

Blackmore Richard Doddridge

Dariel: A Romance of Surrey



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R. D. Blackmore

Dariel: A Romance of Surrey

CHAPTER I

A NIGHTINGALE

If any man came to me, and said, "You are going to tell your tale, good sir, without knowing how to handle it," I should look at him first with some surprise, and anger at his interference, yet in a very few minutes, unless he wanted to argue about it, probably he would have my confession, and a prayer for his assistance. For every one knows how to do a thing, much better than the one who does it.

In spite of all that, I will declare in a truthful manner unabashed, whatever I know concerning the strange affairs which have befallen me; and perhaps if you care to look into them, you will admit that even now, when the world supposes itself to be in a state of proud civilization, there are things to be found near its centre of perfection which are not quite up to the standard of the Lord.

Towards the middle of the month of May, in a year which I never shall forget, I happened to be riding home from Guildford in the county of Surrey, after a long but vain attempt to do a little business for my father. For we were not, as we used to be, people of wealth and large estates, and such as the world looks up to; but sadly reduced, and crippled, and hard-pushed to make a living. And the burden of this task had fallen most heavily upon me, because I was the only son at home, and my father's mind was much too large to be cramped with petty troubles. So that when he had been deprived of nine-tenths of his property, and could not procure any tenants for the rest, it became my duty to work the best of the land that still remained, and make both ends meet, if possible.

To a young man this was no great hardship unless he were spoiled for country life by ambition, or sloth, or luxury; and it seemed to me at first a welcome change, to be recalled from Oxford and from Lincoln's Inn, and set to watch the earth and sky, instead of ink and paper. And although there were storms and swamps of loss and disaster, to cross continually, I was always at the point of getting on, if only there came just a little turn of luck. But that which seemed to baffle mainly my most choice endeavours, was that when I had done good work, and made good staple – as it seemed to me – never a man to whom I showed it (at the most reasonable figure) would stop to look at it for a moment in a reasonable spirit; because, whatever I had to offer was, by strange coincidence, the very thing my fellow-creatures happened not to want just then.

What had I done, this very day, but carried into Guildford market, more than twelve miles from our home, samples of as fair, and fat, and thoroughly solid grain, as ever was grown to be ground in England? And what had the dealers said to me? "Tut, tut! what call you that? Not so bad for an amateur. Try again, sir, try again. Sir Harold must grow it cheaper." And they made me not a single offer, such as I could think of twice; while the farmers looked askance, and smiled very kindly and respectfully, yet as if I had no business there, and must soon discover my sad mistake.

"Never mind what they think," I exclaimed to myself, "or how they laugh at all I can do. Wait a bit, wait a bit, my friends. We are not come to the bottom of the basket yet. Hold up, ancient Joseph."

Ancient Joseph was the only horse now remaining with us, who could get along at all, without a plough or waggon at his heels or tail. Like us, he had seen better days; and like us he did not dwell upon them. Faithful, generous, and conscientious, he kept up to his own standard still, and insisted upon his twelve miles an hour, whenever his head was homeward. It was in that pleasant direction now; and much as I longed for a gentle glide of the soft May breeze around me, and a leisurely gaze at the love of the year, now telling its tale in the valleys, that old fellow (sniffing his oats leagues away) cared for nothing but a quick stroke towards them. Much as I wanted to think about the money

that I ought to have got, but couldn't, this horse between my legs was so full of what he meant to be filled with, that I was compelled to attend to his mood, instead of giving rein to my own; lest haply a ditch should be our conclusion.

Without any heed we scoured past the loveliest views in England, as people in a train are forced to do; till Old Joe's wind became a gale, more adverse now than favourable. His four legs, which had been going like two, began to go like a figure of four, and he gave me to understand through the flaps of leather, that his heart was repentant of having its own way. On the ridge of the hills at the four cross-roads, I allowed him therefore a welcome rest, having the worst of the road before us, and the shadows growing deeper.

Perhaps I had prided myself too much upon seldom indulging in whims and freaks, as my elder brother Harold did, to his great disadvantage and our own; and now at the age of twenty-five, I should have known better than to begin. But some strange impulse (which changed the whole course of my life from that hour) seized me, as I stopped to breathe my horse opposite that old direction-post.

"To Cobham and Esher" was on the left arm; the forward one pointed to a village near our home, and that was the road I had always taken. But the arm that would have pointed to the right, if it had been in its duty, was not there now, though a double mortice-hole gave token of its late existence. And the lane towards the right, of which it should have told us, seemed rather desirous of evading notice, and certainly had received very little for years from any road-surveyor. Narrow, and overhung, and sinking into sleepy shadows with a fringe of old roots and dead bracken, it afforded a pleasant sense of passing into quietude and loneliness.

Time was more plentiful than money with me, and why should I hurry to tell my father the old tale of failure, so often repeated, but none the more welcome – as an old joke is – by reason of familiarity? I knew the chief outlines of the country pretty well, because an old fox had been fond of it, whom we never brought to book, when the hounds were kept at Crogate Park. How he had beaten us we never knew, beyond having fifty opinions about it, of which only two were in favour with the wise ones – the first that he sank into the bowels of the earth, and the other that he vanished into the clouds of heaven. And the place was lonely enough for him to have taken whichever course he chose, leaving nothing but negative evidence.

Knowing that if I could cross that valley I should probably strike into a bridle-lane which would take me home at leisure, I turned my old horse, much against his liking, into this dark and downhill course, away from the main road, which according to the wisdom of our forefathers followed the backbone of the ridge. Soon we began to descend steep places broken with slippery falls of rock, while branches of thicket and sapling trees shook hands overhead, and shut out the sky. My horse, who had never been down on his knees, and knew perhaps by instinct the result of that attitude in the eyes of men, was beginning to tremble exceedingly; and in fairness to him and myself as well, I jumped off and led him. He looked at me gratefully, and followed without fear, though sometimes sliding with all four feet, and throwing back his head for balance. And perhaps he observed, as soon as I did, that no horse had ever tried that descent, since the rains of winter washed it.

When I was ready to think myself a fool, and wish both of us well out of it, the sweetest and clearest note, that ever turned the air into melody and the dull world into poetry, came through the arching bowers of spring, and made the crisp leaves tremulous. Then as a bud, with its point released, breaks into a fountain of flower, the silvery overture broke into a myriad petals of sensitive song.

"What a stunning nightingale," said I, as a matter-of-fact young Briton might, with never an inkling of idea that the bird meant anything to me. But he seemed to be one of those that love mankind (as the genial robin-redbreast does), or at any rate desire to be thought of kindly, and to finish well what is well begun; for he flitted before me down the hill, and enlivened the gloom with vicissitudes of love.

Listening to this little fellow, and trying to catch sight of him, I was standing with Old Joe's nose in my hand – for he was always friendly – when the music that should lead my life, in the purest

strain came through the air. It was not the voice of a bird this time, but a sound that made my heart beat fast and then held me in rapture of wonder.

Dew of the morning in a moss-rose bud, crystal drops beading a frond of fern, lustre of a fountain in full moonlight – none of these seem to me fit to compare with the limpid beauty of that voice. And more than the sweetest sounds can do, that indite of things beyond us, and fall from a sphere where no man dwells, this voice came home to my heart, and filled it with a vivid sorrow and a vague delight.

Sturdy as I was, and robust, and hardy, and apt to laugh at all sentimental stuff, the force of the time overcame me, as if I had never been educated; and as soon as I rather felt than knew that I was listening to some simple hymn, I became almost as a little child inhaling his first ideas of God. The words that fell upon my ears so softly were as unknown as the tune itself, voice and verse and air combining into a harmony of heaven.

Ought any man to be called a snob, for doing a thing that is below himself, on the impulse of the moment, and without a halt of thought? It is not for me to argue that; but I hope that fair ladies will forgive me, when I confess that I stepped very gently, avoiding every dry twig and stone, across the brown hollow that is generally found at the foot of any steep fall of wood. By this time the lane was gone to grass, and I slipped Old Joe's bit that he might have a graze, while I went in quest of my Siren.

On the further brink of the spongy trough, a dark frizzle of alder and close brushwood was overhanging a bright swift stream, which I recognised as the Pebblebourne, a copious brook, beloved of trout, and as yet little harassed by anglers. Through this dark screen I peered, and beheld a vision that amazed me. Along a fair meadow that bent towards the west, and offered a slim tree here and there – like a walking-stick for evening – the gentle light of day's departure came quite horizontally. There was, as there often is in nature, some deep peace of sadness, which rebukes mankind for its petty cares, and perpetual fuss about itself. And yet there was something in front of all this, to set the heart of a young man fluttering.

On the opposite bank, and within fair distance for the eyes to make out everything, was a niche of dark wall shagged with ivy, and still supporting the grey stonework of a ruined chapel-window, between whose jagged mullions flowed the silvery light of the west and fell upon the face of a kneeling maiden. The profile, as perfect as that of a statue, yet with the tender curves of youth, more like the softness of a cameo, was outlined as in a frame of light against the black curtain of the ivied wall. Beside the kneeling figure lay a head-tire of some strange design, removed perhaps when the hymn was followed by the attitude of prayer.

The beauty and rapture of this devotion made me hold my breath, and feel as if I were profaning it. "Get away, you low intruder," said my better self to me. But it is all very well to talk. It was out of my power to go away. Under this spell I stood, until that gentle worshipper arose with a bend of her graceful neck, and gathered her pale grey robe around her. It was not such a dress as English ladies according to the fashion of the moment wear, with pumpkin sleeves, or with wens upon their shoulders, and puckers, and gathers, and frizzles and scollops, in a mangle of angles and zig-zags. What it was made of is more than I can say; I only know that it was beautiful; drawn in at the waist with a narrow belt, and following rather than trying to lead the harmony of the living form. But one thing caught my attention even so, and that was the flash of a bright red cross on the delicate curve of the bosom.

It appeared to me that tears were sparkling under the fringe of large dark eyes, as the lonely maiden glanced around, while preparing for departure. Then to my surprise – if anything could surprise me further – with a rapid movement she laid bare a gleaming shoulder, and set upon it the tip of a long straight finger. Her face was partly obscured to me by the bend of her arm, but I fancied that she smiled, and was opening her lips to pronounce some words, when suddenly that horse Old Joe, who had been doing his best to lessen the burden of his maintenance, gave vent to a snort of approbation, not of the fair sight across the water – for that was hidden by bushes from him – but at

the juiciness of his graze. My guilty conscience made me start, for I fully expected to be found out in a thing I had never done before; and I felt ashamed to look again, till I knew there was no suspicion. Then a breath of wind turned up a leaf; and who could help glancing under it?

I saw that the beautiful and mysterious damsel had taken some little alarm at the grunt of the greedy quadruped. From the foot of the old chapel-window she was taking something white like a crucifix – though I could not be certain about that; meanwhile she had placed on her head that strange affair which I had seen lying on the ground. To me it looked like an octagonal hat, with a long veil of gauze descending from it, resembling nothing that I had ever seen on a lady's head, to the best of my remembrance; although in bright fact they wear such strange things, and trim them anew so wondrously, that no man must be positive. Whatever it was, it looked very sweet – as the ladies themselves express it – but I grieved that I could see her face no more.

