

Barr Amelia E.

I, Thou, and the Other One: A Love Story



Amelia Barr
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One: A Love Story

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CHAPTER FIRST

THE ATHELINGS

**“The Land is a Land of hills and valleys,
and drinketh water of the rain of heaven.”**

Beyond Thirsk and Northallerton, through the Cleveland Hills to the sea eastward, and by Roseberry Topping, northward, there is a lovely, lonely district, very little known even at the present day. The winds stream through its hills, as cool and fresh as living water; and whatever beauty there is of mountain, valley, or moorland, Farndale and Westerdale can show it; while no part of England is so rich in those picturesque manor-houses which have been the homes of the same families for twenty generations.

The inhabitants of this region are the incarnation of its health, strength, and beauty,—a tall, comely race; bold, steadfast, and thrifty, with very positive opinions on all subjects. There are no

Laodiceans among the men and women of the North-Riding; they are one thing or another—Episcopalians or Calvinists; Conservatives or Radicals; friends or enemies. For friendship they have a capacity closer than brotherhood. Once friends, they are friends forever, and can be relied on in any emergency to “aid, comfort, and abet,” legally or otherwise, with perhaps a special zest to give assistance, if it just smacks of the “otherwise.”

Of such elements, John Atheling, lord of the manors of Atheling and Belward, was “kindly mixed,” a man of towering form and great mental vigour, blunt of speech, single of purpose, leading, with great natural dignity, a sincere, unsophisticated life. He began this story one evening in the May of 1830; though when he left Atheling manor-house, he had no idea anything out of the customary order of events would happen. It is however just these mysterious conditions of everyday life that give it such gravity and interest; for what an hour will bring forth, no man can say; and when Squire Atheling rode up to the crowd on the village green, he had no presentiment that he was going to open a new chapter in his life.

He smiled pleasantly when he saw its occasion. It was a wrestling match; and the combatants were his own chief shepherd and a stranger. In a few moments the shepherd was handsomely “thrown” and nobody knew exactly how it had been done. But there was hearty applause, led by the Squire, who, nodding at his big ploughman, cried out, “Now then, Adam Sedbergh, stand up for Atheling!” Adam flung off his vest

and stepped confidently forward; but though a famous wrestler among his fellows, he got as speedy and as fair a fall as the shepherd had received before him. The cheers were not quite as hearty at this result, but the Squire said peremptorily,—

“It is all right. Hold my horse, Jarum. I’ll have to cap this match myself. And stand back a bit, men, I want room enough to turn in.” He was taking off his fine broadcloth coat and vest as he spoke, and the lad he was to match, stood looking at him with his hands on his hips, and a smile on his handsome face. Perhaps the attitude and the smile nettled the Squire, for he added with some pride and authority,—

“I would like you to know that I am Squire Atheling; and I am not going to have a better wrestler than myself in Atheling Manor, young man, not if I can help it.”

“I know that you are Squire Atheling,” answered the stranger. “I have been living with your son Edgar for a year, why wouldn’t I know you? And if I prove myself the better man, then you shall stop and listen to me for half-an-hour, and you may stop a whole hour, if you want to; and I think you will.”

“I know nothing about Edgar Atheling, and I am not standing here either to talk to thee, or to listen to thee, but to give thee a fair ‘throw’ if I can manage it.” He stretched out his left hand as he spoke, and the young man grasped it with his right hand. This result was anticipated; there was a swift twist outward, and a lift upward, and before anyone realised what would happen, a pair of shapely young legs were flying over the Squire’s shoulder. Then

there rose from twenty Yorkshire throats a roar of triumph, and the Squire put his hands on his hips, and looked complacently at the stranger flicking the Atheling dust from his trousers. He took his defeat as cheerily as his triumph. "It was a clever throw, Squire," he said.

"Try it again, lad."

"Nay, I have had enough."

"I thought so. Now then, don't brag of thy wrestling till thou understandest a bit of 'In-play.' But I'll warrant thou canst talk, so I'll give myself a few minutes to listen to thee. I should say, I am twice as old as thou art, but I notice that it is the babes and sucklings that know everything, these days."

As the Squire was speaking, the youth leaped into an empty cart which someone pushed forward, and he was ready with his answer,—

"Squire," he said, "it will take not babes, but men like you and these I see around me, for the wrestling match before us all. What we have to tackle is the British Government and the two Houses of Parliament."

The Squire laughed scornfully. "They will 'throw' thee into the strongest jail in England, my lad; they will sink thee four feet under ground, if thou art bound for any of that nonsense."

"They will have enough to do to take care of themselves soon."

"Thou art saying more than thou knowest. Wouldst thou have the horrors of 1792 acted over again, in England? My lad, I was a youngster then, but I saw the red flag, dripping with blood, go

round the Champ-de-Mars.”

“None of us want to carry the red flag, Squire. It is the tri-colour of Liberty we want; and that flag—in spite of all tyrants can do—will be carried round the world in glory! When I was in America—”

“Wilt thou be quiet about them foreign countries? We have bother enough at home, without going to the world’s end for more. And I will have no such talk in my manor. If thou dost not stop it, I shall have to make thee.”

“King William, and all his Lords and Commons, cannot stop such talk. It is on every honest tongue, and at every decent table. It is in the air, Squire, and the winds of heaven carry it wherever they go.”

“If thou saidst *William Cobbett*, thou mightst happen hit the truth. The winds of heaven have better work to do. What art thou after anyway?”

“Such a Parliamentary Reform as will give every honest man a voice in the Government.”

“Just so! Thou wouldst make the door of the House of Commons big enough for any rubbish to go through.”

“The plan has been tried, Squire, in America; and

As the Liberty Lads over the sea,
Bought their freedom—and cheaply—with blood;
So we, boys, we
Will die fighting; or live free,
And down with—”

“Stop there!” roared the Squire. “Nonsense in poetry is a bit worse than any other kind of nonsense. Speak in plain words, or be done with it! Do you know what you want?”

“That we do. We want the big towns, where working men are the many, and rich men, the few, to be represented. We want all sham boroughs thrown out. What do you think of Old Sarum sending a member to Parliament, when there isn’t any Old Sarum? There used to be, in the days of King Edward the First, but there is now no more left of it than there is of the Tower of Babel. What do you think of the Member for Ludgershall being not only the Member, but the *whole constituency* of Ludgershall? What do you think of Gatton having just seven voters, and sending *two* members to Parliament?”—then leaning forward, and with burning looks drinking the wind of his own passionate speech—“What do you think of *Leeds! Manchester! Birmingham! Sheffield!* being *without any representation!*”

“My lad,” cried the Squire, “have not Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield, done very well without representation?”

“Squire, a child may grow to a man without love and without care; but he is a robbed and a wronged child, for all that.”

“The Government knows better than thee what to do with big towns full of unruly men and women.”

“That is just the question. They are not represented, because they are made up of the working population of England. But the working man has not only his general rights, he has also rights

peculiar to his condition; and it is high time these rights were attended to. Yet these great cities, full of woollen and cotton weavers, and of fine workers in all kinds of metals, have not a man in Parliament to say a word for them.”

“What is there to say? What do they want Parliament to know?” asked the Squire, scornfully.

“They want Parliament to know that they are being forced to work twelve hours a day, for thirty pennies a week; and that they have to pay ten pennies for every four-pound loaf of bread. And they expect that when Parliament knows these two facts, something will be done to help them in their poverty and misery. They believe that the people of England will *compel* Parliament to do something.”

“There are Members in both Houses that know these things, why do they not speak?—if it was reasonable to do so.”

“Squire, they dare not. They have not the power, even if they had the will. The Peers and the great Landlords own two-thirds of the House of Commons. They *own* their boroughs and members, just as they *own* their parks and cattle. One duke returns eleven members; another duke returns nine members; and such a city as Manchester cannot return one! If this state of things does not need reforming, I do not know what does.”

So far his words had rushed rattling on one another, like the ring of iron on iron in a day of old-world battle; but at this point, the Squire managed again to interrupt them. From his saddle he had something of an advantage, as he called out in an angry

voice,—

“And pray now, what are *you* to make by this business? Is it a bit of brass—or land—or power that you look forward to?”

“None of them. I have set my heart on the goal, and not on the prize. Let the men who come after me reap; I am glad enough if I may but plough and sow. The Americans—”

“*Chaff*, on the Americans! We are North-Riding men. We are Englishmen. We are sound-hearted, upstanding fellows who do our day’s work, enjoy our meat and drinking, pay our debts, and die in our beds; and we want none of thy Reform talk! It is all scandalous rubbish! Bouncing, swaggering, new-fashioned trumpery! We don’t hold with Reformers, nor with any of their ways! I will listen to thee no longer. Thou mayst talk to my men, if they will be bothered with thee. I’m not afraid of anything thou canst say to them.”

“I think they will be bothered with me, Squire. They do not look like fools.”

“At any rate, there isn’t one Reform fool among them; but I’ll tell thee something—go to a looking-glass, and thou mayst shake thy fist in the face of one of the biggest fools in England,”—and to the laughter this sally provoked the Squire galloped away.

For a short distance, horse and rider kept up the pace of enthusiasm; but when the village was left behind, the Squire’s mood fell below its level; and a sudden depression assailed him. He had “thrown” his man; he had “threeped” him down in argument; but he had denied his son, and he brought a hungry

heart from his victory. The bright face of his banished boy haunted the evening shadows; he grew sorrowfully impatient at the memories of the past; and when he could bear them no longer, he struck the horse a smart blow, and said angrily,—

“Dal it all! Sons and daughters indeed! A bitter, bitter pleasure!”

At this exclamation, a turn in the road brought him in sight of two horsemen. “*Whew!* I am having a night of it!” he muttered. For he recognised immediately the portly figure of the great Duke of Richmoor, and he did not doubt that the slighter man at his side was his son, Lord Exham. The recognition was mutual; and on the Duke’s side very satisfactory. He quickened his horse’s speed, and cried out as he neared the Squire,—

“Well met, Atheling! You are the very man I wished to see! Do you remember Exham?”

There was a little complimentary speaking, and then the Duke said earnestly: “Squire, if there is one thing above another that at this time the landed interest ought to do, it is to stand together. The country is going to the devil; it is on the verge of revolution. We must have a majority in the next Parliament; and we want you for the borough of Asketh. Exham has come back from Italy purposely to take Gaythorne. What do you say?”

It was the great ambition of the Squire to go to Parliament, and the little dispute he had just had with the stranger on the green had whetted this desire to a point which made the Duke’s question a very interesting one to him; but he was too shrewd to

make this satisfaction apparent. "There are younger men, Duke," he answered slowly; "and they who go to the next Parliament will have a trying time of it. I hear queer tales, too, of Parliament men; and the House keeps late hours; and late hours never did suit my constitution."

"Come, Atheling, that is poor talk at a crisis like this. There will be a meeting at the Castle on Friday—a very important meeting—and I shall expect you to take the chair. We are in for such a fight as England has not had since the days of Oliver Cromwell; and it would not be like John Atheling to keep out of it."

"It wouldn't. If there is anything worth fighting for, John Atheling will be thereabouts, I'll warrant him."

"Then we may depend upon you—Friday, and two in the afternoon, is the day and the hour. You will not fail us?"

"Duke, you may depend upon me." And so the men parted; the Squire, in the unexpected proposal just made him, hardly comprehending the messages of friendly courtesy which Lord Exham charged him to deliver to Mrs. and Miss Atheling.

