, when the boys return to school, I *may* go."

"Well, we will see about it. If you want to gad about you must go, I suppose. You all seem alike now; no rest and no peace unless you are scouring the country like so many wild things. It was very different in my young days. I don't know that I ever slept a night from under my father's roof till I married. I don't mind your going to Barley Wood at the proper time, but I'll have no tracts and no nonsense here, or setting up servant-girls to be wiser than their betters; for all this talk, and preaching, and reading, and writing, the Mendip folk are as bad, as bad can be. Mrs. More has not done much there, anyhow. That was plain enough the other day, when the man was brought before the justices, and they were a pack of chicken-hearts, and dare not commit him for fear of getting their heads broken as they rode home; your father was the only brave man amongst them, and held out that the rascal should be committed for trial."

All this was said in Mrs. Falconer's voluble fashion, while she was engaged in piling up a basket full of harvest cakes, which Joyce soon bore off to the field, where her brothers, and Nip and Pip were still tossing about the sweet hay, and burying themselves and everyone else under it. Piers threw a wisp with the end of his crutch at Joyce as she came, and Bunny rushed to possess himself of the basket and scatter the cakes about, which the younger part of the haymakers scrambled for, head foremost, burrowing in the tussocks of hay, like so many young ferrets, while Nip and Pip barked and danced about in the extremity of their excitement.

The fair weather lasted all through the week, and Sunday dawned in cloudless beauty. Fair Acres did not have the services of one clergyman, but shared the ministrations of the vicar, with another small parish.

The cracked bell began to ring in a querulous, uncertain fashion on Sunday morning, and punctually at half-past ten Mrs. Falconer marshalled her flock down the road to the church.

The church, though small, was architecturally a fine specimen of Early English, and raised a noble tower to the sky; but the interior was dilapidated, and the pillars were covered with many coats of yellow wash, and the pews were hung with moth-eaten cloth. The squire's pew was like a square room, with a fire-place and cushioned seats, and a high desk for the books ran round it.

Mrs. Falconer and her husband sat facing each other on either side of the door of the pew, and the boys were ranged round, while at the further end Joyce sat with Mr. Arundel, a place being left for Melville.

Just as the clergyman had hurried on his very crumpled surplice, and the band in the gallery struck up the familiar air to which the morning hymn was sung, Melville, dressed in his best, came up the uneven pavement of the aisle with the proud consciousness of superiority to the rest of the world. His father threw back the door, and he passed up to the further end of the seat, nodding carelessly to Mr. Arundel, who made no sign in return. Chatting and making engagements for the week was at this time very common in church. There was scant reverence shown for the house of God. He was a God afar off, and the formal recognition of some sort of allegiance to Him being respectable and necessary for the maintenance of social position, brought people like Mrs. Falconer to church Sunday after Sunday.

Mrs. Falconer and the squire, with their family, were never absent from their places, and Mr. Watson, the squire's agent, acting as sidesman, was also regular in his attendance.

But it was a lifeless mechanical service on the part of both minister and people; and the loud Amens of the old clerk were the only responses to be heard. The Psalms at the end of the book of Common Prayer were used, accompanied by a strangely-assorted band in the worm-eaten gallery, and two or three men and boys supplemented the scraping of the fiddle and bassoon with singing, which might well be called bawling.

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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