She placed that white object very carefully in the folds of her dress beneath the veil which covered her down to the waist; and then to my great disappointment she was gone, seeming rather to float on the air than to walk with a definite stride, as our ladies make their way. But the quivering points of some pendulous leafage showed that a bodily form had passed there.

I was left in a conflict of wonder, and doubt, and intense desire to know more, mingled with some self-reproach – though the worst of that came afterwards – and a hollow feeling in my heart as if I should never fill it with myself again. Something told me that the proper course, and the most manly and business-like, was to jump on my horse and make him climb the hill anew, and take the high road, and get home at full speed, and never say a word about what I had seen, nor even think about it, if it could be helped.

But I assure you (and I hope again that allowance will be made for me, as a young man not much accustomed to the world, and hitherto heedless of feminine charms) that I found it impossible to do the right thing now. Instead of a lofty and resolute withdrawal, in I went for more of that, of which I had taken too much already. I stuck Old Joe's bit into the hungry leather of his most voracious mouth, and came down on his back with a ponderous swing, and girded him with a hard grip of his belly, to show me some more of what he had scared away. Much against his liking – for if ever a horse was totally destitute of romance, here he was and no mistake – with a grunt of remonstrance he plodded into the pebbly ford at the bottom of the hill.

But when we struck into the silence of the meadow, what was I the wiser? Lo, the dusk was settling down in the most indifferent manner, the sunset flush was fading into a faint and chill neutrality, the trees had no shadow, and, worst of all, no sign or even memory of any sweet passage among them. Only on the left hand some hundred yards away was a black door set in an old grey wall, which curved along leisurely as far as I could see, and offered no other entrance.

"I am not the sort of fellow to put up with this," I exclaimed to myself impatiently; and yet there was no way to help it just now. And if it came to reason, what business had I there? Still the whole of this land had been ours not more than a century ago, and a true Briton feels that he has his rights, however long he may have lost them. But it is not in his nature to lose sight of reason, though I am not quite so certain how that was with me, as I wandered home slowly along forgotten ways, and knew that my life was changed thenceforth.

CHAPTER II

THE FAMILY

It is said, and seems worthy of belief – though denied quite lately by a great Frenchman – that there are in the world no fairer damsels than those of our own dear island. Graceful, elegant, straight and goodly, gentle – which is the first point of all – yet lively and able to take their own part, eager moreover to please, and clever to obtain what they want by doing so, they have no cause to envy their brothers, or feel ungrateful to Providence for making them fair. If any of them do that sometimes, when led astray every now and then by feminine agitators, for the most part they will come back to themselves, if left without contradiction.

My sister Grace, for instance, was one of the best and kindest-hearted English girls that ever blushed. Far in front of me, I confess, in quickness of apprehension, and perception of character, and readiness of answer, and I might almost say in common-sense; though I never quite conceded that, because I had so much need of it. Nevertheless she looked up to me, as her elder by five years, and a man. Therefore, it was my custom always to listen with much toleration to her, and often adopt her views in practice, after shaking my head for the time at them. For she always finished her orations with, "Well, brother George, you are sure to know the best."

Now, if we had none but Grace to deal with, things would have been very different. Not that we could have retrieved our fortunes – of that there was no possibility; still, we might have carried on in our humble way, and kept my father, Sir Harold Cranleigh, comfortable in his old age, and even happy among his books and collection of minerals, and seals and coins. My mother also might have had all she could wish; for she was in truth a very quiet soul, bound up in her children, and fond of little else, unless it were county histories, and the fulfilment of prophecy. Sometimes she was grieved that we occupied now the old cottage in a corner of the Park, which had once been the house of our agent; also at having but a pony-cart, instead of what she was accustomed to. But the grief was not on her own account, and simply for our sake, as we knew well; and we kept on telling her that we liked it better so.

For after all, if one comes to think, those very wealthy folk have no true enjoyment, and no keen relish for anything good. In the first place, they can never feel the satisfaction of having earned, by honest work, their pleasure. It comes to them but as an everyday matter, wearisome, vapid, insipid, and dull. Many of them have a noble spirit, and that makes it all the worse for them. They see and they feel the misery of the poverty around them, but all they can do is of no avail. They are cheated and wronged in their best endeavours; if they show discernment, they are called niggards; if they are profuse, it is ostentation. And if they are large enough not to be soured by any of these expressions, they begin to feel more and more, as time goes on, that the money should stop in the family.

Remembering this, we should have regarded with delicate compassion that very wealthy individual, Mr. Jackson Stoneman. This eminent stockbroker claimed not only our sympathy for his vast riches, but also some goodwill by the relief afforded us in a cumbrous difficulty. My father had long been casting about, as matters went from bad to worse, and farm after farm was thrown up by insolvent tenants, for some one to occupy our old house, Crogate Hall, and the Park as well, for he could not bear to let them separately, and have the old place cut into patches. But there was no one left among the old families of the county, still possessing cash enough to add this to the homes already on their hands. There is much fine feeling and warmth of heart toward one another, among those who have never had much to do, from one generation to another, except to encourage the good people who love order, by punishing those of an opposite turn, and to keep up the line which has always been drawn between landed estate and commerce; as well as to be heartily kind to the poor – even

though they do encroach a little on preserves – and above all to be hospitable not to one another only, but to people of business who know their position.

Our family, one of the oldest in Surrey, and of Saxon lineage, requiring no mixed Norman blood of outsea cutthroats to better it, had always kept its proper place, and been beloved for its justice, generosity, and modesty. Our tenants had never made any pretension to own the lands they held of us, any more than a man to whom I had lent a thousand pounds at interest – supposing that I owned such a sum – would set up a claim to my capital. We were very kind to them as long as they could pay; and throughout their long struggle with the foreign deluge, we made every effort to keep them afloat, reducing their rent to the vanishing point, and plunging with them into poverty. But what can be done, when the best land in England will not pay for working, and is burdened as heavily as ever?

"Cut your coat according to your cloth," is a very fine old precept; and we went on doing so, as Heaven only knows. But when there is no cloth left at all, and the climate is not good enough to supply fig-leaves, wherewithal shall a man be clothed? And for a woman, how much worse – though they sometimes exaggerate their trials. My sister Grace was as lovely a maiden as ever was born of Saxon race, which at its best is the fairest of all. To my mind she was far more beautiful than her sister Elfrida, the eldest of us, now the wife of Lord Fitzragon, who had children of her own, and very seldom came to see us, being taken up with her own world. And one of the things that grieved me most was to see my favourite sister dressed in some common blue serge, with a brown leather belt round her waist, and thick shoes on her delicate feet, like a boy elected by Twickenham parish to the Blue-coat School. For a boy it is all very well, and may lead to the highest honours of the realm; but with a maiden of gentle breed it is not so encouraging.

Notwithstanding this, I say that you might put a lady of any rank you please, and of any wealth to back it up, by the side of my sister Grace; and I know to which of them your eyes would turn. The Lord may see fit, for some good purpose, to set one of His children high and to pluck down another; but He never undoes what He did at the first, and His goodness remains in the trouble. Many girls lowered from their proper line of life, and obliged to do things that seemed hard for them, would have turned sour, and tossed their heads, or at the very least would have taken unkindly to what they were forced to do. And if anybody blamed them for it, the chances are that it would be some one who would have done the very same. But to see our Grace now, you would have thought that she had been born a small yeoman's daughter, or apprenticed quite young to a dairyman. What I mean is – unless you looked at her twice; and to fail of doing that would be quite sufficient proof that you care not for the most interesting thing in all human nature – except perhaps a loving mother – to wit, a gentle, truthful, lively, sweet, and affectionate young maid.

It is not in a man to be so good, and luckily it is not expected of him. Certainly I did speak strongly sometimes, and find fault with the luck, and the world, and the law, and above all with the Government, which every Englishman has a right to do. At such times my sister would scarcely say a word, – which alone is enough to prove her self-command, – but draw down her golden hair between her fingers, and look at me softly from her deep blue eyes, and clearly be trying to think as I thought. When any one whose opinion is at all worth having does that sort of thing, almost any man is pleased with the silence he has created; and his temper improves, as he approves of himself. And so I always felt with Grace, that she might be right, because I was right; and it helped me more than any one might think, to know that my words made a stronger impression on another mind than they left upon my own.

Happy beyond all chance of fortune would be the man who could win such a heart, and be looked at with even deeper love than a sister has for a brother, and feel himself lifted more nigh to heaven than he had any power, or perhaps even any desire of his own to go. But no man so gifted had appeared as yet, neither did we want him to turn up, for the very good reason that Grace Cranleigh was the heart and soul of our little household, just as I, George, was the hand and head, for all practical purposes, though much against my liking.

Because my elder brother Harold, heir to the title and the dwindled heritage, was the proper person to come forward, and take the lead of our forlorn hope, and stand up bravely in the gap, and encourage the elders when thus stricken down and impoverished. But as I have hinted before, we had a trouble almost as bad as mortgages, loss of invested money, and even the ruinous price of corn, and that was a Genius in the family, without any cash to support him. Truly in almost every family the seeds of genius may be found, but most of them are nipped in early days, or start in some harmless direction. But Harold's was not to be cured like this, for it started in every direction, with a force that left nothing to be desired, except the completion of something. There was no conceit in this brother of mine, neither any defect of energy. No matter what he took up, not only was he full of it for the time, but perfectly certain that nothing of equal grandeur had dawned upon the human race till now. Time would fail me to begin the list of his manifold inventions, for every one was greater than the one before it, and in justice to him I should have to go through all. While there were difficulties in the way, his perseverance was boundless. But the moment he had vanquished them, and proved that there was little more to do, as sure as eggs are eggs he would stop short, exclaim, "Oh, any fool can do that!" and turn his great powers to something even greater.

We all admired him, as no one could help doing, for he was a wonderfully taking fellow, gentle, handsome, generous, and upright, a lover of Shakespeare, a very fine scholar, as tender to animals as if he knew their thoughts, and in every way a gentleman, though not fond of society. But the worst of it was that we had to pay for him; and this was uncommonly hard to do, under our present circumstances. For inventors must have the very best material, as well as the finest tools for their work, and some one of skill to hold things in their place, and to bear the whole blame when the job miscarries. We were grieved, when instead of the untold gold which was to have set us staggering, a basketful of bills was all that came, with headings that sent us to the Cyclopædia, and footings that spelled the workhouse.

"What is all this about letting the old house?" Harold had asked me, without indignation, but still with some sadness at our want of faith, the very last time I had seen him. "You have so very little foresight, George! You forget altogether how easy it is to let a man in; but to get him out again, there's the rub; and how often the landlord is forced to take the roof off!"