"My word! My word!" he exclaimed, as soon as the Duke and he were far enough back to back. "Won't Maude be set up? Won't little Kitty plume her wings?" and in this vague, purposeless sense of wonder and elation he reached his home. The gates to the large, sweet garden stood open, but after a moment's thought, he passed them, and went round to the farm court at the back of the house. The stables occupied one side of this court, and he left his

horse there, and proceeded to the kitchen. The girls were starting the fires under the coppers for the quarterly brewing; they said "the Missis was in the houseplace," and the Squire opened the door between the two rooms, and went into the houseplace. But the large room was empty, though the lattices were open, and a sudden great waft of honeysuckle fragrance saluted him as he passed them. He noticed it, and he noticed also the full moonlight on the rows of shining pewter plates and flagons, though he was not conscious at the time that these things had made any impression upon him.

Two or three steps at the west end of this room led to a door which opened into Mrs. Atheling's parlour; and the Squire passed it impatiently. The news of the night had become too much for him; he wanted to tell his wife. But Mrs. Atheling was not in her parlour. A few ash logs were burning brightly on the hearth, and there was a round table spread for supper, and the candles were lit, and showed him the mistress's little basket containing her keys and her knitting, but neither wife nor daughter were to be seen.

"It is always the way," he muttered. "It is enough to vex any man. Women are sure to be out of the road when they are wanted; and in the road when nobody cares to see them. Wherever has Maude taken herself?" Then he opened a door and called "Maude! Maude!" in no gentle voice.

In a few minutes the call was answered. Mrs. Atheling came hurriedly into the room. There was a pleasant smile on her large, handsome face, and she carried in her hands a bowl of cream and

a loaf of white bread. "Why, John!" she exclaimed, "whatever is to do? I was getting a bit of supper for you. You are late home to-night, aren't you?"

"I should think I was—all of an hour-and-a-half late."

"But you are not ill, John? There is nothing wrong, I hope?"

"If things go a bit out of the common way, women always ask if they have gone wrong. I should think, they might as well go right."

"So they might. Here is some fresh cream, John. I saw after it myself; and the haver-cake is toasted, and—"

"Nay, but I'll have my drinking to-night, Maude. I have been flustered more than a little, I can tell thee that."

"Then you shall have your drinking. We tapped a fresh barrel of old ale an hour ago. It is that strong and fine as never was; by the time you get to your third pint, you will be ready to make faces at Goliath."

"Well, Maude, if making faces means making fight, there will be enough of that in every county of England soon,—if Dukes and Radical orators are to be believed."

"Have you seen the Duke to-night?"

"I have. He has offered me a seat in the next Parliament. He thinks there is a big fight before us."

"Parliament! And the Duke of Richmoor to seat you! Why, John, I am astonished!"

"I felt like I was dreaming. Now then, where is Kate? I want to tell the little maid about it. It will be a grand thing for Kate."

She will have some chances in London, and I'll warrant she is Yorkshire enough to take the best of them."

"Kate was at Dashwood's all the afternoon; and they were riding races; and she came home tired to death. I tucked her up in her bed an hour ago."

"I am a bit disappointed; but things are mostly ordered that way. There is something else to tell you, Maude. I saw a stranger on the green throw Bill Verity and Adam Sedbergh; and I could not stand such nonsense as that, so I off with my coat and settled him."

"You promised me that you would not 'stand up' any more, John. Some of them youngsters will give you a 'throw' that you won't get easy over. And you out of practice too."

"Out of practice! Nothing of the sort. What do you think I do with myself on wet afternoons? What could I do with myself, but go to the granary and have an hour or two's play with Verity and Sedbergh, or any other of the lads that care to feel my grip? I have something else to tell you, Maude. I had a talk with this strange lad. He began some Reform nonsense; and I settled him very cleverly."

"Poor lad!" She spoke sadly and absently, and it nettled the Squire. "I know what you are thinking, Mistress," he said; "but the time has come when we are bound to stick to our own side."

"The poor are suffering terribly, John. They are starved and driven to the last pinch. There never was anything like it before."

"Women are a soft lot; it would not do to give up to their

notions.”

“If you mean that women have soft hearts, it is a good thing for men that women are that way made.”

“I have not done with my wonders yet. Who do you think was with the Duke?”

“I don’t know, and I can’t say that I care.”

“Yes, but you do. It was Lord Exham. He said this and that about you, but I did not take much notice of his fine words.” Then he rose and pushed his chair aside, and as he left the room added,—

“That stranger lad I had the tussle with to-night says he knows your son Edgar—that they have lived and worked together for a year,—a very unlikely thing.”

“Stop a minute, Squire. Are you not ashamed of yourself to keep this news for a tag-end? Why it is the best thing I have heard to-night; and I’ll be bound you let it go past you like a waft of wind. What did you ask the stranger about *my* son?”

“Nothing. Not a word.”

“It was like your stubborn heart. *My son* indeed! If ever you had a son, it is Edgar. You were just like him when I married you—not as handsome—but very near; and you are as like as two garden peas in your pride, and self-will, and foolish anger. Don’t talk to me of Dukes, and Lords, and Parliaments, and wrestling matches. I want to hear about *my* son. If you have nothing to say about Edgar, I care little for your other news.”

“Why, Maude! Whatever is the matter with you? I have lived

with you thirty years, and it seems that I have never known you yet.”

“But I know you, John Atheling. And I am ashamed of myself for having made nothing better out of you in thirty years. I thought I had you better shaped than you appear to be.”

“I shall need nothing but my shroud, when thou, or any other mortal, shapest me.”

“Fiddlesticks! Go away with your pride! I have shaped everything for you,—your house, and your eating; your clothes, and your religion; and if I had ever thought you would have fallen into Duke Richmoor’s hands, I would have shaped your politics before this time of day.”

“Now, Maude, thou canst easily go further than thou canst come back, if thou dost not take care. Thou must remember that I am thy lord and husband.”

“To be sure, thou hast that name. But thou hast always found it best to do as thy lady and mistress told thee to do; and if ever thou didst take thy own way, sorry enough thou hast been for it. Talk of clay in the hands of the potter! Clay is free and independent to what a man is in the hands of his wife. Now, John, go to bed. I won’t speak to thee again till I find out something about *my* son Edgar.”

“Very well, Madame.”

“I have been thy guardian angel for thirty years”—and Mrs. Atheling put her head in her hands, and began to cry a little. The Squire could not bear that argument; he turned backward a few

steps, and said in a more conciliatory voice,—

“Come now, Maude. Thou hast been my master for thirty years; for that is what thou meanest by ‘guardian angel.’ But there is nothing worth crying about. I thought I had brought news that would set thee up a bit; but women are never satisfied. What dost thou want more?”

“I want thee to go in the morning and find out all about Edgar. I want thee to bring his friend up here. I would like to question him myself.”

“I will not do it.”

“Then thou oughtest to be ashamed of thyself for as cruel, and stubborn, and ill-conditioned a father as I know of. John, dear John, I am very unhappy about the lad. He went away without a rag of his best clothes. There’s the twelve fine linen shirts Kitty made him, backstitched and everything, lying in his drawers yet, and his top-coat hanging on the peg in his room, and his hat and cane so natural like; and he never was a lad to take care of his health; and so—”

“Now, Maude, I have humbled a bit to thee many a time; and I don’t mind it at all; for thou art only a woman—and a woman and a wife can blackguard a man as no other body has either the right or the power to do—but I will not humble to Edgar Atheling. No, I won’t! He is about as bad a prodigal son as any father could have.”

“Well, I never! Putting thy own son down with harlots and swine, and such like!”

"I do nothing of the sort, Maude. There's all kinds of prodigals. Has not Edgar left his home and gone away with Radicals and Reformers, and poor, discontented beggars of all makes and kinds? Happen, I could have forgiven him easier if it had been a bit of pleasuring,—wine and a bonny lass, or a race-horse or two. But mechanics' meetings, and pandering to ranting Radicals—I call it scandalous!"

"Edgar has a good heart."

"A good heart! A cat and a fiddle! And that friend of his thou wantest me to run after, he is nothing but a bouncing, swaggering puppy! Body of me, Maude! I will not have this subject named again. If thou thinkest I will ever humble to Edgar Atheling, thou art off thy horse; for I will not—*never!*"

"Well, John, as none of thy family were ever out of their senses before, I do hope thou wilt come round; I do indeed!"

"Make thyself easy on that score. Lord! What did the Almighty make women of? It confounds me."

"To be sure it does. Didst thou expect the Almighty to tell thee? He has so ordered things that men get wed, and then try and find the secret out. Thou hadst better go to bed, John Atheling. I see plainly there is neither sense nor reason in thee to-night. I fancy thou art a bit set up with the thought of being sent to Parliament by Duke Richmoor. I wouldn't if I was thee, for thou wilt have to do just what he tells thee to do."

"What an aggravating woman thou art!" and with the words he passed through the door, clashing it after him in a way

that made Mistress Atheling smile and nod her handsome head understandingly. She stood waiting until she heard a door clash sympathetically up-stairs, and then she said softly,—

“He did not manage to ‘throw’ or ‘threep’ me; if he was cock of the walk down on the green—what fools men are!—I see clear through him—stubborn though—takes after his mother—and there never was a woman more stubborn than Dame Joan Atheling.”

During this soliloquy she was locking up the cupboards in the parlour and houseplace. Then she opened the kitchen door and sharply gave the two women watching the malt mash her last orders; after which she took off her slippers at the foot of the stairs, and went very quietly up them. She had no light, but without any hesitation she turned towards a certain corridor, and gently pushed open a door. It let her into a large, low room; and the moonlight showed in the centre of it a high canopied bedstead, piled with snowy pillows and drapery, and among them, lying with closed eyes, her daughter Kate.

“Kate! Kitty darling! Are you awake?” she whispered.

“Mother! Yes, dear Mother, I am wide awake.”

“Your father has been in one of his tantrums again—fretting and fuming like everything.”

“Poor father! What angered him?”

“Well, child, I angered him. Why wouldn’t I? He saw a man in the village who has been living with Edgar for a year, and he never asked him whether your poor brother was alive or dead. What do you think of that?”

“It was too bad. Never mind, Mother. I will go to the village in the morning, and I will find the man, and hear all about Edgar. If there is any chance, and you want to see him, I will bring him here.”

“I would like him to come here, Kitty; for you know he might take Edgar his best clothes. The poor lad must be in rags by this time.”

“Don’t fret, Mother. I’ll manage it.”

“I knew you would. Your father is going to Parliament, Kate. The Duke offers to seat him, and you will get up to London. What do you think of that?”

“I am very glad to hear it. Father ought to be in Parliament. He is such a straight-forward man.”

“Well, I don’t know whether that kind of man is wanted there, Kate; but he will do right, and speak plain, I have no doubt. I thought I would tell you at once. It is something to look forward to. Now go to sleep and dream of what may come out of it,—for one thing, you shall have plenty of fine new dresses—good-night, my dear child.”

“Good-night, Mother. You may go sweetly to sleep, for I will find out all about Edgar. You shall be at rest before dinner-time to-morrow.” Then the mother stooped and tucked in the bedclothing, not because it needed it, but because it was a natural and instinctive way to express her care and tenderness. Very softly she stepped to the door, but ere she reached it, turned back to the bed, and laying her hand upon Kitty’s head whispered,

“Lord Exham is home again. He is coming here to-morrow.”

And Kate neither spoke nor moved; but when she knew that she was quite alone, a sweet smile gathered round her lips, and with a gentle sigh she went quickly away to the Land of Happy Dreams.