"The rub has been to get him in, this time," I answered in my dry submissive way, for I never tried to reason with such a clever fellow. "The doors are scarcely large enough for a man of such substance. And as for the roof, it was taking itself off, after three years without any repairs, and no one to ask where the leaks were. I think it is a wonderful piece of luck that Mr. Jackson Stoneman, a man of extraordinary wealth, has taken such a fancy to the poor old place. It was Grace who showed him round, for there was no one else to do it. And she says that although he may not be quite accustomed –"

"Oh, I don't wish to hear any more about him. I detest the idea of letting our old house, and the Park, and the stables, I suppose he wants them all. And just when I am at the very point of securing a patent, which must restore us to our proper position in the county; for the model is as good as finished. No lease, no lease, my dear George. If you let him in, have a binding agreement to get him out at any time, with three months' notice. And when you speak of roofing, have you quite forgotten that I have discovered a material which must supersede all our barbarous plans for keeping the sun and the rain out?"

"Oh, yes, I remember. You mean to let them in," I replied, without any attempt at sarcasm, but having a vague recollection of something.

"Undoubtedly I do, to a certain extent; and then to utilise them. Every great idea must be in accordance with nature, instead of repelling her. Now the sun and the rain – but just give me that sheet of paper, and in two minutes you will see it all. It is the most simple and beautiful idea. All I fear is that some one else may hit upon it. But, George, I can trust you, because you are so slow."

With pencil and compass he was sure to be happy for an hour or more and come beaming to dinner; so I left him, and went to tell my father that his eldest son, whose consent he required, had

given it to that most necessary step, the letting of Crogate Hall and Park to some eligible tenant. Not only was a very great burden removed, – for we could not bear to see the old place lapse into ruin, – but also a welcome addition was made to our very scanty income. For the great stockbroker paid a handsome rent without any demur, and began for his own sake to put everything into good order. Once more the windows shone with light instead of being grimed with dust and fog; and the Park was mown, and the deer replaced, and the broad expanse of lawn was gay with cricket colours and the pretty ways of women.

But we in our corner kept ourselves at a distance from such enjoyment. Not through any false pride, or jealousy of a condition which had once been ours; but simply because, as my father said, and my mother agreed with him warmly, it had never been the habit of our family to receive entertainment which it could not return. Our home-made bread was (for relish and for nurture) worth fifty of their snowy Vienna stuff, and a pint of the ale which I brewed myself was better than a dozen of their dry champagne, or a vintage of their Chateau this and that. But they would never think so; and if Englishmen choose to run down their own blessings, as they do their merits, let the fashion prevail, while the few who can judge for themselves hold fast their convictions.

CHAPTER III

TOM ERRICKER

Mr. Jackson Stoneman was – so far as I could make him out, without having had six words with him – a very clever City-man, yet keeping two sides to his life, as he could well afford to do. At an early age he had come into the chief control of a long-established firm, one of those that venture little, but keep on rolling from age to age the ball of accumulating gold. This globe of all human delight was not at all likely to slip between such legs as his; though the wicked metal will do that sometimes, and roll away down the great hill of despair. He attended very strictly to the main chance of all humanity, the object for which we were born and die. That of course ruled his existence; but the people who met him outside the covert, or rode with him when the scent was hot, declared that he was a most excellent fellow, ready at an answer, intelligent of hounds, skilful of hand and full of pluck, neither showing off nor shirking work, and as courteous to a farmer as to the Lord-Lieutenant.

This was high praise for a man of his position. And we found before long that every one confirmed it. He took a large farm off our hands which had long been begging anybody to take it; and though his solicitor was keen enough to grind down the rent to the lowest figure, and insist upon many new conditions, we could not blame his principal for that, and were well aware that landlords nowadays must be grateful to any who will patronise them. In fact, we had no other grievance against him, except that he was rich and we were poor; and I am sure that we were not so narrow-minded as to feel any grudge on that account. My mother especially – as behoved one of the most charitable of women – found many good excuses for a practice of his, which some might have taken as a proof of want of taste. Our cottage was beside the direct road from the Hall to the nearest railway station, for no line had cut up our neighbourhood as yet. Every morning, at least except on Saturday and Sunday, when we were sitting down to breakfast, a rattle of wheels and clank of silver harness would explain itself into Mr. Jackson Stoneman, sitting bolt-upright with a cigar in his mouth, and flourishing a long tandem-whip, while a couple of glittering chestnuts whirled him along the smooth road, and a groom in white buckskins and top-boots accordingly sat behind, and folded his arms in contempt of the world. Grace like a child, though she was dignity itself when any stranger looked at her, used to run to the window and exclaim, "Oh, what loves of horses! How everything shines, and how well he drives!"

"Who couldn't drive a team of circus horses?" was the first thing I said, but she took no notice. And the next morning, when the thing came jingling by, and she stopped my sugar to stare at it – "Perhaps you long to be upon that spare cushion," I remarked; for what man can put up with his sister's nonsense? And after that, she never knew when the brilliant tandem passed, which made me feel a little ashamed of myself.

However, I will not blame the great stockbroker – "Stocks-and-Stones" was the name I gave him, without meaning harm, but the nickname spread, and gave him some trifling annoyance, I fear – what right has any man to blame another for a little bit of thoughtlessness, redressed at first perception? Somebody told Stoneman, or perhaps he found it out, for nothing escaped him, that I was displeased at his flashing by like that, not on my own account, as scarcely need be said; and the next week he took another road to the station, half a mile longer and much worse for his horses. And so we lost sight of his handsome turn-out, to which we were getting accustomed and began to set our time-piece by it.

All these things are small; but what is truly great, unless it be concerned with love, or valour, freedom, piety, or self-denial, and desire to benefit the world at large? And yet, as a rule, we care most about those who dwell little upon such big matters, but carry on pleasantly, and suit us, and amuse us, and seem to be rather below than above us, in mind, and ambition, and standard of life. Tom Erricker knows that he is of that class, and I am welcome to say what I like of him, without

any danger to our friendship. And if I describe him exactly as he is, he will take the better part as a compliment, and tell me that the rest is of my imagination.

As he came to and fro from his chambers in the Temple, my friend Tom was a very bright young fellow, indolent yet restless, perpetually in love, though his loves were of brief continuity, light of heart, impulsive, very eager to oblige, and gifted with a very high opinion of himself, and a profound scorn of everything that he could not understand. He was generous, bold, and adventurous, a keen judge of character according to his own idea, yet a thorough hero-worshipper, very fond of addressing himself in the mirror, and trying to give an impartial account of his own appearance and qualities.

"Well, Tom, my boy," I heard him say one day, for he was confidential to others, as well as to himself, about himself, "you are not looking quite the thing this morning. A few cigars less, Tom, would suit you better. And little crow's-feet already coming! What business have they there at five-and-twenty? It can't be reading too hard, or you would have got through, last time. Never mind, Tom, you are not a bad-looking fellow, though you mustn't suppose you are handsome. There is not enough of you; that's the great fault, – not enough of you to look dignified."

In all this he was perfectly correct, though he might have supposed himself handsome without any very great partiality; for his eyes were of a rich and lively brown, such as many a maiden might have envied. And his features quite regular enough, and short, and full of genial vivacity. He was right enough also in the observation that there was not enough of him to enforce the impression which such wisdom as his should create; for although not by any means a dwarf, he was of less than average stature, while exceedingly active and very well built. But he never said a truer thing in the purest of all self-commune, than that his crow's-feet, if any there were, could not have owed their origin to excess of mental labour. Such is the sort of man one likes; because he can never put one right, when a plague of accuracy comes on.

Now what was my inducement, who shall say? And the reasons come too late to make much difference, when a man has done a very foolish thing. It may have been partly because I had never kept any secret back from Tom, after my long time at school and college with him, and I did not like to do so now; and it may have been also that I felt uneasy about my own behaviour, and longed for some encouragement. Be that as it will, when Tom Erricker came down, as he never failed to do at least once every month, to spend Saturday and Sunday with us, no sooner had I got him in my little den at the back of our cottage where the harness was kept, than I bundled old Croaker, our only stableman, away to his dinner, and with proper introductions poured forth to my friend the whole narrative of that strange affair which I had witnessed as above, but spoken of as yet to no one.

My friend's interjections and frequent questions need not be set down, for he was of the many who can never hear a story without interruption. But when I had assured him for the fiftieth time that there was nothing more to tell, his face, which had been a fine study of amazement, became equally full of oracular wisdom.

"Leave it to me," he said; "leave it to me, George. I will soon get to the bottom of it. I never speak rashly. You know what I am. There is something very deep behind all this. You, who live so near, and are only acquainted with country ways, must not move in the matter. I shall find the key to it. You can do nothing. I get about among people so much; and I know nearly all that goes on in Soho. You have never done a wiser thing than to keep this dark and consult me about it. And a wonderfully lovely girl, you say!"

"Dark let it be if you please," I answered; though I had never even thought about that before, for I do detest all mystery. "Erricker, I told you this in confidence. It looks as if I was wrong in doing even that, when you begin talking in that sort of way. Is it likely that I would let you take it up? If I cannot myself, as a gentleman, pry into a thing I was not meant to see, do you suppose I would let a young fellow" – Tom was my junior by about three months – "a young fellow like you meddle with it?"

"Now don't be in a huff, George;" he spoke with a smile, as if I were making a fuss about nothing. "I have far more important things than this to think of. It was only for your sake that I said a

word. But I always try to be straightforward. Why did I go down in the last exam? They asked me to describe a contingent remainder; and I said it was a remainder that was contingent. Could anything be more correct than that? And yet the infernal old Q. C. said that I must pursue my studies. And now, if I don't get through next time, the glorious tinman will cut short my allowance. But, thank God, I have got a maiden aunt."

The glorious tinman was Tom's worthy father, the head of a great plating firm at Sheffield. Being perpetually involved in law-suits concerning trade-marks and patents, and finding silver and gold enough for a month's heavy plating sink into the long robe, this gentleman had said to his wife, "Why not keep it in the family?" And she had replied, "Oh, how clever our Tom is! None of those councillors understand the trade." Therefore was Tom at the Temple now.

When my friend once began upon his own affairs, and the ignorance of his examiners, he was ready to go on for ever; and so I cut him short with the question which had chiefly induced me to unburden my mind to him.

"The point is this, my dear boy. Ought I to feel ashamed, do you feel ashamed of me, for acting the spy upon a young lady who had no idea I was looking at her? Speak plainly, I won't be offended."

"If I ever get through, I am sure to be a judge," Tom Erricker replied, with a glance of deprecation at his rather "loud" suit of red-and-white plaid "Dittoes;" "my aunt Gertrude has said so fifty times; and I feel the making of it in me, though it takes a long time in development. And I sum up the merits thus, George Cranleigh. You had no right to begin; but when you had begun, I am blown if I can see how you could help going on. And I should like to go on a lot further with it."