CHAPTER SECOND

CECIL AND EDGAR

Early the next morning the Squire was in the parlour standing at the open lattices, and whistling to a robin on a branch of the cherry-tree above them. The robin sang, and the Squire whistled, scattering crumbs as he did so, and it was this kindly picture which met Kate's eyes as she opened the door of the room. To watch and to listen was natural; and she stood on the threshold doing so until the Squire came to the last bars of his melody. Then in a gay voice she took it up, and sang to his whistling:

*"York! York! for my money!"*¹

"Hello, Kate!" he cried in his delight as he turned to her; and as joyously as the birds sing "Spring!" she called, "Good-morning, Father!"

"God bless thee, Kate!" and for a moment he let his eyes rest on the vision of her girlish beauty. For there was none like Kate Atheling in all the North-Riding; from her sandalled feet to her shining hair, she was the fairest, sweetest maid that ever Yorkshire bred,—an adorable creature of exquisite form and

¹ "York! York for my monie Of all the places I ever did see This is the place for good companie Except the city of London."

superb colouring; merry as a bird, with a fine spirit and a most affectionate heart. As he gazed at her she came close to him, put her fingers on his big shoulders, and stood on tiptoes to give him his morning greeting. He lifted her bodily and kissed her several times; and she said with a laugh,—

“One kiss for my duty, and one for my pleasure, and all the rest are stolen. Put me down, Father; and what will you do for me to-day?”

“What wouldst thou like me to do?”

“May I ride with you?”

“Nay; I can’t take thee with me to-day. I am going to Squire Ayton’s, and from there to Rudby’s, and very like as far as Ormesby and Pickering.”

“Then you will not be home to dinner?”

“Not I. I shall get my dinner somewhere.”

“Can I come and meet you?”

“Thou hadst better not.”

At this moment Mrs. Atheling entered, and Kate, turning to her, said, “Mother, I am not to ride with father to-day. He is going a visiting,—going to get his dinner ‘somewhere,’ and he thinks I had better not come to meet him.”

“Father is right. Father knows he is not to trust to when he goes ‘somewhere’ for his dinner. For he will call for Ayton, and they two will get Rudby, and then it will be Ormesby, and so by dinner-time they may draw rein at Pickering, and Pickering will start ‘Corn Laws’ and ‘Protection for the Farmers,’ and midnight

will be talked away. Is not that about right, John?" but she asked the question with a smile that proved Maude Atheling was once more the wise and loving "guardian angel" of her husband.

"Thou knowest all about it, Maude."

"I know enough, any way, to advise thee to stand by thy own heart, and to say and do what it counsels thee. Pickering is made after the meanest model of a Yorkshireman; and when a Yorkshireman turns out to be a failure, he is a ruin, and no mistake."

"What by that? I can't quarrel with Pickering. You may kick up a dust with your neighbour, but, sooner or later, it will settle on your own door-stone. It is years and years since I learned that lesson. And as for Pickering's ideas, many a good squire holds the same."

"I don't doubt it. Whatever the Ass says, the asses believe; thou wilt find that out when thou goest to Parliament."

"Are you really going to Parliament, Father?"

"Wouldst thou like me to go, Kate?"

"Yes, if I may go to London with you."

"It isn't likely I would go without thee. Did thy mother tell thee, Lord Exham has come back from Italy to sit for Gaythorne."

"A long way to come for so little," she answered. "Why, Father! there are only a few hovels in Gaythorne, and all the men worth anything have gone to Leeds to comb wool. Poor fellows!"

"Why dost thou say 'poor fellows'?"

“Because, when a man has been brought up to do his day’s work in fields and barns, among grass, and wheat, and cattle, it is a big change to sit twelve hours a day in ‘the Devil’s Hole,’ for Martha Coates told me that is what the wool-combing room is called.”

“There is no sense in such a name.”

“It is a very good name, I think, for rooms so hot and crowded, and so sickening with the smells of soap, and wool, and oil, and steam. Martha says her lads have turned Radicals and Methodists, and she doesn’t wonder. Neither do I.”

“Ay; it is as natural as can be. To do his duty by the land used to be religion enough for any Yorkshire lad; but when they go to big towns, they get into bad company; and there couldn’t be worse company than those weaving chaps of all kinds. No wonder the Government doesn’t want to hear from the big towns; they are full of a ranting crowd of Non-contents.”

“Well, Father, if I was in their place, and the question of Content, or Non-content, was put to me, I should very quickly say, ‘Non-content.’”

“Nobody is going to put the question to thee. Thy mother has not managed to bring up a daughter any better than herself, I see that. Kate, my little maid, Lord Exham will be here to-day; see that thou art civil enough to him; it may make a lot of difference both to thee and me.”

“John Atheling!” cried his wife, “what a blunderer thou art! Why can’t thou let women and their ways alone?”

When they rose from the breakfast-table, the Squire called for his horse, and his favourite dogs, and bustled about until he had Mrs. Atheling and half-a-dozen men and women waiting upon him. But there was much good temper in all his authoritative brusqueness, and he went away in a little flurry of éclat, his wife and daughter, his men and maid-servants, all watching him down the avenue with a loving and proud allegiance. He was so physically the expression of his place and surroundings that not a soul in Atheling ever doubted that the Squire was in the exact place to which God Almighty had called him.

On this morning he was dressed in a riding suit of dark blue broadcloth trimmed with gilt buttons; his vest was white, his cravat white, and his hat of black beaver. As he galloped away, he swept it from his brow to his stirrups in an adieu to his wife and daughter; but the men and women-servants took their share in the courtesy, and it was easy to feel the cheer of admiration, only expressed by their broad smiles and sympathetic glances. As soon as "the Master" was out of sight, they turned away, each to his or her daily task; and Kate looked at her mother inquiringly. There was an instant understanding, and very few words were needed.

"Thou hadst better lose no time. He might get away early."

"He will not leave until he sees us, Mother. That is what he came to Atheling for,—I'll warrant it,—and if I don't go to the village, he will come here; I know he will."

"Kitty, I can't, I can't trust to that—and you promised."

“I am going to keep my promise, Mother. Have my mare at the door in ten minutes, and I will be ready.”

Mrs. Atheling had attended to this necessity before breakfast, and the mare was immediately waiting. She was a creature worthy of the Beauty she had to carry,—dark chestnut in colour, with wide haunches and deep oblique shoulders. Her mane was fine, her ears tremulous, her nostrils thin as parchment, her eyes human in intelligence, her skin like tissue-paper, showing the warm blood pressing against it, and the veins standing clearly out. Waiting fretted her, and she pawed the garden gravel impatiently with her round, dark, shining hoofs until Kate appeared. Then she uttered a low whinny of pleasure, and bent her head for the girl to lay her face against it.

A light leap from the groom’s hand put Kate in her seat, and a lovelier woman never gathered reins in hand. In those days also, the riding dress of women did not disfigure them; it was a garb that gave to Kate Atheling’s loveliness grace and dignity, an air of discreet freedom, and of sweet supremacy,—a close-fitting habit of fine cloth, falling far below her feet in graceful folds, and a low beaver hat, crowned with drooping plumes, shadowing her smiling face. One word to the mare was sufficient; she needed no whip, and Kate would not have insulted her friend and companion by carrying one.

For a little while they went swiftly, then Kate bent and patted the mare’s neck, and she instantly obeyed the signal for a slower pace. For Kate had seen before them a young man sitting on

a stile, and teaching two dogs to leap over the whip which he held in his hand. She felt sure this was the person she had to interview; yet she passed him without a look, and went forward towards the village. After riding half-a-mile she took herself to task for her cowardice, and turned back again. The stranger was still sitting on the stile, and as she approached him she heard a hearty laugh, evoked doubtless by some antic or mistake of the dogs he was playing with. She now walked her mare toward him, and the young man instantly rose, uncovered his head, and, pushing the dogs away, bowed—not ungracefully—to her. Yet he did not immediately speak, and Kate felt that she must open the conversation.

“Do you—do you want to find any place?” she asked. “I think you are a stranger—and I am at home here.”

He smiled brightly and answered, “Thank you. I want to find Atheling Manor-house. I have a message for Mrs. and Miss Atheling.”

“I am Miss Atheling; and I am now returning to the house. I suppose that you are the Wrestler and Orator of last night. My father told us about the contest. Mother wishes to talk with you—we have heard that you know my brother Edgar—we are very unhappy about Edgar. Do you know anything of him? Will you come and see mother—*now*—she is very anxious?”

These questions and remarks fell stumblingly from her lips, one after the other; she was excited and trembling at her own temerity, and yet all the time conscious she was Squire Atheling’s

daughter and in her father's Manor, having a kind of right to assume a little authority and ask questions. The stranger listened gravely till Kate ceased speaking, then he said,—

“My name is Cecil North. I know Edgar Atheling very well. I am ready to do now whatever you wish.”

“Then, Mr. North, I wish you would come with me. It is but a short walk to the house; Candace will take little steps, and I will show you the way.”

“Thank you.”

He said only these two words, but they broke up his face as if there was music in them; for he smiled with his lips and his eyes at the same time. Kate glanced down at him as he walked by her side. She saw that he was tall, finely formed, and had a handsome face; that he was well dressed, and had an air of distinction; and yet she divined in some occult way that this animal young beauty was only the husk of his being. After a few moments' silence, he began that commonplace chat about horses which in Yorkshire takes the place that weather does in other localities. He praised the beauty and docility of Candace, and Kate hoped she was walking slowly enough; and then Cecil North admired her feet and her step, and asked if she ever stumbled or tripped. This question brought forth an eager denial of any such fault, and an opinion that the rider was to blame when such an accident happened.

“In a general way, you are right, Miss Atheling,” answered North. “If the rider sits just and upright, then any sudden jerk

forward throws the shoulders backward; and in that case, if a horse thinks proper to fall, *he* will be the sufferer. He may cut his forehead, or hurt his nose, or bark his knees, but he will be a buffer to his rider.”

“Candace has never tripped with me. I have had her four years. I will never part with her.”

“That is right. Don’t keep a horse you dislike, and don’t part with one that suits you.”

“Do you love horses?”

“Yes. A few years ago I was all for horses. I could sit anything. I could jump everything, right and left. I had a horse then that was made to measure, and foaled to order. No one borrowed him twice. He had a way of coming home without a rider. But I have something better than horses to care for now; and all I need is a good roadster.”

“My father likes an Irish cob for that purpose.”

“Nothing better. I have one in the village that beats all. He can trot fourteen miles an hour, and take a six-foot wall at the end of it.”

“Do you ride much?”

“I ride all over England.”

She looked curiously at him, but asked no questions; and North continued the conversation by pointing out to her the several points which made Candace so valuable. “In the first place,” he said, “her colour is good,—that dark chestnut shaded with black usually denotes speed. She has all the signs of a

thoroughbred; do you know them?"

"No; but I should like to."

"They are three things long,—long ears, long neck, and long forelegs. Three things short,—short dock, short back, and short hindlegs. Three things broad,—broad forehead, broad chest, and broad croup. Three things clean,—clean skin, clean eyes, and clean hoofs. Then the nostrils must be quite black. If there had been any white in the nostrils of Candace, I would have ranked her only 'middling.'"

Kate laughed pleasantly, and said over several times the long, short, broad, and clean points that went to the making of a thoroughbred; and, by the time the lesson was learned, they were at the door of the Manor-house. Mrs. Atheling stood just within it, and when Kate said,—

"Mother, this is Edgar's friend, Mr. Cecil North," she gave him her hand and answered:

"Come in! Come in! Indeed I am fain and glad to see you!" and all the way through the great hall, and into her parlour, she was beaming and uttering welcomes. "First of all, you must have a bit of eating and drinking," she said, "and then you will tell me about my boy."

"Thank you. I will take a glass of ale, if it will please you."

"It will please me beyond everything. You shall have it from the Squire's special tap: ale smooth as oil, sweet as milk, clear as amber, fourteen years old next twenty-ninth of March. And so you know my son Edgar?"

"I know him, and I love him with all my heart. He is as good as gold, and as true as steel."

"To be sure, he is. I'm his mother, and I ought to know him; and that is what I say. How did you come together?"

"We met first at Cambridge; but we were not in the same college or set, so that I only knew him slightly there. Fortune had appointed a nobler introduction for us. I was in Glasgow nearly a year ago, and I wandered down to the Green, and was soon aware that the crowd was streaming to one point. Edgar was talking to this crowd. Have you ever heard him talk to a crowd?"

The mother shook her head, and Kate said softly: "We have never heard him." She had taken off her hat, and her face was full of interest and happy expectation.

"Well," continued North, "he was standing on a platform of rough boards that had been hastily put together, and I remembered instantly his tall, strong, graceful figure, and his bright, purposeful face. He was tanned to the temples, his cheeks were flushed, the wind was in his hair, the sunlight in his eyes; and, with fiery precipitance of assailing words, he was explaining to men mad with hunger and injustice the source of all their woes and the remedy to be applied. I became a man as I listened to him. That hour I put self behind me and vowed my life, and all I have, to the cause of Reform; because he showed me plainly that Parliamentary Reform included the righting of every social wrong and cruelty."

"Do you really think so?" asked Kate.

“Indeed, I am sure of it. A Parliament that represented the great middle and working classes of England would quickly do away with both black and white slavery,—would repeal those infamous Corn Laws which have starved the working-man to make rich the farmer; would open our ports freely to the trade of all the world; would educate the poor; give much shorter hours of labour, and wages that a man could live on. Can I ever forget that hour? Never! I was born again in it!”

“That was the kind of talk that he angered his father with,” said Mrs. Atheling, between tears and smiles. “You see it was all against the land and the land-owners; and Edgar would not be quiet, no matter what I said to him.”

“He *could not* be quiet. He had *no right* to be quiet. Why! he sent every man and woman home that night with hope in their hearts and a purpose in their wretched lives. Oh, if you could have seen those sad, cold faces light and brighten as they listened to him.”

“Was there no one there that didn’t think as he did?”

“I heard only one dissenting voice. It came from a Minister. He called out, ‘Lads and lasses, take no heed of what this fellow says to you. He is nothing but a Dreamer.’ Instantly Edgar took up the word. ‘A Dreamer!’ he cried joyfully. ‘So be it! What says the old Hebrew prophet? Look to your Bible, sir. Let him that hath a dream tell it. Dreamers have been the creators, the leaders, the saviours of the world. And we will go on dreaming until our dream comes true!’ The crowd answered him with a sob and a

shout—and, oh, I wish you had been there!”

Kate uttered involuntarily a low, sympathetic cry that she could not control, and Mrs. Atheling wept and smiled; and when North added, in a lower voice full of feeling, “There is no one like Edgar, and I love him as Jonathan loved David!” she went straight to the speaker, took both his hands in hers, and kissed him.

“Thou art the same as a son to me,” she said, “and thou mayst count on my love as long as ever thou livest.” And in this cry from her heart she forgot her company pronoun, and fell naturally into the familiar and affectionate “thou.”

Fortunately at this point of intense emotion a servant entered with a flagon of the famous ale, and some bread and cheese; and the little interruption enabled all to bring themselves to a normal state of feeling. Then the mother thought of Edgar’s clothing, and asked North if he could take it to him. North smiled. “He is a little of a dandy already,” he answered. “I saw him last week at Lady Durham’s, and he was the best dressed man in her saloon.”

“Now then!” said Mrs. Atheling, “thou art joking a bit. Whatever would Edgar be doing at Lady Durham’s?”

“He had every right there, as he is one of Lord Durham’s confidential secretaries.”

“Art thou telling me some romance?”

“I am telling you the simple truth.”

“Then thou must tell me how such a thing came about.”

“Very naturally. I told Lord Grey and his son-in-law, Lord

Durham, about Edgar—and I persuaded Edgar to come and speak to the spur and saddle-makers at Ripon Cross; and the two lords heard him with delight, and took him, there and then, to Studley Royal, where they were staying; and it was in those glorious gardens, and among the ruins of Fountains Abbey, they planned together the Reform Campaign for the next Parliament.”

“The Squire thinks little of Lord Grey,” said Mrs. Atheling.

“That is not to be wondered at,” answered North. “Lord Grey is the head and heart of Reform. When he was Mr. Charles Grey, and the pupil of Fox, he presented to Parliament the famous Prayer, from the Society of Friends, for Reform. That was thirty-seven years ago, but he has never since lost sight of his object. By the side of such leaders as Burke, and Fox, and Sheridan, his lofty eloquence has charmed the House until the morning sun shone on its ancient tapestries. He and his son-in-law, Lord Durham, have the confidence of every honest man in England. And he is brave as he is true. More than once he has had the courage to tell the King to his face what it was his duty to do.”

“And what of Lord Durham?” asked Kate.

“He is a masterful man,—a bolder Radical than most Radicals. All over the country he is known as Radical Jack. He has a strong, resolute will, but during the last half-year he has leaned in all executive matters upon ‘Mr. Atheling.’ Indeed, there was enthusiastic talk last week at Lady Durham’s of sending ‘Mr. Atheling’ to the next Parliament.”

“My word! But that would never do!” exclaimed Mr.

Atheling's mother. "His father is going there for the landed interest; and if Edgar goes for the people, there will be trouble between them. They will get to talking back at each other, and the Squire will pontify and lay down the law, even if the King and the Law-makers are all present. He will indeed!"

"It would be an argument worth hearing, for Edgar would neither lose his temper nor his cause. Oh, I tell you there will be great doings in London next winter! The Duke of Wellington and Mr. Peel will have to go out; and Earl Grey will surely form a new Government."

"The Squire says Earl Grey and Reform will bring us into civil war."

"On the contrary, only Reform can prevent civil war. Hitherto, the question has been, 'What will the Lords do?' Now it is, 'What must be done with the Lords?' For once, all England is in dead earnest; and the cry everywhere is, 'The Bill, the whole Bill, and nothing but The Bill!' And if we win, as win we must, we shall remember how Edgar Atheling has championed the cause. George the Fourth is on his death-bed," he added in a lower voice. "He will leave his kingdom in a worse plight than any king before him. I, who have been through the land, may declare so much."

"The poor are very poor indeed," said Mrs. Atheling. "Kate and I do what we can, but the most is little."

"The whole story of the poor is—slow starvation. The best silk weavers in England are not able to make more than eight or

nine shillings a week. Thousands of men in the large towns are working for two-pence half-penny a day; and thousands have no work at all.”

“What do they do?” whispered Kate.

“They die. But I did not come here to talk on these subjects—only when the heart is full, the mouth must speak. I have brought a letter and a remembrance from Edgar,” and he took from his pocket a letter and two gold rings, and gave the letter and one ring to Mrs. Atheling, and the other ring to Kate. “He bid me tell you,” said North, “that some day he will set the gold round with diamonds; but now every penny goes for Reform.”

“And you tell Edgar, sir, that his mother is prouder of the gold thread than of diamonds. Tell him, she holds her Reform ring next to her wedding ring,”—and with the words Mrs. Atheling drew off her “guard” of rubies, and put the slender thread of gold her son had sent her next her wedding ring. At the same moment Kate slipped upon her “heart finger” the golden token. Her face shone, her voice was like music: “Tell Edgar, Mr. North,” she said, “that my love for him is like this ring: I do not know its beginning; but I do know it can have no end.”

Then North rose to go, and would not be detained; and the women walked with him to the very gates, and there they said “good-bye.” And all the way through the garden Mrs. Atheling was sending tender messages to her boy, though at the last she urged North to warn him against saying anything “beyond bearing” to his father, if they should meet on the battle-ground

of the House of Commons. "It is so easy to quarrel on politics," she said with all the pathos of reminiscent disputes.

"It has always been an easy quarrel, I think," answered North. "Don't you remember when Joseph wanted to pick a quarrel with his brethren, he pretended to think they were a special commission sent to Egypt to spy out the nakedness of the land?"

"To be sure! And that is a long time ago. Good-bye! and God bless thee! I shall never forget thy visit!"

"And we wish 'The Cause' success!" added Kate.

"Thank you. Success will come. They who *care* and *dare* can do anything." With these words he passed through the gates, and Mrs. Atheling and Kate went slowly back to the house, both of them turning the new ring on their fingers. It was dinner-time, but little dinner was eaten. Edgar's letter was to read; Mr. North to speculate about; and if either of the women remembered Lord Exham's expected call, no remark was made about it.

Yet Kate was neither forgetful of the visit, nor indifferent to it. A sweet trouble of heart, half-fear and half-hope, flushed her cheeks and sent a tender light into her star-like eyes. In the very depths of her being there existed a feeling she did not understand, and did not investigate. Was it Memory? Was it Hope? Was it Love? She asked none of these questions. But she dressed like a girl in a dream; and just as she was sliding the silver buckle on her belt, a sudden trick of memory brought back to her the rhyme of her childhood. And though she blushed to the remembrance, and would not for anything repeat the words, her heart sang softly to

itself,—

“It may so happen, it may so fall,
That I shall be Lady of Exham Hall.”

CHAPTER THIRD

THE LORD OF EXHAM

On the very edge of the deep, tumbling becks which feed the Esk stands Exham Hall. It is a stately, irregular building of gray stone; and when the sunshine is on its many windows, and the flag of Richmoor flying from its central tower, it looks gaily down into the hearts of many valleys, where

“The oak, and the ash, and the bonny ivy-tree,
Flourish at home in the North Countree.”

Otherwise, it has, at a distance, a stern and forbidding aspect. For it is in a great solitude, and the babble of the beck, and the cawing of the rooks, are the only sounds that usually break the silence. The north part was built in A. D. 1320; and the most modern part in the reign of James the First; and yet so well has it stood the wear and tear of elemental and human life in this secluded Yorkshire vale that it does not appear to be above a century old.

It was usually tenanted either by the dowager of the family, or the heir of the dukedom; and it had been opened at this time to receive its young lord on his return from Italy. So it happened that at the very hour when Mrs. and Miss Atheling were talking with Cecil North, Piers Exham was sitting in a

parlour of Exham Hall, thinking of Kate, and recalling the events of their acquaintanceship. It had begun when he was seventeen years old, and Kate Atheling exactly twelve. Indeed, because it was her birthday, she was permitted to accompany an old servant going to Exham Hall to visit the housekeeper, who was her cousin.

This event made a powerful impression on Kate's imagination. It was like a visit to some enchanted castle. She felt all its glamour and mystery as soon as her small feet trod the vast entrance hall with its hangings of Arras tapestry, and its flags and weapons from every English battlefield. Her fingers touched lightly standards from Crecy, and Agincourt, and the walls of Jerusalem; and her heart throbbed to the touch. And as she climbed the prodigiously wide staircase of carved and polished oak, she thought of the generations of knights, and lords and ladies, who had gone up and down it, and wondered where they were. And oh, the marvellous old rooms with their shadowy portraits, and their treasures from countries far away!—shells, and carved ivories, and sandalwood boxes; strange perfumes, and old idols, melancholy, fantastic, odd; musky-smelling things from Asia; and ornaments and pottery from Africa, their gloomy, primitive simplicity, mingling with pretty French trifles, and Italian bronzes, and costly bits of china.