My mind (which was larger then than now, for nothing loses more by wear and tear) was relieved, much more than it would be now by even some valid pronouncement.

"Tom Erricker, you are a brick," I said; "and I don't mind showing you the place. There is plenty of time before dinner yet. Only you must give me your word of honour – not a syllable about it to any one."

"Hands up. That's what we say in our corps," – for he was a member of the "Devil's Own," and a very zealous one, for such a lazy fellow, – "but I could not walk so far without a gun."

This difficulty did not last long; for I ran to the door, and asked my sister to lend her pony Amabel to my friend Tom for an hour or two. Grace was the most obliging girl that was ever too good to be married, and although she felt some kind disdain, as it seemed to me sometimes, for Tom, her pony was heartily at his service, if he would promise not to whip her. Tom came out of our little hole, when this stipulation reached his ears, and he put on his hat for the pleasure and glory of taking it off again to my sister. Among his many tendernesses, the sweetest and biggest of all perhaps was one with our Grace at the end of it. But he knew, as we know such things by instinct, that she never would come in to share it; and though he fetched many a sigh, they were shallow, because hope had never been beneath them.

Off we set in the summer afternoon, for the month was come to June already, with everything going on as if we were nothing. Because I have not said much about it, – as behoves an average young Englishman, – if anybody reads this, he may think that nothing to dwell upon had come home to me, by reason of what I had seen that day when the millers made light of my samples. But this I can declare, and would have done so long ago except for some sense that it was my affair alone, the whole world had been quite a different thing to me, ever since I set eyes upon – well, there is but one to any man worth anything; and does he ever get her?

Tom Erricker was the last fellow in the world to whom one could offer any fine gush of feeling; because he was sadly sentimental sometimes, when his veins of thought were varicose, and when something nasty had happened to himself; but when his spirits were up, you would think there had never been a tear shed in the world, except by some brat who knew not how to cut his teeth. He was now in great exaltation at having fetched me, as he thought, to his level; for I had always regarded his light flirtations with a pleasant turn of humour, and he could not see the difference between himself

and me. So I rode Old Joseph, who was a good tall horse; and he on little Amabel looked up at me, with no more reverence than Sancho Panza showed to the immortal knight, who ever failed to elevate him.

"Give me an open country, not your slash and scratch-pins." There was nothing Tom loved more than talking as if he had followed hounds from his infancy, instead of growing up under a dish-cover; but romancing on such subjects would not go down with me.

"Surely you might have brought us by a better road than this, George. I have had my bad times, I don't mind them in a burst; but I'm blessed if I like being scratched to pieces, with nothing whatever to show for it."

"To talk about, you mean, Tom. Well, here we get out into as pretty a bit of firland as can be found even in Surrey; and that may challenge all England to equal it. But I never go in for the picturesque."

"To be sure, not. The ladies do it ever so much better. To own the land, or at any rate the shooting, is the chief thing for us to care about. And the shooting is worth twice as much as the crops, in the present condition of the market. Never mind, George, I won't talk about that, for I know it is a very sore subject. Do you mean to say that all this belonged to you, not more than fifty years ago?"

"Out of the frying-pan into the fire, as regards the subject," I answered with a smile, for I knew that he never meant to vex me. "But I am sorry that we cannot give you leave even to poke about here with your gun, and pot blackbirds and magpies. There go two magpies! You don't often get so near them."

"Two for a wedding – don't they say? A good omen for you, George. But where the deuce does your nymph hang out? Aha! good hit of mine! A nymph means a bride, doesn't she, in Greek?"

"Shut up!" I said, for this talk was very paltry, and perhaps Tom Erricker's appearance was not quite up to the mark of a romantic moment. My chief desire was to gaze across the valley, down the further side of which, about a mile away, I could trace pretty clearly by its fringe of bushes the windings of the brook which I had crossed that day on my return from Guildford. It seemed to be ages ago, whereas it was only four weeks; but I had thought about it enough to make a very broad space of time. And here was Tom chaffing, and eager to make fun, with his red plaid trousers forced up to his knees by his jerking about in the saddle, and his loftiest air of acquaintance with the world, and his largest smiles of superiority to women. For the moment I longed to deposit him in an ant-hill.

"Well, what can I see? Or what am I to look for?" He spoke as if he had paid me for a view and I was bound to make it worth the money. Whereas, though I did ask his opinion at a distance, it was the last thing I should think of now; and in plain truth, what business had he here at all, and spying about through a shilling eyeglass? But it was not for me to take things as he did. Let him long to enter into them.

"All right," I said. "We will come another day. This may or it may not be the place. Look at your poor legs. They are fat enough; but what a sight for a lady! What a fool you were, not to take my straps!"

"Bless the fellow! Well, you are hard hit, or you would not carry on in this style." Tom turned his eyeglass upon me in a manner which might have provoked me, if I had been capable of thinking twice about him now. "In a blue study, George? Everything looks blue, even the mist in the valley. Has she got blue eyes? Ah! there is nothing like them."

"Blue eyes have no depth. What do you know about eyes?" I spoke with some warmth, as was natural. And then, just to show him how calmly I took his childish and shallow observation, I proceeded as if he had never spoken.

"You see that long mass of black ivy to the right, cutting a sort of jag, or perhaps it is a great curve out of the flat steep line of the meadow?"

"Yes, to be sure I do. Nothing could be plainer. A jag which is a curve at the same time; and a flat meadow which is also steep!"

"Never mind the meadow. You are not so stupid that you can't see the wall, and the ivy on it. Now, Tom Erricker, what do you suppose that to be?"

"How can I tell, about two miles away? Let us go on, and make it out, old chap."

"Not another step. I am not at all sure that I ought to have brought you so far as this. However, you can hold your tongue, I know; and you are upon your honour about all this. Well, that is the wall of an old monastery, more than five hundred years old, I believe, and connected with that ancient chapel on the hills. Naturally, it is all in ruins now, and there has been an attempt to set a mill up in its place."

"The best thing to be done with it," Tom replied, for his nature was not reverent. "But a mill should have paid, if it had any water. Free trade has not had time to destroy the pounders yet, although it has killed the producers. But I don't want to hear about monks and mills. The lovely nuns are more to my taste."

"What nuns could there be in a monastery, Tom? You are even more abroad than usual. But though I have not been near the place, since the time I told you of, and we have nothing to do with that valley now, I have put a few quiet questions here and there, and I find that the old place has been sold to a foreign gentleman, whose name our fine fellows cannot pronounce."

"Oho! That becomes very interesting. He's papa of the beautiful nymph, no doubt. But you never mean to say that you left off there?"

"Certainly I do. How could I go prying? What Englishman would ever think of meddling with his neighbours? And a foreigner, too, who has come here for quiet – "

"Bother!" replied Tom. "If they have lovely daughters, everybody has a right to find out all about them. I'll bet you a hat it is some wicked old conspirator, a Nihilist perhaps, or at least an Anarchist, taking advantage of our stupid hospitality, to hatch some fiendish plot, and blow up some foreign monarch, with whom we pretend to be in strict friendship. Why, only a few months ago – "

"No more of that. I hoped to have found a little common-sense in you. As if it were possible that that – that perfect – "

"Angel!" cried Tom. "You can't get beyond that. And I am blessed if I ever could have believed that a sensible, slow-going bloke like you, George – "

I took hold of his bridle, and turned Amabel homeward, and gave her such a sharp little flick behind that my friend had as much as he could do to keep in the saddle, for the best part of the way back to our cottage. For we never grudged oats to our horses.

CHAPTER IV

MR. STONEMAN

No man who has to contend with the world, and support those he loves against it, cares twopence about being taken for a fool by the people he has to contend with. Their opinion to this effect frequently is of some service to him, and very seldom hurts him, unless he wants to get into their employment, or to borrow money from them. And in the latter point it even helps him, when he has good security to give.

There is a certain worm, whose name I know not, being all abroad in natural history, whose habit it is to come out of the ground and give himself an airing late at night. And then if you moisten him from above, in September or October, so grateful is he – or, if you deny him that lofty feeling, so sensitive – that he glitters like any glow-worm.

With no less amplitude, perhaps, a man who has deep emotions, such as shy ambition, or literary yearnings, or passionate humanity, or true love of a woman, sometimes lets himself out at night, when small things are lost to the eyes, and the larger objects begin to assert themselves. For after all, what are the toys of the day, for which we sweat, and fight, and crawl, and rack our poor brains till they cry for the revolver – even if we get such gauds, what are they, to make up for the gentle delight we have lost, of the days when we loved all the world, and the moments when some one tried to do the like to us?

Now nothing of this kind comes in here, for verily I had been cheated too often to rush into the embrace of the universe. But for the life of me, I cannot tell how to explain the behaviour of a man, keener by a thousandfold, and harder than in my worst moments I could long to be, except by such principles, or (if they are not that) such want of principle, such backsliding, such loosening of texture, and relapse into nature, as we feel even in ourselves sometimes, and are more ashamed of them in voice than heart. However, let every one judge for himself.

It must have been close upon St. Swithin's Day, for people were watching the weather as they do, to keep up the fine old legend, when after a long turn among the hay, which was very late that year, I sat in my little den after dark, considering my pipe, or perhaps allowing it to consider for me, because I was tired with a hard day's work, and fit for nothing but putting my legs up. While we were so busy with the only thing worth growing now in England, because it grows itself, the wisest plan was to dine, or at least to feed, among it, and be content. And to feed upon it is what the true Briton must come to, whenever a great war arises. The man who has shut his eyes, must also shut his mouth, as the proverb hath it.

While I was nodding at every puff, and full of the sleepy scent of hay, the sound of a step, and the darkening of my open doorway, aroused me. "Come in, Bob," I said, "anything the matter?" For some of our ricks had been carried rather green, and we were still obliged to watch them.

"Excuse me for taking you thus by surprise. If you can spare me a few minutes, Mr. Cranleigh, you will do a great favour. It is Jackson Stoneman."

Having seen this rich gentleman chiefly at a distance, and not cared much to look at him, I wondered at his coming in upon me thus, and was rather inclined to resent it. But the thought of my father and mother, and of the great help that his tenancy was to them, compelled me to drop such little points, and receive him with all civility. My snuggerly was but a very little place, forming a part of the harness-room, and resigned (whenever the door was shut) to a very modest share of daylight coming through leaded diamonds, which were certainly not brilliants. So I lit my candles, still having a pair, and offered him my one armchair, an ancient Windsor, with a cushion in the bottom, more cosy than most of the easy-chairs made now to be gazed at rather than sat upon. He thanked me, but

took his seat upon an oaken bench, and looked at me steadily, as if to search my humour. Being of an equable and by no means rapid temper, I returned his gaze with interest, and left him to begin.

"First of all, I must have this settled," – his voice was very clear and rather pleasant, though he showed some signs of nervousness; "it must be understood that whether I am right or wrong in coming to you like this, you will not be annoyed, and turn against me."

"Very well," I said, for the promise was a light one. What harm could I do to a man of his wealth? And if a man offends me, I let him alone, until it is cowardice to do so.