It was all like an Arabian Night's adventure, and hardly needed the touches of romance and superstition the housekeeper quite incidentally threw in: thus, as they passed a very, very tall old

clock with a silver dial on a golden face, she said: "Happen, you would not believe it, but on every tenth of June, a cold queer light travels all round that dial. It begins an hour past midnight, and stops at an hour past noon. I've seen it myself a score of times." And again, in going through a state bed-room, she pointed out a cross and a candlestick, and said, "They are made from bits of a famous ship that was blown up with an Exham, fighting on the Spanish Main. I've heard tell that candles were once lighted in that stick on his birthday; but there's been no candle-lighting for a century, anyway." And Kate thought it was a shame, and wished she knew his birthday, and might light candles again in honour of the hero.

With such sights and tales, her childish head and heart were filled; and the mazy gardens, with their monkish fish-ponds and hedges, their old sun-dials and terraces, their ripening berries and gorgeous flower-beds, completed her fascination. She went back to Atheling ravished and spellbound; too wrapt and charmed to talk much of what she had seen, and glad when she could escape into the Atheling garden to think it all over again. She went straight to her swing. It was hung between two large ash-trees, and there were high laurel hedges on each side. In this solitude she sat down to remember, and, as she did so, began to swing gently to-and-fro, and to sing to her movement,—

"It may so happen, it may so fall,
That I shall be Lady of Exham Hall."

And as she sung these lines over and over—being much pleased with their unexpected rhyming—the young Lord of Exham Hall came through Atheling garden. He heard his own name, and stood still to listen; then he softly parted the laurel bushes, and watched the little maid, and heard her sing her couplet, and merrily laugh to herself as she did so. And he saw how beautiful she was, and there came into his heart a singular warmth and pleasure; but, without discovering himself to the girl, he delivered his message to Squire Atheling, and rode away.

The next morning, however, he managed to carry his fishing-rod to the same beck where Edgar Atheling was casting his line, and to so charm the warm-hearted youth that meeting after meeting grew out of it. Nor was it long until the friendship of the youths included that of the girl; so that it was a very ordinary thing for Kate to go with her brother and Piers Exham to the hill-streams for trout. As the summer grew they tossed the hay together, and rode after the harvest wagons, and danced at the Ingathering Feast, and dressed the ancient church at Christmastide, and so, with ever-increasing kindness and interest, shared each other's joy and sorrows for nearly two years.

Then there was a break in the happy routine. Kate put on long dresses; she was going to a fine ladies' school in York to be "finished," and Edgar also was entered at Cambridge. Piers was to go to Oxford. He begged to go to Cambridge with his friend;

but the Duke approved the Tory principles of his own University, and equally disapproved of those of Cambridge, which he declared were deeply tainted with Whig and even Radical ideas. Perhaps also he was inclined to break up the close friendship between the Athelings and his heir. "No one can be insensible to the beauty of Kate Atheling," he said to the Duchess; "and Piers' constant association with such a lovely girl may not be without danger." The Duchess smiled at the supposition. A royal princess, in her estimation, was not above her son's deserts and expectations; and the Squire's little home-bred girl was beneath either her fears or her suppositions. This also was the tone in which she received all her son's conversation about the Athelings. "Very nice people, I dare say, Piers," she would remark; "and I am glad you have such thoroughly respectable companions; but you will, of course, forget them when you go to College, and begin your independent life." And there was such an air of finality in these assertions that it was only rarely Piers had the spirit to answer, "Indeed, I shall never forget them!"

So it happened that the last few weeks of their friendship missed much of the easy familiarity and sweet confidence that had hitherto marked its every change. Kate, with the new consciousness of dawning womanhood, was shy, less frank, and less intimate. Strangers began to call her "Miss" Atheling; and there were hours when the little beauty's airs of maidenly pride and reserve made Piers feel that any other address would be impertinent. And this change had come, no one knew how, only

it was there, and not to be gainsaid; and every day's events added some trifling look, or word, or act which widened the space between them, though the space itself was full of sweet and kindly hours.

Then there came a day in autumn when Kate was to leave her home for the York school. Edgar was already in Cambridge. Piers was to enter Oxford the following week. This chapter of life was finished; and the three happy souls that had made it, were to separate. Piers, who had a poetic nature, and was really in love—though he suspected it not—was most impressed with the passing away. He could not keep from Atheling, and though he had bid Kate “good-bye” in the afternoon, he was not satisfied with the parting. She had then been full of business: the Squire was addressing her trunks; Mrs. Atheling crimping the lace frill of her muslin tippets; and Kate herself bringing, one by one, some extra trifle that at the last moment impressed her with its necessity. It was in this hurry of household love and care that he had said “good-bye,” and he felt that it had been a mere form.

Perhaps Kate felt it also; for when he rode up to Atheling gates in the gloaming, he saw her sauntering up the avenue. He thought there was both melancholy and expectation in her attitude and air. He tied his horse outside, and joined her. She met him with a smile. He took her hand, and she permitted him to retain it. He said, “Kate!” and she answered the word with a glance that made him joyous, ardent, hopeful. He was too happy to speak; he feared to break the heavenly peace between them by a word. Oh,

this is the way of Love! But neither knew the ways of Love. They were after all but children, and the sweet thoughts in their hearts had not come to speech. They wandered about the garden until the gloaming became moonlight, and they heard Mrs. Atheling calling her daughter. Then their eyes met, and, swift as the firing of a gun, their pupils dilated and flashed with tender feeling; over their faces rushed the crimson blood; and Piers said sorrowfully, "Kate! Sweet Kate! I shall never forget you!" He raised the hand he held to his lips, kissed it, and went hurriedly away from her.

Kate was not able to say a word, but she felt the kiss on her hand through all her sleep and dreams that night. Indeed five years of change and absence had not chilled its warm remembrance; there were hours when it was still a real expression, when the hand itself was conscious of the experience, and willingly cherished it. All through Cecil North's visit, she had been aware of a sense of expectancy. Interested as she was in Edgar, the thought of Lord Exham would not be put down. For a short time it was held in abeyance; but when the early dinner was over, and she was in the solitude of her own room, Piers put Edgar out of consideration. As she sat brushing and dressing her long brown hair, she recalled little incidents concerning Piers,—how once in the harvest-field her hair had tumbled down, and Piers praised its tangled beauty; how he had liked this and the other dress; how he had praised her dancing, and vowed she was the best rider in the county. He had given her a little gold brooch for a Christmas present, and she took it from its box, and said to

herself she would wear it, and see if it evoked its own memory in Exham's heart.

It had been her intention to put on a white gown, but the day darkened and chilled; and then she had a certain shyness about betraying, even to her mother, her anxiety to look beautiful. Perhaps Piers might not now think her beautiful in any garb. Perhaps he had forgotten—everything. So, impelled by a kind of perverse indifference, she wore only the gray woollen gown that was her usual afternoon attire. But the fashion of the day left her lovely arms uncovered, and only veiled her shoulders in a shadowing tippet of lace. She fastened this tippet with the little gold brooch, just where the folds crossed the bosom. She had hastened rather than delayed her dressing; and when Mrs. Atheling came downstairs in her afternoon black silk dress, she found Kate already in the parlour. She had taken from her work-box a piece of fine cambric, and was stitching it industriously; and Mrs. Atheling lifted her own work, and began to talk of Edgar, and Edgar's great fortune, and what his father would say about it. This subject soon absorbed her; she forgot everything in it; but Kate heard through all the radical turmoil of the conversation the gallop of a strange horse on the gravelled avenue, and the echo of strange footsteps on the flagged halls of the house.

In the middle of some grand prophecy for Edgar's future, the parlour door was opened, and Lord Exham entered. He came forward with something of his boyhood's enthusiasm, and took

Mrs. Atheling's hands, and said a few words of pleasant greeting, indistinctly heard in the fluttering gladness of Mrs. Atheling's reception. Then he turned to Kate. She had risen, but she held her work in her left hand. He took it from her, and laid it on her work-box, and then clasped both her hands in his. The firm, lingering pressure had its own eloquence. In matters of love, they who are to understand, *do* understand; and no interpreter is needed.

The conversation then became general and full of interest; but from Oxford, and France, and Italy, it quickly drifted—as all conversation did in those days—to Reform. And Mrs. Atheling could not keep the news that had come to her that day. She magnified Edgar with a sweet motherly vanity that was delightful, and to which Piers listened with pleasure; for the listening gave him opportunity to watch Kate's eloquent face, and to flash his sympathy into it. He thought her marvellously beautiful. Her shining hair, her rich colouring, and her large gray eyes were admirably emphasised by the homely sweetness of her dress. After the lavish proportions, and gaily attired women of Italy, nothing could have been more enchanting to Piers Exham than Kate's subdued, gray-eyed loveliness, clad in gray garments. The charming background of her picturesque home added to this effect; and this background he saw and realised; but she had also a moral background of purity and absolute sincerity which he did not see, but which he undoubtedly felt.

While Piers was experiencing this revelation of womanhood, it was not likely Kate was without impressions. In his early

youth, Exham had a slight resemblance to Lord Byron; and he had been vain of the likeness, and accentuated it by adopting the open collar, loose tie, and other peculiarities of the poetic nobleman. Kate was glad to see this servile imitation had been discarded. Exham was now emphatically individual. He was not above medium height; but his figure was good, and his manner gentle and courteous, as the manner of all superior men is. Grave and high-bred, he had also much of the melancholy, mythical air of an English nobleman, conscious of long antecedents, and dwelling in the seclusion of shaded parks, and great houses steeped in the human aura of centuries. His hair was very black, and worn rather long, and his complexion, a pale bronze; but this lack of red colouring added to the fascination of his dark eyes, which were remarkable for that deep glow always meaning mental or moral power of some kind. They were often half shut—and then—who could tell what was passing behind them? And yet, when all this had been observed by Kate, she was sure that something—perhaps the most essential part—had escaped her.

This latter estimate was the correct one. No one as yet had learned the heart or mind of Piers Exham. It is doubtful if he understood his own peculiarities; for he had few traits of distinctive pre-eminence, his character being very like an opal, where all colours are fused and veiled in a radiant dimness. So that, after all, this meeting was a first meeting; and Kate did not feel that the past offered her any intelligible solution of the present man.

The conversation having drifted to Edgar and Reform, stayed there. Lord Exham spoke with a polite, but stubborn emphasis in favour of his own caste, as the governing caste, and thought that the honour and welfare of England might still be left "to those great Houses which represented the collective wisdom of the nation." Nor was he disturbed when Mrs. Atheling, with some scorn and temper, said "they represented mostly the collective folly of the nation." He bowed and smiled at the dictum, but Kate understood the smile; it was of that peculiarly sweet kind which is equivalent to having the last word. He admitted that some things wanted changing, but he said, "Changes could not be manufactured; they must grow." "True," replied Kate, "but Reform has been growing for sixty years." "That is as it should be," he continued. "You cannot write Reforms on human beings, as you write it on paper. Two or three generations are not enough." In all that was said—and Mrs. Atheling said some very strong things—he took a polite interest; but he made no surrender. Even if his words were conciliatory, Kate saw in his eyes—languid but obstinately masterful—the stubborn, headstrong will of a man who had inherited his prejudices, and who had considered them in the light of his interest, and did not choose to bring them to the light of reason.

Still the conversation was a satisfactory and delightful vehicle of human revelation. The two women paled and flushed, and grew sad or happy in its possibilities, with a charming frankness. No social subject could have revealed them so completely; and

Exham enjoyed the disclosures of feeling which this passionate interest evoked,—enjoyed it so much that he forgot the lapse of time, and stayed till tea was ready, and then was delighted to stay and take it with them. Mrs. Atheling was usually relieved of the duty of making it by Kate; and Piers could not keep his glowing eyes off the girl as her hands moved about the exquisite Derby teacups, and handed him the sweet, refreshing drink. She remembered that he loved sugar; that he did not love cream; that he preferred his toast not buttered; that he liked apricot jelly; and he was charmed and astonished at these proofs of remembrance, so much so indeed that he permitted Mrs. Atheling to appropriate the whole argument. For this sweet hour he resigned his heart to be pleased and happy. Too wise in some things, not wise enough in others, Piers Exham had at least one great compensating quality—the courage to be happy.

He let all other feelings and purposes lapse for this one. He gave himself up to charm, and to be charmed; he flattered Mrs. Atheling into absolute complaisance; he persuaded Kate to walk through the garden and orchard with him, and then, with caressing voice and a gentle pressure of the hand, reminded her of days and events they had shared together. Smiles flashed from face to face. Her simple sweetness, her ready sympathy, her ingenuous girlish expressions, carried him back to his boyhood. Kate shone on his heart like sunshine; and he did not know that it had become dark until he had left Atheling behind, and found himself Exham-way, riding rapidly to the joyful whirl and hurry

of his thoughts.

Now happiness, as well as sorrow, is selfish. Kate was happy and not disposed to talk about her happiness. Her mother's insistent questions about Lord Exham troubled her. She desired to go into solitude with the new emotions this wonderful day had produced; but the force of those lovely habits of respect and obedience, which had become by constant practice a second nature, kept her at her mother's side, listening with sweet credulousness to all her opinions, and answering her hopes with her own assurances. The reward of such dutiful deference was not long in coming. In a short time Mrs. Atheling said,—

“It has been such a day as never was, Kate; and you must be tired. Now then, go to bed, my girl, and sleep; for goodness knows when your father will get home!”

So Kate kissed her mother—kissed her twice—as if she was dimly conscious of unfairly keeping back some pleasure, and would thus atone for her selfishness. And Mrs. Atheling sat down in the chimney-corner with the gray stocking she was knitting, and pondered her son's good fortune for a while. Then she rose and sent the maids to bed, putting the clock an hour forward ere she did so, and excusing the act by saying, “If I don't set it fast, we shall soon be on the wrong side of everything.”

Another hour she sat calmly knitting, while in the dead silence of the house the clock's regular “*tick! tick!*” was like breathing. It seemed to live, and to watch with her. As the Squire came noisily into the room it struck eleven. “My word, Maude!” he said with

great good humour, "I am sorry to keep you waiting; but there has been some good work done to-night, so you won't mind it, I'll warrant."

"Well now, John, if you and your friends have been at Pickering's, and have done any 'good' work there, I will be astonished! You may warrant *that* with every guinea you have."

"We were at Rudby's. There were as many as nine landed men of us together; and for once there was one mind in nine men."

"That is, you were all for yourselves."

"No! Dal it, we were all for old England and the Constitution! The Constitution, just as it is, and no tinkering with it."

"I wonder which of the nine was the biggest fool among you?"

"Thou shouldst not talk in that way, Maude. The country is in real danger with this Reform nonsense. Every Reformer ought to be hung, and I wish they were hung."

"I would be ashamed to say such words, John. Thou knowest well that thy own son is a Reformer."

"More shame to him, and to me, and to thee! I would have brought up a better lad, or else I would hold my tongue about him. It was thy fault he went to Cambridge. I spent good money then to spoil a fine fellow."

"Now, John Atheling, I won't have one word said against Edgar in this house."

"It is my house."

"Nay, but it isn't. Thou only hast the life rent of it. It is Edgar's as much as thine. He will be here, like enough, when I and thou

have gone the way we shall never come back.”

“Maybe he will—and maybe he will not. I can break the entail if it suits me.”

“Thou canst not. For, with all thy faults, thou art an upright man, and thy conscience wouldn’t let thee do anything as mean and spiteful as that. How could we rest in our graves if there was any one but an Atheling in Atheling?”

“He is a disgrace to the name.”

“He is nothing of that kind. He will bring the old name new honour. See if he does not! And as for the Constitution of England, it is about as great a ruin as thy constitution was when thou hadst rheumatic fever, and couldn’t turn thyself, nor help thyself, nor put a morsel of bread into thy mouth. But thou hadst a good doctor, and he set thee up; and a good House of Commons—Reforming Commons—will happen do as much for the country; though when every artisan and every farm labourer is hungry and naked, it will be hard to spread the plaster as far as the sore. It would make thy heart ache to hear what they suffer.”

“Don’t bother thy head about weavers, and cutlers, and artisans. If the Agriculture of the country is taken care of—”

“Now, John, do be quiet. There is not an idiot in the land who won’t talk of Agriculture.”

“We have got to stick by the land, Maude.”

“The land will take care of itself. If thou wouldst only send for thy son, and have a little talk with him, he might let some light and wisdom into thee.”

"I have nothing to say on such subjects to Edgar Atheling—not a word."

"If thou goest to Parliament, thou mayst have to 'say' to him, no matter whether thou wantest to or not; that is, unless thou art willing to let Edgar have both sides of the argument."

"What tom-foolery art thou talking?"

"I am only telling thee that Edgar is as like to go to Parliament as thou art."

"To be sure—when beggars are kings."

"Earl Grey will seat him—or Lord Durham; and I would advise thee to study up things a bit. There are new ideas about, John; and thou wouldst look foolish if thy own son had to put any of thy mistakes right for thee."

"I suppose, Maude, thou still hast a bit of faith left in the Bible. And I'll warrant thou knowest every word it says about children obeying their parents, and honouring their parents, and so on. And I can remember thee telling Edgar, when he was a little lad, about Absalom going against his father, and what came of it; now then, is the Bible, as well as the Constitution, a ruin? Is it good for nothing but to be pitched into limbo, or to be 'reformed'? I'm astonished at thee!"

"The Bible has nothing to do with politics, John. I wish it had! Happen then we would have a few wise-like, honest politicians. The Bible divides men into good men and bad men; but thou dividest all men into Tories and Radicals; and the Bible has nothing to do with either of them. I can tell thee that. Nay, but I'm

wrong; it does say a deal about doing justice, and loving mercy, and treating your neighbour and poor working-folk as you would like to be treated yourself. Radicals can get a good deal out of the New Testament.”

“I don’t believe a word of what thou art saying.”

“I don’t wonder at that. Thou readest nothing but the newspapers; if thou didst happen to read a few words out of Christ’s own mouth, thou wouldst say, ‘Thou never heardest the like,’ and thou wouldst think the man who quoted them wrote them out of his own head, and call him a Radical. Get off to thy bed, John. I can always tell when thou hast been drinking Rudby’s port-wine. It is too heavy and heady for thee. As soon as thou art thyself again, I will tell thee what a grand son thou art the father of. My word! If the Duke gives thee a seat at his mahogany two or three times a year, thou art as proud as a peacock; now then, thy son Edgar is hob-nobbing with earls and lords every day of his life, and they are proud of his company.”

The Squire laughed boisterously. “It is time, Maude,” he said, “I went to my bed; and it is high time for thee to wake up and get thy head on a feather pillow; then, perhaps, thou will not dream such raving nonsense.”

With these scornful words he left the room, and Mrs. Atheling rose and put away her knitting. She was satisfied with herself. She expected her mysterious words to keep the Squire awake with curiosity; and in such case, she was resolved to make another effort to reconcile her husband to his son. But the Squire gave

her no opportunity; he slept with an indifferent continuity that it was useless to interrupt. Perhaps there was intention in this heavy sleep, for when he came downstairs in the morning he went at once to seek Kate. He soon saw her in the herb garden; for she had on a white dimity gown, and was standing upright, shading her eyes with her hands to watch his approach. A good breeze of wind from the wolds fluttered her snowy skirts, and tossed the penetrating scents of thyme and marjoram, mint and pennyroyal upward, and she drew them through her parted lips and distended nostrils.

“They are so heavenly sweet!” she said with a smile of sensuous pleasure. “They smell like Paradise, Father.”

“Ay, herbs are good and healthy. The smell of them makes me hungry. I didn’t see thee last night, Kitty; and I wanted to see thee.”

“I was so tired, Father. It was a day to tire any one. Was it not?”

“I should say it was,” he replied with conscious diplomacy. “Now what part of it pleased thee best?”

“Well, Mr. North’s visit was of course wonderful; and Lord Exham’s visit was very pleasant. I enjoyed both; but Mr. North’s news was so very surprising.”

“To be sure. What dost thou think of it?”

“Of course, Edgar is on the other side, Father. In some respects that is a pity.”

“It is a shame! It is a great shame!”

"Nay, nay, Father! We won't have 'shame' mixed up with Edgar. He is in dead earnest, and he has taken luck with him. Just think of our Edgar being one of Lord Durham's favourites, of him speaking all over England and Scotland for Reform. Mr. North says there is no one like him in the drawing-rooms of the Reform ladies; and no one like him on the Reform platforms; and he was made a member of the new Reform Club in London by acclamation. And Earl Grey will get him a seat in Parliament next election."

"Who is this Mr. North?"

"Why, Father! You heard him speak, and you 'threw' him down on the Green, you know."

"*Oh! Him!* Dost thou believe all this palaver on the word of a travelling mountebank?"

"He is not a travelling mountebank. I am sure he is a gentleman. You shouldn't call a man names that you have 'thrown' fairly. You know better than that."

"I know nothing about the lad. And he does not seem to have told thee anything about himself. As for thy mother—" and then he hesitated, and looked at Kate meaningly and inquiringly.

"Mother liked him. She liked him very much indeed. He brought both mother and me a ring from Edgar," and she put out her hand and showed the Squire the little gold circle.

"Trumpery rubbish!" he said scornfully. "It didn't cost half a crown. Give it to me, and I will get thee a ring worth wearing,—sapphires or rubies."

"I would not part with it for loops and hoops of sapphires and rubies. Edgar sent it as a love-token; he wants his money for nobler things than rubies—but, dear me! you can't buy love for any money. Oh, Father! I do wish you would be friends with Edgar."

"My little lass, I cannot be friends with any one if he goes against the land, and the King, and the Constitution. I am loyal straight through; up and down to-day, and to-morrow, and every day; and I can't bear traitors,—men that would sell their country for a bit of mob power or mob glory. All of Edgar's friends and neighbours are for the King and the Laws; and it shames me and pains me beyond everything to have a rascal and a Radical in my family. The Duke and his son are finger and thumb, buckle and belt; and Edgar and I ought to be the same. And it stands to reason that a father knows more than his own lad of twenty-six years old. What dost thou think of Lord Exham?"

The question was asked at a venture; but Kate had no suspicion, and she answered frankly, "I think very well of him. He talked mostly of politics; but every one does that. It was pleasant to see him at our tea-table again."

"To be sure. So he stayed to tea?"

"Yes; did not mother tell you?"

"Nay, we were talking of other things. What does he look like?"

"I think he is much improved."

"Well, he ought to be. He must have learned a little, and he has seen a lot since we saw him. Come, let us go and find out

what kind of a breakfast mother can give us. I am hungry enough for two.”