"You attach much importance, I think, Mr. Cranleigh, to questions of birth, and position in the county, and ancient family, and so on?"

"I am not at all aware that I do so. The fact is, that I am too busy now to dwell much upon such things. And their period seems to be over."

I knew that I was talking stuff, and that bitterness made me do it. One glance from his swift eyes showed me that he thought none the more of me for taking such a tone, although for the moment it was genuine.

"If you make little of such matters, I do not," said Stoneman; "neither will any one of common-sense, for many generations yet to come. At least if those who are born to such advantage have the wisdom not to overdo it. But I want to put a few plain questions to you; and from what I have heard and seen of you, I am sure that you will answer them plainly, when you know that they are not impertinent. And I give you my word that they are not that."

"Anything you please, to the best of my knowledge, of anything a stranger has a right to know."

"I am not a stranger altogether; though I have no privilege of friendship. When I tell you what I have come about, you may think that I should have gone to your father first. But I thought it better to give you the chance of saving him from annoyance. In almost every way, you act as the manager now for the family. Am I right in believing that?"

"Yes, as regards all local business. My brother, Harold, would be the proper man; but he is seldom here, and he is not fond of business – business of a small kind, I mean of course."

My visitor smiled, as if he doubted that ever there could be any but small business here; and remembering what we must have been once, I regarded him rather sternly. He was tall, and strongly built, and straight, and plainly dressed, as a man should be, leaving beauty to the beautiful. Not that he was an unsightly fellow, but very good-looking in a certain way. His forehead was large and square, and gave the idea of strength and steadfastness, and his eyes, perhaps too deeply set, but full of vigour and decision. His complexion was dark for an Englishman's, and his close-cropped hair as black as jet, and so was his short moustache, the only growth allowed upon his face. A good clear countenance upon the whole, without any sign of weakness in it, neither of more hardness than a man of the world requires, to hold his own and enlarge it.

He saw that I was "taking stock" of him, – as his own phrase might have been perhaps, – and he waited the result with confidence. Then he put me to some little confusion.

"Well, Mr. Cranleigh, I hope that some of your prejudices are not confirmed. I know that my position here is not very likely to produce goodwill, especially with young men of high spirit. But I will not go into that question now, beyond asking you this as a favour. Have I done anything, since I occupied the Hall, that a stranger should not have done among – among the real owners?"

"Not that I know of. I may say more than that. I may say that you have shown us in every way very kind consideration."

"Thank you. I have tried to do so in everything round here. But now as to taking the hounds, I have given no promise, until I knew your opinion. Would it annoy Sir Harold, or any of your family?"

"Not in the least; especially after you have been so kind as to ask us. They have long left our hands, as you know. My grandfather kept them on, long after he could afford it; but my father never cared for them, and gave it up as soon as possible. As for my brother, he would have nothing to do with them, if he were made of money. And my liking matters of course neither way."

"That seems hard when you do all the work. You mean, I suppose, that you would like to keep them under different circumstances."

"If I were head of the family, and could afford it handsomely. As it is, I would not, even if I could afford it. I should seem to be putting myself too forward."

"Exactly so. And shall not I appear to be putting myself too forward, if I bring them back to the old place, just because I can afford it? Your candid opinion about that."

"Then I think not. No one could take it amiss but ourselves; and we are not so small as that."

"Not even the ladies? Sometimes ladies do not see things quite as we do. They might take it into their heads – I mean, they might think, not unreasonably, that I was of the upstart order."

"There is very little fear of that," I said; "in our family the ladies are never difficult to deal with. They have always been consulted, and therefore they are shy about forming their opinions. It is not as if they had no weight, as among the less solid Norman race. They know that what they say is something; and that makes them like to hear our opinions first."

"That state of things is most interesting, as well as rather unusual." Mr. Stoneman spoke with a smile of calm inquiry, entirely free from irony, and evidently wished me to go on. But I did not see how it concerned a stranger; so I left him to his own affairs.

"He seems a very decent sort of fellow. But if he has come to pump me," thought I, "he will find that the water has gone from the sucker." And he saw that he could not pursue that subject.

"I have lately received a requisition, or whatever is the proper name for it, from several of the people about here, whose acquaintance I made last season, that I should take over the old Crogate hounds, as Lord Wiedeland has resigned them. It was signed by yourself and your brother Harold. That made me think more about it. It seems rather absurd for a busy man like me, who could never be out more than twice a-week, and very seldom as much as that. And I am not such a fool as to care two raps about random popularity; but I want to do what I ought to do; and I will, whenever I know it."

"Then I think that you ought to do this," I answered, seeing that he was in earnest. "You ride very well, you enjoy it thoroughly, and you know quite enough about it to keep things in good order. There is not a man in the neighbourhood who dares take any liberties with you. Joe Stevens, of course, will come over with the pack. He is a host in himself. The kennels are as good as they ever were. And perhaps the hounds will recognise their duty to their ancestors, who lived so happily in the old place."

"Ah, there you touch me up; although I am sure that you never meant it. And that brings me to my second point. If I undertake this affair, upon the distinct conditions which I shall make, will you join me, and be in effect the real master, although my name is used? You are here always, I am generally away. Everybody knows and values you. I am a mere interloper. If you would only help me thus, everything would go beautifully."

Not being very quick of thought, which is upon the whole a benefit, while on the other hand I am uncommonly fond of hunting, I was not far from saying yes, when luckily my pipe went out. With that I arose to get another, and as I stood by the mantelpiece a clearer waft of mind came to me, and showed me the many objections.

"Your offer is wonderfully kind and tempting, and shows more confidence in me than I have earned." I spoke with some emotion, because I felt that last point strongly, having shown no friendship towards this man. "But I cannot accept it, Mr. Stoneman. I will do all I can to make things easy, and to help you to the utmost of my power. But my first duty is to my father and mother. And I could not do this without neglecting that."

"You are right. I was wrong in proposing it. My stable, of course, would have been at your service. But the inroads upon your time, and the many derangements – well, never mind, so long as you are not angry with me for proposing it. But if you will come out with us now and then –"

"Certainly I will, upon our Old Joseph. He ran away with me not very long ago. Some of your young cracks would find him not so very far behind; for he is wonderfully knowing."

"Good for you, I know how that tells up; though I am not a 'Parson Jack,' who laid £5 that he would be in at the death upon his old donkey, and won it. Very well, all that is settled – not exactly as I should wish, but as much as we ever get things. But the next thing I shall never get. And it is the only thing in life I care for."

"I should have thought that a man like you, resolute, very clear-headed, and wealthy, might make sure of everything that in reason he required. With life and health, I mean, of course, and the will of the Lord not against him."

"We never know what is the will of the Lord, until we console ourselves with it. Not that I am a scoffer or even a sceptic, Mr. Cranleigh. And in some of the greatest moments of my life – but I will not bother you with them. Only I may say that I look upon this as the very greatest of them all. I don't want to make a fool of myself – but – perhaps the Lord has done it for me."

He tried to make a little smile of this, and looked as if he wanted me to help him out. But I could only stare, and wonder whether any man ever born is at all times right in his head. For if anybody could be expected to know what he is about at all times, I should have thought that man would be Jackson Stoneman of the Stock Exchange. So I waited, as my manner is, for him to make good sense of this.

Then he got up from his bench and set his face (which had been quivering) as firm as the Funds, and looked down at me – for I was in my Windsor chair again – and his eyes seemed to flash defiance at me, although his voice was tender.

"George Cranleigh, you may think what you like. I care not a rap what anybody thinks. I love your sister Grace, as no man ever loved a woman, or ever will."

My amazement was so great and sudden that I looked at him without a word. For a moment I was beaten out of time by this strong man's intensity.

"I know all the stuff that you will say," he went on with scanty politeness. "That I have not seen her more than half-a-dozen times. That I have no right to lift my eyes to her. That even a mint of money can never make up for the want of birth. That I am nothing but an upstart. That I may be a rogue for all you know. That she is a million times too good, and pure, and beautiful for such a fellow. Go on, go on; I would rather have it over."

"But I have not begun yet, and you give me no time," I answered very steadily, having now recovered myself, and objecting to have my arguments forestalled. "You seem to forget yourself, Mr. Stoneman. There is no necessity for excitement. That a man of the world like you –"

"That is the very point. That's what makes my chance so bad. There is nothing of romance or sweet sentiment about me. I don't know anything about hearts and darts. I have no poetical ideas. I could not fling myself off a rock – if there was one. I don't know how to couch a lance. I am pretty sure, though I have never tried, that I couldn't do a sonnet, at any price. And if I did, and it leaked out, it would be the ruin of my business."

"You can buy a sweet sonnet for five shillings, as good as they make them nowadays, but a little common-sense is better than a thousand sonnets; and of that, when you are at all yourself, you must have a very large supply. Now sit down, and let us talk this out. At first it came to me as a very great surprise. It was about the last thing that I could have expected. But I think you were wise in coming first to me."

When I look back upon this interview, it often astonishes me that I should have been able so quietly to take the upper hand with a man not only my elder and of tenfold experience in the world, but also before me in natural gifts, and everything that one could think of, except bodily strength and the accident of birth. Nevertheless I did at once, after that weak confession of his, take a decided lead upon him. Why? Because he was plunged into love – a quicksand out of which no man attempts to pull another, being well aware what he would get for his pains, and rather inclined to make sport of him, whenever it may be done, without harm to oneself.

"Well," I said, after waiting to see whether he would make another start; but even his vigour was unequal to that, and he felt that he had trespassed over the British bounds of self-control – "well, let us look at this affair like men, and as if there were no woman in it." He lifted his hand, by way of protest, as if I were begging the question; but seeing how judicious my view was, and desiring perhaps to conciliate me, he pulled out a large cigar and did his best to light it. "You may take it," I proceeded, with much magnanimity and some contempt, little presaging my own condition in less than a month from that very day, "that I look at these subjects sensibly. I have every reason so far to like you, because you have behaved very well to us. You behaved very handsomely and justly, long before – well, long before you could possibly have taken this strange turn."

"What a way to put it! But let everything be straight. I should never have taken the Hall unless – I mean if anybody else had been there to show me – to show me what a nice place it was."

"I see. Well, never mind how it began. But I will be as straight as you are. It is difficult for me to do that, without saying some things to offend you."

"Say what you please, Mr. Cranleigh. Say what you will, I shall not forget whose brother you are, and that you mean to do your duty to her."

"To the best of my power. In the first place, then, do you know what the character of our Grace is? She is gentle, and shy, and affectionate, and unselfish as a girl alone can be. On the other hand, she is proud, and high-spirited, and as obstinate as the very devil. Of money she never thinks twice, except for the sake of those around her. She has the very loftiest ideals, which she cherishes, but never speaks of them. Can a money-maker realise them?"

This I ought never to have said; for it pained him very bitterly. He made no answer; but the expression of his face showed that I had hit his own misgivings.