So Kate lifted the herbs which she had cut into her garden apron, and cruddling close to her father’s side, they went in together, with the smell of the thyme and marjoram all about them. Mrs. Atheling drew it in as they entered the parlour, and then turned to them with a smile. The Squire went to her side, and promptly kissed her. It was one of his ways to ignore their little tiffs; and this morning Mrs. Atheling was also agreeable. She looked into his eyes, and said:

“Why, John! are you really awake. You lay like the Seven Sleepers when I got up, and I said to myself, ‘John will sleep the clock round,’ so Kate and I will have our breakfasts.”

“Nay, I have too much to look after, Maude.” Then he turned the conversation to the farms, and talked of the draining to be done, and the meadows to be left for grass; but he eschewed politics altogether, and, greatly to Mrs. Atheling’s wonder, never alluded to the information she had given him about their son Edgar. Did he really think she had been telling him a made-up story? She could not otherwise understand this self-control in her curious lord. However, sometime during the morning, Kate told her about the conversation in the herb garden; then she was content. She knew just where she had her husband; and the little laugh with which she terminated the conversation was her expression of conscious power over him, and of a retaliation quite within her reach.

CHAPTER FOURTH

THE DAWN OF LOVE

There is always in every life some little part which even those dearer than life to us cannot enter. Kate had become conscious of this fact. She hoped her mother would not talk of Lord Exham; for she did not as yet understand anything about the feelings his return had evoked. She would have needed the uncertain, enigmatical language which comes in dreams to explain the “yes” and the “no” of the vague, trembling memories, prepossessions, and hopes which fluttered in her breast.

Fortunately Mrs. Atheling had some dim perception of this condition, and without analysing her reasons, she was aware “it was best not to meddle” between two lives so surrounded by contradictory circumstances as were those of her daughter and Lord Exham. Besides, as she said to her husband, “It was no time for love-making, with the King dying, and the country on the quaking edge of revolution, and starvation and misery all over the land.” And the Squire answered: “Exham has not one thought of love-making. He is far too much in with a lot of men who have the country and their own estates to save. He won’t bother himself with women-folk now, whatever he may do in idle times.”

They had both forgotten, or their own love affair had been of such Arcadian straightness and simplicity that they had never

learned Love's ability to domineer all circumstances that can stir this mortal frame. Exham had indeed enlisted himself with passionate earnestness in the cause of his class, which he called the cause of his country—but as the drop of

“lucent sirup tinct with cinnamon”

is forever flavoured and perfumed by the spice, so Exham's life was coloured and prepossessed by the thought of the sweet girl who had been blended with so many of his purest and happiest hours.

It was then of Kate he thought as he wandered about the stately rooms and beautiful gardens of Exham Hall. He was not oblivious of his engagements with the Duke and the tenants; but he was considering how best to keep these engagements, and yet not miss a visit to her. The dying King, the riotous land, were accidentals of his life and condition; his love for Kate Atheling was at the root of his existence; it was a fundamental of the past and of the future. For five years of constant change and movement, it had lain in abeyance; but old love is a dangerous thing to awaken; and Piers Exham found in doing this thing that every event of the past strengthened the influence of the present, and fixed his heart more passionately on the girl he had first found fair; the

—“rosebud set with little, wilful thorns,
And sweet as English airs could make her,”

that had sung and swung herself into his affection when she was only twelve years old.

He was however quite aware that any proposal to marry Kate Atheling would meet with prompt opposition from his family; indeed the Duke had already mentioned a very different alliance, and in that case, he did not doubt but that Squire Atheling would be equally resolved never to allow his daughter to enter a home where she would be regarded by any member of it as an intruder. But he put all such considerations for the present behind him. He said to himself, "The first thing to do, is to win Kate's love; with that sweet consciousness, I shall be ready for all opposition." For his heart kept assuring him that every trouble and obstacle has an hour in which it may be conquered,—an hour when Fate and Will become One, and are then as irresistible as a great force of Nature. He was sure the hour for this conflict had not yet come. It was the day for a different fight. His home, his estate, his title, and all the privileges of his nobility were in danger. When they were placed beyond peril, then he would fight for the wife he wanted, and win her against all opposition. And who could tell in what way the first conflict would bring forth circumstances to insure victory to the last?

He was deeply in love; he was full of hope; he was at Atheling some part of every day. If he came in the afternoon, Kate's pony was saddled, and they rode far and away, to where the shadows and sunshine elbowed one another on the moors. The golden gorse shed its perfume over their heads; the linnets sang to them

of love; they talked, and laughed, and rode swiftly until their pace brought them among the mountains that looked like a Titanic staircase going up to the skies. There, they always drew rein, and went slower, and spoke softer, and indeed often became quite silent, and knew such silence to be the sweetest eloquence. Then after a little interval Piers would say one word, "*Kate!*" and Kate only answer with a blush, and a smile, and an upturned face. For Love can put a volume in four letters; and souls say in a glance what a thousand words would only blunder about. Then there was the gallop home, and the merry cup of tea, and the saunter in the garden, and the long tender "good-bye" at the threshold where the damask roses made the air heavy with their sweetness.

So Lord Exham did not find his politics hard to bear with such delicious experiences between whiles. And Kate? What were Kate's experiences? Oh, any woman who has once loved, any pure girl who longs to love, may divine them! For Love is always the same. The tale he told Kate on the Atheling moors and under the damask roses was the very same tale he told high in Paradise by the four rivers where the first roses blew.

As the summer advanced, startling notes from the outside world forced themselves into this heavenly solitude. On the twenty-sixth of June, King George died; and this death proved to be the first of a series of great events. Piers felt it to be a warning bell. It said to him, "The charming overture of Love, with its restless pleasure, its delicate hopes and fears, is nearly at an end." He had been with Kate for three divine hours. They had sat

among the brackens at the foot of the mountains, and been twenty times on the very point of saying audibly the word "Love!" and twenty times had felt the delicious uncertainty of non-confession to be too sweet for surrender. Nay, they did not reason about it; they simply obeyed that wise, natural self-restraint which knew its own hour, and would not hurry it.

With a sigh of rapture, they rose as the sun began to wester, and rode slowly back to Atheling. No one was at the door to receive them, and Kate wondered a little; but when they entered the hall, the omission was at once understood. There was a large open fireplace at the northern extremity, and over it the Atheling arms, with their motto, "*Feare God! Honour the Kinge! Laus Deo!*" Squire Atheling was draping this panel with crape; and Mrs. Atheling stood near him with some streamers of the gloomy fabric in her hands. She pointed to the King's picture—which already wore the emblem of mourning—and said, "The King is dead."

"The King lives! God save the King!" replied the Squire, instantly. "God save King William the Fourth!"

Then all the clocks in the house were stopped, and draped, and when this ceremony was over, they had tea together. And as it is a Yorkshire custom to make funeral feasts, Mrs. Atheling gave to the meal an air of special entertainment. The royal Derby china added its splendour to the fine old silver and delicate damask. There were delicious cheese-cakes, and Queen's-cakes, and savoury potted meats, and fresh crumpets; and the ripe red

strawberries filled the room with their ethereal scent. No one was at all depressed by the news. If King George was dead, King William was alive; and the Squire thought, "Everything might be hoped from 'The Sailor King.' Why!" he said, "he is that good-natured he won't say a bad word about the Reformers; though, God knows, they are a disgrace to themselves, and to all that back them up."

"There will now be a general election," said Exham positively.

"To be sure," answered the Squire. "And it is to be hoped we may get together a few men that will take the Bull of Reform by the horns, and put a stop to that nonsense forever in England."

"Before they do that," said Mrs. Atheling, "they will have to consider the swarms of people they have brought up in dirt, and rags, and misery. For if they don't, they will bring ruin to the nation that owns them."

"King William is a fighter. He will back the Law with bayonets, if he thinks it right," said the Squire.

Mrs. Atheling looked at him indignantly. Then, putting her cup down with unmistakable emphasis, she exclaimed, "The Lord forgive thee, John Atheling! I'll say one thing, and I'll say it now, and forever, it isn't law backed with bayonets that has saved England so far; it is the bit of religion in every man's heart, and his trust that somehow God will see him righted. If it wasn't for that it would have been all up with our set long ago."

"That is just the way women talk politics," said the Squire, with some contempt. "If there was nothing else in this Reform

business to make a man sick, the way they have given in to women, and got them to form clubs and make speeches, is enough to set any sensible person against Reform; and if there is no way of talking people into doing what is right—then they must be *made* to do right; and that's all there is about it."

"Very well, John; but there are two sides to play at making other people do right. I'll tell you one thing, the Government will have to take a lot of things into consideration before they put their trust in backing law with bayonets. It won't work! Let them start doing it, and we shall all find ourselves in a wrong box."

"I think there is much good sense in what Mrs. Atheling believes," said Lord Exham.

"And as for the Reformers getting round the women of the country," she continued, "that is as it should be. Men have done all the governing for six thousand years; and, in the main, they have made a very bad job of it. Happen, a few kind-hearted women would help things forwarder. There is going to be some alterations, you may depend upon it, John."

"Father," said Kate, "you had better not argue with mother. She knows a deal more about the country than you think she does; and mother is always right."

"To be sure, Kate. To hear mother talk, she knows a lot; but if she would take my advice, she would forget a lot, and try and learn something better." Then touching his wife's hand, he continued, "Maude, I always did believe thou wert in favour of the land, and the law, and the King."

“I don’t know that I ever said such a thing, John; but thou mayst have believed it. What I *thought*, was another matter. And I am beginning to think aloud now, that makes all the difference.”

Such divided opinions were in every household; and yet, upon the whole, the death of the selfish, intolerant George was a hopeful event. When people are desperate, any change is a promise; and William had a reputation not only for good nature, but also for that love of fair play which is the first article of an Englishman’s personal creed. He came to the throne on the twenty-sixth of June; and on the twenty-ninth Parliament resumed its sittings. Mr. Brougham led the opposition, and violent debates and unmeasured language distinguished the short session. The Duke of Wellington, representing the Government, was prominently bitter against Reform of every kind; and Mr. Brougham boldly declared that any Minister now hoping to rule either by royal favour or military power would be overwhelmed. In less than a month the King prorogued Parliament in person, and in so doing, congratulated his country on the tranquillity of Europe. Forty-eight hours afterwards, France was insurgent, and Paris in arms. Three days of most determined fighting followed; and then Charles the Tenth was driven from his throne, and the white flag of the Bourbon tyranny gave place to the Tri-colour of Liberty.

Now if there had been a direct electric or magnetic current between England and the Continent, the effect could not have been more sympathetically startling; and these three memorable

“Days of July” in Paris impelled forward, with an irresistible impetus, the cause of freedom in England. The nobility and the landed gentry were gravely aware of this effect; and the great middle class, and the working men in every county, were stirred to more hopeful and united action. Far and wide the people began anew to express, in various ways, their determination to have the Tory Ministers dismissed, and a Liberal Government in favour of Reform inaugurated.

For the first time the Squire was anxious. For the first time he saw and felt positive symptoms of insubordination among his own people. Pickering’s barns were burnt one night; and a few nights afterwards, Rudby’s hay-ricks. Squire Atheling was a man of prompt action; one well disposed to do in his own manor what he expected the Government to do in the country,—take the Reform bull by the horns. He sent for all his labourers to meet him in the farm court at Atheling; and when they were gathered there, he stood up on the stone wall which enclosed one side of it and said in his strong, resonant voice,—

“Now, men of Atheling manor and village, you have been sulky and ugly for two or three weeks. You aren’t sulky and ugly without knowing *why* you are so. If you are Yorkshiremen worth your bread and bacon, you will out with your grievance—whatever it is. Tom Gisburn, what is it?”