"Not that I would make too great a point of that," I proceeded more politely; "for a woman is not like a man altogether, however consistent she may be. And Grace is only a girl after all, so that no one must be too certain. She forms her own opinions to some extent, and nothing will work her out of them. She takes likes and dislikes at first sight, and she declares they are always justified –"

"You don't happen to know, I suppose – I mean you have not formed any idea –"

"What she thought of you, Mr. Stoneman? No. I was rather surprised that she never said a word that day she was sent for to give you the keys. The utmost I could get out of her was, 'Oh, yes, he was very polite, very polite, I assure you.' And so it is still; as if your entire nature was politeness, and you consisted of good manners."

"Manners maketh man." My visitor spoke for the first time lightly, and the smile on his face was no small improvement. "But you will think that I cannot claim them, if I delay any longer to thank you. You have taken what I had to tell you much better than I could have expected; and for that I am very grateful. But I want to know this. I have heard a good deal of the importance attached by the Cranleighs to their very old lineage – Saxon, I believe. But my family has no such claims. We can boast no more than this – for three, or four generations at the most, we have been well educated and well off. All business men, no lords of the land, no knights with coats of mail, and legs crossed upon a slab. Now does that make you look down upon me from the height of Salisbury steeple?"

Without any knowledge of his wealth, such as most of us look up to, it would have been hard for any one to look down upon the man before me. And sooth to say, there are plenty of men in his position, and of far lower birth than his, who would have considered themselves at the top, and me at the bottom of the tower. But before I could answer, a sudden flush came over his face, and he rose in haste – for I had made him sit down again – and he seemed to be trying very hard to look as if he were not where he was. Perhaps his conscience told him that he was caught in the attempt to steal a march.

But my sister Grace (who had just come in with her usual light step, to tempt me to have at least a glass of beer before despising everything), by some extraordinary gift of sight – though there never have been straighter eyes – Grace never saw that great stockbroker, who wanted her not to look at him.

"George, this is too bad of you again," she began with a smile, almost too sweet for home-consumption only. "Work, work, all day, double, double, toil and trouble; and scarcely a morsel of nourishment!"

"Not a bit to eat, is what you generally say, and ever so much better English." I spoke in that way, because I really do dislike all affectation, and I was sure that she had espied the stockbroker.

"Never mind how I express it," said Grace, and I thought that rather independent of her, and it confirmed my conviction that she knew of some one too ready to make too much of her. "If you understand it, that is enough. But do come, darling George, you make us so sadly anxious about you. What should we do, if you fell ill? And your poor dear eyes that were so blue – the loveliest blue – oh, such a blue – "

She knew that her own were tenfold bluer, and mine no more than cigar-ash to them. Now a man can put up with a lot of humbug from a sister who is good to him; but he must be allowed to break out sometimes, or she herself will soon make nought of him. And all this unusual gush from Grace, because I had missed my supper beer. When she offered to kiss my poor lonely brow, it annoyed me, as I thought of being superseded.

"My dear child," I said, waving my hand towards the corner where Stoneman looked envious, "the light is very dim; but I really should have thought that you must have seen Mr. Stoneman there. Mr. Stoneman, allow me to apologise for my sister's apparent rudeness. I fear that she over-tries her eyes sometimes."

The stockbroker favoured me with a glance, as if he longed to over-try my eyes too; and then he came forward and offered his hand to my discomfited sister, with the lowest bow I ever did behold. All this was a delight to me; but neither of them for the moment seemed to be enjoying it.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Stoneman," said our Grace, recovering herself with a curtsy, as profound as his bow, and a thousand times more graceful. "Really I must take to spectacles. But I hope, as you have heard my little lecture, you will join me in persuading my dear brother to take a little more care of himself. He works all day long; and then at night he sits all by himself and thinks – as I thought he was doing when I came so in the dark."

After a few more words she left us, departing with a dignity which showed how wrong I must have been in suspecting her of levity.

"She is – she is – " Mr. Stoneman stopped, for he could not find anything grand enough. "Oh, I wish I might only call you *George*."

"With all my heart," I replied quite humbly, perceiving a touch of bathos, which in human affairs is almost sure to mean a return to common-sense. "All over the farm they call me *George*, at any rate behind my back."

"Then, my dear George, I will leave you now. I have had a most delightful visit; and I wish to go and think about it. But do not suppose for a moment that I shall cherish any foolish hopes. I know what I am, and what she is. Did you see how she walked from the table? And my cigar was smoking on it."

"Shall I tell you what to do, my friend?" I answered rather pettishly; "you are famous for strong decision, as well as quick sagacity. Exert a little of them now, and put away this weakness."

"It is not my weakness. It is my strength."

Before I could speak again, he was gone. And verily, when I went out of doors, and saw the stars in their distant gaze, and felt the deep loneliness of night, it struck me that perhaps this man was wise – to set his heart upon a constant love, some warmth and truth not far to seek, and one at least who would never fail to feel his thoughts and endear his deeds.

CHAPTER V

TICKNOR'S MEW

Some men there are whom it is a pleasure to observe at their daily work. How they swing their shoulders, and sway their arms, and strain the strong cordage of the bulky thigh, casting weight as well as muscle into the fight they are waging! And this pleasure should be made the most of, because it is growing very rare. I have heard my grandfather say, that when he was a boy, one man could do, ay and would insist on doing, more work in a day, than is now to be got out of three by looking hard at them – three men of the very same stock and breed, perhaps even that grandfather's own grandchildren. And the cause which he always assigned for this, though not a bad scholar himself, and even capable of some Latin, was the wild cram and pressure of pugnacious education. "The more a jug gurgles, the less it pours," was his simple explanation.

There is much to be said on the other side, especially as the things put into their heads are quick enough to go out again, and the Muses as yet have not turned the village-boy into a Ganymede; but the only man, on our little farm, who ever worked with might and main had never been at school at all, and his name was Robert Slemmick. To this man nothing came amiss, if only there was enough of it. He was not particularly strong, nor large of frame, nor well put together; but rather of a clumsy build and gait, walking always with a stoop, as if he were driving a full wheel-barrow, and swinging both arms at full speed with his legs. But set him at a job that seemed almost too heavy for him, and he never would speak, nor even grunt, nor throw down his tool and flap his arms, but tear away at it, without looking right or left, till you saw with surprise that this middle-sized man had moved a bigger bulk in the course of a day than a couple of hulking navvies.

But one fault he had, and a very sad fault, which had lost him many a good place ere now, and would probably bring him to the workhouse – he was what is called by those who understand such matters a "black buster." At the nearest approach I could make to this subject, sidling very carefully – for the British workman would be confidential rather to a ghost than to his own employer – it seems that there are two kinds of "busters." The white one, who only leaves work for a spree of a day or two, meaning to jollify, and to come back in a chastened vein, after treating all his friends, and then going upon trust; and the black, who is of a stronger mind. This man knows better than to waste his cash upon clinking glasses with a bubble at the top. He is a pattern for weeks and months together, pours every shilling on a Saturday night into the hands of his excellent wife – for it is his luck to have a good one – sits in a corner with his quiet pipe at home, and smiles the smile of memory when the little ones appeal to his wisdom. And so he goes on, without much regret for adventure, or even for beer, beyond the half-pint to which his wife coerces him.

Everybody says, "What a steady fellow Bob is! He is fit for a Guild, if he would only go to Church." He ties the Canary creeper up, and he sees to his cabbages, upon a Sunday morning. And the next-door lady shakes her head over the four-feet palings, with her husband upstairs roaring out for a fresher, after a tumble-down night of it. "Oh, if my Tom was like your Mr. Robert!" But Mrs. Bob also shakes her head. "Oh, yes, he is wonderful good *just now*."

Then comes the sudden break down, and breakaway. Without a word to any one, or whisper to his family, off sets Mr. Robert, on a Monday morning generally, after doing two good hours' work, before breakfast. Perhaps he has been touched on the virtuous road home, by a fine smell of beer at the corner, where the potboy was washing the pewters, and setting them in the sun for an airing; perhaps it was a flower that set him off, a scarlet Geranium, who can tell? Under some wild impulse he bolts and makes away; he is in the next parish, before his poor wife has given up keeping the tea-pot warm; and by the time she has knocked at the tool-house door, in the forlorn hope that he may be ill, he is rousing the dust of the adjoining county, still going straight ahead, as if the Devil were after him.

And that last authority alone can tell how Bob lives, what he thinks of, where his legs and arms are, whence his beer flows down to him, for a month, or even half-a-year, or nobody knows how long it is.

This Robert Slemmick had been in our employment ever since last Candlemas, and had only broken out once as yet, in the manner above described. Excepting only that little flaw, his character was excellent, and a more hard-working, obliging, intelligent man never came on any premises. When I took him back after his escapade, I told him very plainly that it would not be done again; and he promised to stick to his work, and did so. But not a word to me, or anybody else, as to why he went away, or whither, or what he had been doing, or how he got his living. Knowing how peculiar the best men are – otherwise could they be good at all? – I tried not to intrude upon the romance of his Beerhaven, but showed myself rather cold to him, though I longed to know about it.

"Master Jarge," said this man one day, when he was treading a hayrick, and I was in the waggon with the fork below; and it must according to the times have been the very day after Jackson Stoneman came to me, "Master Jarge, what would 'e give to know summut as I could tell 'e?"

He had had a little beer, as was needful for the hay; and I looked at him very seriously; reminding him thus, without harshness, of my opinion of his tendencies. But he did not see it in that light.

"You shape the rick," I said. "I don't want to hear nothing." For you must use double negations if you wish them to understand you. We were finishing a little rick of very choice short staple, with a lot of clover in it, and *Old Joe* in the shafts was likely to think of it many a winter night. At such a juncture, it will not do to encourage even a silent man.

Bob went cleverly round and round, dealing an armful here and there, for a very small round rick is the hardest of all for scientific building, and then he came back to the brink close to me, till I thought he was going to slide down upon my knees.

"What would 'e give, Master Jarge," he whispered, making a tube of his brown, bristly hand, "to hear all about the most bootifullest maiden as ever come out of the heavens?"

Although I felt a tingle in my heart at this, I answered him very firmly. "Get on with your work. Don't talk rubbish to me."

"You be the steadiest of the steady. Every fool knows that. But I reckon, Master Jarge hath his turn to come, same as every young man the Lord hath made with a pair of eyes. Oh! our Miss Grace, she be bootiful enough. But this one over yonner – O Lord! O Lord!"

He waved his hand towards the valley in the distance, whose outline was visible from where we stood. And dignified as I tried to be, he saw my glance go wandering.

"Why, you knows all about it, Master Jarge! You be clapping your eyes upon the very place! Why, ne'er a man in England hath ever seed the like. And who could a'thought it, a'standing outside!"

"Nonsense!" I said. "Why, you must have been dreaming. Who knows what comes over you sometimes?"

This reference to his "busting" weakness was not in good taste, when the crime had been forgiven, and the subject was known to be hateful to him. But this was the sure way to let his tongue loose; and when a reserved man once breaks forth, he is like a teetotaller going on the spree.

"I could show 'e the place now just, Master Jarge; the place can't run away I reckon. All over ivy-leaves the same as a church-tower. You can't deny of they, when you sees them, can 'e? And the bootiful young gal – why, you've seed her, Master Jarge! By the twinkle of your eyes, I could swear to it."

"Robert Slemmick, you are off your head;" I answered with a very steadfast gaze at him, for his keen little eyes were ready to play "I spy" with mine. "I insist upon knowing where you have been, and what you have done, and what people you have met. If they knew that you were in Sir Harold Cranleigh's service, you may have done us great discredit."

With some indignation he told his tale, and finished it before the other men came back; for his tongue was as brisk as his arms and legs, which had rare gifts of locomotion. But I must fill in what he left out, for it would be neither just nor wise to expect him to inform against himself.

It seems that he was walking very fast, discharging himself from domestic bonds, and responsibility, and temperance, when he came to a black door in a big wall; and rapid as he was, this brought him up. His thoughts, if any, were always far in advance of him at such moments, and perhaps his main object was to overtake them. This he could not explain, and had never thought about it, but at any rate that door should not stop him. It was locked, or bolted, and without a bell, but he worked all his members together against it, as he alone of mankind could do, and what could withstand such progressive power? The door flew open, and in rushed Slemmick, like the London County Council.

But there are powers that pay no heed to the noblest psychical impulse. Two dogs of extraordinary bulk and stature had him prostrate between them in an instant, and stood over him, grinding enormous jaws. Dazed as he was, cold terror kept his restless members quiet, and perhaps he felt – though he did not so confess it – that conjugal law was vindicated. "I were in too terrible a funk to think," was his statement of the position.

But the two dogs appeared to enjoy the situation, and being of prime sagacity were discussing his character between them. If he had been a mere "white buster," that is to say a common tramp, they would have stopped his tramp for ever. But they saw that he was a respectable man, a sound home-liver in his proper state of mind; and although they would not hear of his getting up, they deliberated what they ought to do with him. Slemmick in the meanwhile was watching their great eyes, and their tails flourished high with triumphant duty, and worst of all their tremendous white fangs, quivering if he even dared to shudder.

"Abashed I were to the last degree," he told me, and I could well believe it; "my last thought was to my poor wife Sally." A good partner, to whom his first thoughts should have been. But while he was thus truly penitent I hope, a clear sound as of a silver whistle came to his ears, and the dogs stood up, and took the crush of their paws from his breast, and one of them sat by him, in strict vigilance still, while the other bounded off for instructions.

Then, according to Slemmick, there appeared to him the most beautiful vision he had ever seen. "Straight from heaven. Don't tell me, Master Jarge, for never will I hear a word agin it. Straight from heaven, with the big hound a'jumping at her side, and him looking like an angel now. If you was to see her, you'd just go mad, and never care to look at any other maid no more."

"What was she like, Bob?" It had not been my intention to put any question of this kind, but Slemmick was in such a state of excitement, that I had a right to know the reason.

"Don't 'e ask me, sir; for good, don't 'e ask me. There never was no words in any Dixunary, and if there was, I couldn't lay to them. There then, you go and judge for yourself, Master Jarge."

"But she can't be there all by herself, my friend. Surely you must have seen some one else. And what language did she speak in?"

"Blowed if I can tell 'e, sir. All I know is, 't were a mixture of a flute and a blackbird, and the play-'em-out-of-Church pipes of the horgan. Not that she were singing, only to the ear, my meaning is; and never mind the words no more than folk does in a hanthem. Lor, to hear poor Sally's voice, after coming home from that – even in the wisest frame of mind, with all the wages in her lap!"

"But you did not come home, Bob Slemmick, for I know not how long. Did you spend the whole of your time in that enchanted valley?"

"Ah, a chant it were, by gum! A chant as I could listen to – why, Master Jarge, I'll take 'e there; for two skips of a flea I would. Won't 'e? Very well. Best not, I reckon. Never look at no English maids no more."

This was nearly all that I could get from Bob, without putting hundreds of questions; for instead of straight answers, he went off into ravings about this most ravishing young lady, who must have contrived to make out what he wanted, for after having saved him from the dogs, she led him directly to the lower door, and sped him on his way with half-a-crown. But that, as he assured me, was of no account in his estimate of her qualities. "You ask Farmer Ticknor, sir, if you think I be a'lying. Farmer Ticknor hath seed her, more at his comfort than ever I did; and Ticknor come hotter than I

do. 'Hold your blessed jaw' – he say, when I goeth to ask about her, knowing as he were neighbourly – 'What call for you, Bob Slemmick?' he saith, 'to come running like a dog on end down here? I'll give you a charge of shot,' he saith, 'if I catch you in the little lane again. 'T is the Royal Family, and no mistake, that knoweth all about this here. And don't you make no palaver of it, to come stealing of my mushrooms.' As if we hadn't better as we kicks up every day!"

Now all this talk of Bob's, although it may have told upon my mind a little, was not enough to set me running straight away from my home and friends, at a very busy time of year, as Slemmick was so fond of doing. But betwixt the green and yellow, as our people call the times of hay and corn, it seemed to me that I might as well have a talk with that Farmer Ticknor, who was known to be a man of great authority about the weather and the crops, and had held land under us as long as he could afford to do so. He was rather crusty now, as a man is apt to be when he lives upon a crust for the benefit of foreigners, and receives his exchange in coloured tallow. It was two or three years since I had seen him now; for "Ticknor's Mew," as he called his place, was out of the general course of traffic, and as lonely among the woods as a dead fern-frond. I found him at home on a fine summer evening, and he put up my horse, and received me very kindly, for he was not a bad sort of man, though rough. And if any pleasure yet remained in Farmer's lane to workhouse, this man made the most of it by looking at the sky, as if it still could help him against the imbecility of the earth.

"Yes, I have been a fine hand at it," he said, after sending for a jug of ale, and two bell-rummers; "there never was a cloud, but I know the meaning of 'un, though without they long names they has now. Bessie, my dear, fetch *Ticknor's marks*. Don't care much to do it now – nought to lose or gain of it. Not much odds to this land of England now, what weather God Almighty please to send. 'And when they shamed the Lord out of caring to mind the harvest, the Government goeth for to hirritate Him more, with a Hoffice to tell us what sort of hat to put upon our heads, when us can't pay for none. But I'll bet my Sunday beaver against his band of gold. What say to that, Mr. Cranleigh? I stuck 'un on the barn-door every marnin' as long as there was anything to care for in the whitfields. It covereth a whole year, don't it, Bessie? Cross stands for wrong, and straight line for right."

Ticknor's marks, as he called his calendar, certainly seemed to hit the mark more often than the men of science did. On a great blackboard were pasted in parallel columns the "Daily forecasts" and Farmer Ticknor's predictions entered at noon of each preceding day. His pretty daughter Bessie, the editor, no doubt, of his oracles, displayed them with no little pride.

"If you will be pleased to observe, Mr. Cranleigh" – Bessie had been at a boarding-school – "my father's predictions are in manuscript of course," – and much better than he could write, thought I, – "while the authorised forecasts are in type. Now the crosses on the manuscript are not quite five per cent; while those upon the printing exceed seventy-five. If there were any impartiality in politics, don't you think, Mr. Cranleigh, they would give father the appointment? And he would be glad to do it in these bad times, for less than half the money. Though we must not blame the gentlemen who have to do it all through the window."

"You never hear me boast," interrupted the farmer; "there never was that gift in our family. But I'll go bail to give that Meatyard man, or whatever they calls 'un, five pips out of ten – all this reckoning by scents hath come after my time – and give 'un twelve hours longer with his arrows and his dots; and then I'll name the day agin him, for the best joint in his yard. But bless your heart and mine too, Master Jarge, what odds for the weather now? Why, even the hay, they tell me now, is to come in little blocks from foreign parts. Make a ton of it they say they can by hyderaulic something come out not a morsel bigger than the parish-Bible. Well, well! Well, well!"

Knowing that if he once began upon "Free Trade," there would be many changes of weather before he stopped, I brought him back to the other subject, and contrived to lead him as far as the margin of the wood, where the clouds by which he made his divinations could be contemplated more completely; but he told me a great deal about their meanings, although he knew nothing of their names; all of which I forget, though I tried to attend.

It was not for any knowledge of clouds, or weather, or politics, or even harvest-prospects, that I was come to see this Prophet Ticknor in the woods. My mother's favourite subject was the "Fulfilment of Prophecy;" but what I cared for now, and thought myself bound to follow out, was the vision (seen by others as well as myself) of a foreign young maiden – if it must be so – unequalled by any of English birth. The prevalence of loose commercial ideas, and the prostitution of Britannia (so highly respected while she locked her own gate), had given me a turn against things foreign, though none but my enemies could call me narrow-minded. And here I was open to conviction, as usual, with a strong prepossession against my country, or, at any rate, against her girls, however lovely.

"I suppose you don't happen to know," I said to that excellent Ticknor, while still among his clouds, "whether anybody lives in that old place, where there seems to be such a lot of black stuff? What is it? Ivy it looks like. And old walls behind it, or something very old. I think I have heard of some old Monastery there; and it was part of our property long and long ago. Oh, Farmer Ticknor, how everything does change!"

The farmer afforded me a glance of some suspicion. Narrow trade-interests had got the better of him. "You be gone into the retail line," he said. "To think of the Cranleighs coming down to that. But you don't sell milk by the quart now, do 'e?"

Though I did not see how it could bear upon the subject, I assured him that most of our milk went to London, under contract with a great man, whose name I mentioned; and the rest we kept for making butter.

"Well, then, I does a good little stroke of business there. Though not much profit out of that, of course. They takes in a gallon-can every morning. And they asked the boy whether I didn't keep no goats."

"Goats! Why then they must be foreigners," I said. "No English people care about goat's milk. At least, unless their doctor orders it."

"They ha'n't got no doctor, and don't want none. A rare strong lot according to all I hear. Toorks I call them, and I put it on the bill, 'Toork Esquire, debtor to John Ticknor.' Having raised no objection, why it stands they must be Toorks."

"But people can't live on milk alone, Mr. Ticknor. And they must have some other name besides Turks. Even if they are Turks, which I scarcely can believe."

"Well, you knows more about them than I do, sir. I never form an opinion, so long as they pays me good English money. But they never has no butcher's meat, nor no beer; and that proves that they bain't English folk. If you want to know more about them, Mr. Cranleigh, the one as can teach you is my dog *Grab*. *Grab* feeleth great curiosity about them, because of the big dogs inside the old wall. He hath drashed every other dog in the parish; and it goeth very hard with him to have no chance to drash they. Never mind, old boy, your time will come."