“We can’t starve any longer, Squire. We want two shillings a week more wages. Me and mine would hev been in t’ churchyard if thy Missis hed been as hard-hearted as thysen.”

“I will give you all one shilling a week more.”

“Nay, but a shilling won’t do. Thy Missis is good, and Miss Kate is good; but we want our rights; and we hev made up our minds that two shillings a week more wage will nobbut barely cover them. We are varry poor, Squire! Varry poor indeed!”

The man spoke sadly and respectfully; and the Squire looked at him, and at the stolid, anxious faces around with an angry pity. “I’ll tell you what, men,” he continued; “everything in England is going to the devil. Englishmen are getting as ill to do with as a lot of grumbling, contrary, bombastic Frenchers. If you’ll promise me to stand by the King, and the land, and the laws, and give these trouble-making Reformers a dip in the horse-pond if any of them come to Atheling again—why, then, I will give you all—every one of you—two shillings a week more wage.”

“Nay, Squire, we’ll not sell oursens for two shillings a week; not one of us—eh, men?” and Gisburn looked at his fellows interrogatively.

“Sell oursens!” replied the Squire’s blacksmith, a big, hungry-looking fellow in a leather apron; “no! no, Squire! Thou oughtest to know us better. Sell oursens! Not for all the gold guineas in Yorkshire! We’ll sell thee our labour for two shilling a week more wage, and thankful; but our will, and our good-will, thou can’t buy for any money.”

There was a subdued cheer at these words from the men, and the Squire’s face suddenly lightened. His best self put his lower self behind him. “Sawley,” he answered, “thou art well

nicknamed ‘Straight-up!’ and I don’t know but what I’m very proud of such an independent, honourable lot of men. Such as you won’t let the land suffer. Remember, you were all born on it, and you’ll like enough be buried in it. Stand by the land then; and if two shillings a week more wage will make you happy, you shall have it,—if I sell the gold buttons off my coat to pay it. Are we friends now?”

A hearty shout answered the question, and the Squire continued, “Then go into the barn, and eat and drink your fill. You’ll find a barrel of old ale, and some roast beef, and wheat bread there.”

In this way he turned the popular discontent from Atheling, and doubtless saved his barns and hay-ricks; but he went into his house angry at the men, and angry at his wife and daughter. They had evidently been aiding and succouring these discontents and their families; and—as he took care to point out to Kate—evil and not good had been the result. “I have to give now as a right,” he said, “what thee and thy mother have been giving as a kindness!” And his temper was not improved by hearing from the barn the noisy “huzzas” with which the name of “the young Squire” was received, and his health drank.

“Wife, and son, and daughter! all of them against me! I wonder what I have done to be served in such a way?” he exclaimed sorrowfully. And then Kate forgot everything about politics. She said all kinds of consoling words without any regard for the Reform Bill, and, with the sweetest kisses, promised her

father whatever she thought would make him happy. It is an unreasonable, delightful way that belongs to loving women; and God help both men and women when they are too wise for such sweet deceptions!

Yet the Squire carried a hot, restless heart to the Duke's meeting that night; and he was not pleased to find that the tactics he had used with his labourers met with general and great disapproval. Those men who had already suffered loss, and those who knew that they had gone beyond a conciliating policy, said some ugly words about "knuckling down," and it required all the Duke's wisdom and influence to represent it as "a wise temporary concession, to be recalled as soon as the election was over, and the Tory Government safely reinstalled."

Upon the whole, then, Squire Atheling had not much satisfaction in his position; and every day brought some new tale of thrilling interest. All England was living a romance; and people got so used to continual excitement that they set the homeliest experiences of life to great historical events. During the six weeks following the death of King George the Fourth occurred the new King's coronation, the dissolution of Parliament, the "Three Days of July," and the landing of the exiled French King in England; all of these things being accompanied by agrarian outrages in the farming districts, the destruction of machinery in the manufacturing towns, and constant political tumults wherever men congregated.

The next six weeks were even more restless and excited.

The French King was a constant subject of interest to the Reformers; for was he not a stupendous example of the triumph of Liberal principles? He was reported first at Lulworth Castle in Devonshire. Then he went to Holyrood Palace in Edinburgh. The Scotch Reformers resented his presence, and perpetually insulted him, until Sir Walter Scott made a manly appeal for the fallen tyrant. And while the Bourbon sat in Holyrood, a sign and a text for all lovers of Freedom, England was in the direst storm and stress of a general election. The men of the Fen Country were rising. The Universities were arming their students. There was rioting in this city and that city. The Tories were gaining. The Reformers were gaining. Both sides were calling passionately on the women of the country to come to their help, without it seeming to occur to either that if women had political influence, they had also political rights.

But the end was just what all these events predicated. When the election was over, the Tory Government had lost fifty votes in the House of Commons; but Piers Exham was Member of Parliament for the borough of Gaythorne, and Squire Atheling was the Representative of the Twenty-two Tory citizens of the village of Asketh.

CHAPTER FIFTH

ANNABEL VYNER

The first chapter of Kate's and Piers' love-story was told to these stirring events. They were like a *trumpet obligato* in the distance thrilling their hearts with a keener zest and a wider sympathy. True, the sympathy was not always in unison, for Piers was an inflexible partisan of his own order, yet in some directions Kate's feelings were in perfect accord. For instance, at Exham Hall and at Atheling Manor-house, there was the same terror of the mob's firebrand, and the same constant watch for its prevention. These buildings were not only the cherished homes of families; they were houses of national pride and record. Yet many such had perished in the unreasoning anger of multitudes mad with suffering and a sense of wrong; and the Squire and the Lord alike kept an unceasing watch over their habitations. On this subject, all were unanimous; and the fears, and frights, and suspicions relating to it drew the families into much closer sympathy.

After the election was over, there was a rapid subsidence of public feeling; the people had taken the first step triumphantly; and they were willing to wait for its results. Then the Richmoor family began to consider an immediate removal to London, and, as a preparatory courtesy, gave a large dinner party at the Castle.

As Kate was not yet in society, she had no invitation; but the Squire and Mrs. Atheling were specially honoured guests.

“The Squire has been of immense service to me,” said Richmoor to his Duchess. “A man so sincere and candid I have seldom met. He has spoken well for us, simply and to the point, and I wish you to pay marked attention to Mrs. Atheling.”

“Of course, if you desire it, I will do so. Who was Mrs. Atheling? Is she likely to be detrimental in town or troublesome?”

“She is the daughter of the late Thomas Hardwicke, of Hardwicke—as you know, a very ancient county family. She had a good fortune; in fact, she brought the Squire the Manor of Belward.”

“In appearance, is she presentable?”

“She was very handsome some years ago. I have not seen her for a long time.”

“I dare say she has grown stout and red; and she will probably wear blue satin in honour of her husband’s Tory principles. These county dames always think it necessary to wear their party colours. I counted eleven blue satin dresses at our last election dinner.”

“Even if she does wear blue satin, I should like you to be exceedingly civil to her.”

“I suppose you know that Piers has been at Atheling a great deal. I heard in some way that—in fact, Duke, that Piers and Miss Atheling were generally considered lovers.”

The Duke laughed. “I think I understand Piers,” he said.

“These incendiary terrors have drawn people together; and there has also been the election business as well. Many perfectly necessary natural causes have taken Piers to Atheling.”

“Miss Atheling, for instance!”

“Oh, perhaps so! Why not? When I was a young man, I thought it both necessary and natural to have a pretty girl to ride and walk with. But riding and walking with a lovely girl is one thing; marrying her is another. Piers knows that he is expected to marry Annabel Vyner; he knows that for many reasons it will be well for him to do so. And above all other considerations, Piers puts his family and his caste.”

The Duke’s absolute confidence in his son satisfied the Duchess. She looked upon her husband as a man of wonderful penetration and invincible wisdom. If he was not uneasy about Piers and Miss Atheling, there was no necessity for her to carry an anxious thought on the subject; and she was glad to be fully released from it. Yet she had more than a passing curiosity about Kate’s mother. The Squire she had frequently seen, both in the pink of the hunting-field and in the quieter dress of the dinner-table. But it so happened that she had never met Mrs. Atheling; and, on entering the great drawing-room, her eyes sought the only lady present who was a stranger to her.

Mrs. Atheling was standing at the Duke’s side; and she went directly to her, taking note, as she did so, of the beauty, style, and physical grace that distinguished the lady. She saw that she wore a gown—not of blue—but of heavy black satin, that it fell

away from her fine throat and shoulders, and showed her arms in all their exquisite form and colour. She saw also that her dark hair was dressed well on the top of the head in *bouillonés* curls, and that the only ornament she wore was among them,—a comb of wrought gold set with diamonds,—and that otherwise neither brooch nor bracelet, pendant nor ruffle of lace broke the noble lines of her figure or the rich folds of her gown. And the Duchess was both astonished and pleased with a toilet so distinguished; she assured herself in this passing investigation that Mrs. Atheling was quite “presentable,” and also probably desirable.

The favourable impression was strengthened in that hour after dinner when ladies left to their own devices either become disagreeable or confidential. The Duchess and Mrs. Atheling fell into the latter mood, and their early removal to London was the first topic of conversation.

“We have no house in town,” said Mrs. Atheling; “but the Squire has rented one that belonged to the late General Vyner. It is in very good condition, I hear, though we may have to stay a few days at *The Clarendon*.”

“How strange! I mean that it is strange you should have rented the General’s house. Did you make the arrangement with the Duke?”

“No, indeed; with a Mr. Pownell who is a large house agent.”

“Mr. Pownell attends to the Duke’s London property. I am sure he will be delighted to know his old friend’s home is in such

good hands. I wonder if you have heard that the Duke is General Vyner's executor and the guardian of his daughter?"

Mrs. Atheling made a motion indicative of her ignorance and her astonishment, and the Duchess continued, "It is quite a charge everyway; but there was a life-long friendship between the two men, and Annabel will come to us almost like a daughter."

"A great charge though," answered Mrs. Atheling, "especially if she is yet to educate."

"Her education is finished. She is twenty-two years of age. It is her wealth which will make my position an anxious one. It is not an easy thing to chaperon a great heiress."

"And if she is beautiful, that will add to the difficulty," said Mrs. Atheling.

"I have never seen Miss Vyner. I cannot tell you whether she is beautiful or not so. She joins us in London, and my first duty will be to present her at the next drawing-room."

A little sensitive pause followed this statement,—a pause so sensitive that the Duchess divined the desire in Mrs. Atheling's heart; and Mrs. Atheling felt the hesitancy and wavering inclination weighing her wish in the thoughts of the Duchess. A sudden, straight glance from Mrs. Atheling's eyes decided the question.

"I should like to present Miss Atheling at the same time, if you have no objection," she added. And Mrs. Atheling's pleasure was so great, and her thanks so candid and positive, that the Duchess accepted the situation she had placed herself in with

apparent satisfaction. Yet she wondered *why* she had made the offer. She felt as if the favour had been obtained against her will. She was half afraid in the very moment of the proposal that she was doing an imprudent thing. But when she had done it, she never thought of withdrawing from a position she must have taken voluntarily. On the contrary, she affected a great interest in the event, and talked of “the ceremonies Miss Atheling must make herself familiar with,” of the probable date at which the function would take place, and of the dress and ornaments fitting for the occasion. “And the young people must meet each other as soon as possible,” she continued.

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