An atrocious bull-dog of the fiercest fighting type, who had followed us from the farmhouse, was nuzzling into his master's grey whiskers. Now I love nearly all dogs, and, as a rule, they are very good to me; but that surly fellow, who is supposed to be the type of our national character, does not appear to me, by any means, adorable. Very faithful he may be, and consistent, and straightforward, and devoted to his duty. But why should he hold it a part of his duty to kill every gentle and accomplished dog he meets, unless the other dips his tail, the canine ensign, to him? And of all the bull-dogs I have ever seen, this *Grab* was the least urbane and polished. A white beast with three grisly patches destroying all candour of even blood-thirstiness, red eyes leering with treacherous ill-will, hideous nostrils, like ulcers cut off, and enormous jowls sagging from the stark white fangs. He saw that I disliked him, and a hearty desire to feel his tusks meet in my throat was displayed in the lift of his lips, and the gleam of his eyes.

"Wonnerful big hounds they furriners has, according to what my milk-boy says," the farmer continued, with a plaintive air; "but they never lets them free of the big wall hardly, to let *Grab* see

what they be made of. But come back to house, and have a bit of supper with us, before you go home, Mr. Cranleigh. 'T is a roughish ride even in summer-time."

"Thank you; not a bit to eat; but perhaps before I go, another glass of your very fine home-brewed. But I see a tree down in the valley there, that I should like to know more about. I'll follow you back to the house in a few minutes. But how long did you say that those strangers have been here? It seems such an odd thing that nobody appears to know anything about them."

"Well, a goodish long while they must have been there now. And they don't seem to make no secret of it. Bakes their own bread, if they have any; never has any carriage-folk to see them, never comes out with a gun to pot a hare; don't have no fishmonger, butcher, grocer, nor any boy to call out 'papper' at the door. My boy Charlie is uncommon proud, because he have got into their 'Good-morning.' They says it like Christians, so far as he can judge, and naturally he sticketh up for them. You can ask him, Master Jarge, if you think fit. Nothing clandestinal about Ticknor's Mew. But none of them Inspectors to pump into our milk, and swear as we did it. That's why I keep you, *Grab*."

Farmer Ticknor made off with this little grumble, lifting his hat to me, until I should return. For he did not look down upon the "Gentry of the land," for being out at elbows. After thinking for a minute of all that I had heard, which was not very much to dwell upon, I twirled my riding-crop (which I had brought from habit, and been glad to have when I watched *Grab's* teeth), and set off with a light foot, to explore that lonely valley.

I was now on the opposite side from that by which I had entered it to the tune of the nightingale, and at first I could scarcely make out my bearings. For though I had seen it afar with Tom Erricker, something prevented me from letting him come near it. Tom was an excellent fellow in his way; but of reverence and lofty regard for women no decent Englishman could have much less. Decent I say, because if such sentiments are cast by, and scoffed at – as fools think it clever to do – the only thing left is indecency.

This valley was not like many places, that are tempting only at a distance. The deeper I found myself in it, the more I was filled with its gentleness and beauty. It has never been in my line at all to be able to convey what comes across me, – when I see things that look as if they called upon us to be grateful for the pleasure they contribute to our minds. Certain people can do this, as some can make fine after-dinner speeches, while others are more fitted to rejoice inside. And if I were to fail in depicting a landscape, such as any Surrey man may see by walking a few miles, how would you care to follow me into the grandest scenery the Maker of the earth has made anywhere, unless it be in His own temple of the heavens?

Enough that it was a very lovely valley, winding wherever it ought to wind, and timbered just where it should be, with the music of a bright brook to make it lively, and the distance of the hills to keep it sheltered from the world. And towards the upper end where first the stream came wimpling into it, that ancient wall, which had baffled me, enclosed a large piece of land as well as some length of watercourse, but gave no other token of its purpose. This was what I cared most about; for stupid and unreasonable as it must appear, a sharp spur had been clapped to my imagination by the vague talk of Slemmick and Ticknor. And not only that, but to some extent, the zeal and the ardour of Jackson Stoneman, and his downright policy, had set me thinking that poor as I was, while he was rolling in money, the right of my manhood was the same as his – to pursue by all honest means the one fair image which a gracious power had disclosed to me. Therefore, after looking at the tree to soothe my conscience, I followed the course of that wandering wall, by no means in a sneaking manner, but showing myself fairly in the open meadows, and walking as one who takes exercise for health.

The wall was on my left hand, all the way from the track (in which the steep road ended after crossing the brook) and although I would rather sink into a bog than seek to be spying impertinently, nothing could have come upon that wall, and no one could have peeped over it without my taking it in at a side-flick. But I only had sense of one thing moving throughout all my circuit, and that was but little to comfort me. Just as I was slipping by the upper door (which Slemmick had burst open),

and taking long strides – for if some one had opened it and asked what I wanted there, how could I, as a gentleman, tell the whole truth? – suddenly there appeared within a square embrasure, and above the parapet among the ivy, the most magnificent head I ever saw. Mighty eyes, full of deep intelligence, regarded me, noble ears (such as no man is blest with) quivered with dignified inquiry, while a majestic pair of nostrils, as black as night, took sensitive quest of the wind, whether any of the wickedness of man were in it.

Knowing that I only intended for the best, though doubtful if that would stand me in much stead, supposing that this glorious dog took another view of it, I addressed him from below with words of praise, which he evidently put aside with some contempt. He was considering me impartially and at leisure; and if I had moved he would have bounded down upon me. Luckily I had the sense to stand stock-still, and afford him every facility for study of my character. At the same time I looked at him, not combatively, but as if I felt similar interest in him, which I had excellent reason for doing. To my great relief his eyes assumed a kind expression; by the pleasant waving of his ears I could tell that his tail was wagging, and he showed a bright dimple beneath his black whiskers, and smiled with the humour which is far beyond our ken. Whereupon I nodded to him, and made off.

When I came to think of him, in that coarser frame of mind in which we explain everything so meanly, it occurred to me that those noble nostrils, curving like the shell of Amphitrite, were scarcely moved so much perhaps by the influence of my goodness, as by the fragrance of my sister's spaniel, *Lady Silky*, who had nestled in my hairy jacket, while I was casting up accounts that day. However, be his motive large or small, he had formed a friendly opinion of me, and when I disappeared among the trees, a low whine followed me as if the place had grown more lonely.

Upon the whole I had made some progress towards the solution of this strange affair. Within those walls there must be living a settlement of foreigners, an establishment of some size, to judge by the quantity of milk they used. Some of them could speak English, but they did not seem to associate with any of their neighbours, and probably procured from London the main part of what they needed. To Farmer Ticknor, as to most of the rustics round about us, all who were not of British birth were either Turks or Frenchmen. To my mind these were neither; and the possession of those noble dogs – a breed entirely new to me – showed that they were not dwelling here to conceal their identity, or to retrench from poverty. For there were at least two dogs, perhaps more, worth a hundred guineas each to any London dealer at the lowest computation, and not by any means qualified to live on scanty rations. Another point I had ascertained – that the old Mill, out of use for many years, was now at work again. This had been built, no one knows how long ago, among the monastic ruins upon the never-failing Pebblebourne. And while I was counting the moments for that gigantic dog to spring down on me, I heard very clearly the splash of the wheel, and the boom and murmur of the works inside.

As a last chance of picking up something more, when I was getting on my horse, I said across his mane to the fair Bessie Ticknor, that "highly-cultured" maiden, – "A little bird has told me, though I would not listen to him, that a young lady almost as pretty as Miss Ticknor lives in a valley not a hundred miles from here." Bessie raised her jet-black eyes, and blushed, and simpered, and whispered, so that her father could not hear it: —

"Oh, I 'd give anything to know! It is such a romantic mystery! Culture does put such a cruel curb upon curiosity. But it does not take much to surpass *me*, Mr. Cranleigh."

"We are not all quite blind in this world, Miss Ticknor; though some may try to contradict their looking-glass."

CHAPTER VI

TRUE HYGIENE

Whenever my brother Harold deigned to visit us from London, we had not much time to do anything more than try to understand his last idea. If he had only been fond of society, or philosophy, or even ladies, we could have got on with him ever so much better; for he really never meant any harm at all. Pity for the pressure he was putting on his brain saddened to some extent the pride which he inspired; and when he came down to announce his last *eureka*, the first thing my mother did was to make him show his tongue. My mother did think mighty things of this the first-born child she had; and him a son – endowed beyond all sister-babies with everything. Nevertheless she did her utmost to be fair to all of us; and sometimes when her eyes went round us, at Christmastime, or birthdays, any stranger would have thought that we all were gifted equally.

I am happy to say that this was not the case. Never has it been my gift to invent anything whatever; not even a single incident in this tale which I am telling you. Everything is exactly as it happened; and according to some great authorities, we too are exactly as we happened.

But my brother Harold can never have happened. He must have been designed with a definite purpose, and a spirit to work his way throughout, although it turned to Proteus. He had been through every craze and fad, – I beg his pardon, – Liberation of the Age, Enlightenment, Amelioration of Humanity, &c. &c., and now in indignation at the Pump Court drains, he was gone upon what he called *Hygiene*.

"What the devil do you mean, by this blessed Hygiene?" Though by no means strong at poetry, I turned out this very neat couplet one day, with the indignation that makes verses, when I saw that he had a big trunk in the passage, which certain of us still called the hall.

"George, will you never have any large ideas?" he replied with equal rudeness, such as brothers always use. "This time, even you will find it hard to be indifferent to my new discovery. The ardour of truth has triumphed."

"Go ahead," I said, for he had had his dinner, though that made very little difference to him, his ardour of truth being toast and water now. "But if you won't have a pipe, I will. Is the smell anti-hygienic?"

"Undoubtedly it is. About that there cannot be two sane opinions. Puff away; but be well assured that at every pull you are inhaling, and at every expiration spreading –"

"All right. Tell us something new, and you are never far to seek in that – Pennyroyal, fenugreek, ruta nigra, tin-tacks hydriised, hyoscyamus, colocasia, geopordon carbonised – what is the next panacea?"

"Tabacum Nicotianum." Nothing pleased my brother more than the charge of inconsistency and self-contradiction. Seeing that he lay in wait for this, I would not let him have it, but answered with indifference —

"That is right, old fellow. I am glad that you have come to a sensible view of Tobacco. Any very choice cigars in your trunk, old chap? But I should fear that you had invented them."

No one could help liking Harold at first sight. He was simply the most amiable fellow ever seen. Amiable chiefly in a passive way, although he was ready for any kind action, when the claims of discovery permitted. And now as we were strolling in the park, and the fine Surrey air had brightened his handsome face with more "hygiene" than he ever would produce, I was not surprised at the amount of money he extracted even from our groans.

"Would you like to know what is in my trunk?" he asked with that simple smile, which was at once the effect and the cause of his magnetism. "I have done it for the sake of the family first, and then of the neighbourhood, and then of the county. I shall offer the advantages to Surrey first.

As an old County family, that is our duty. There is some low typhoid in the valleys still. Run and fetch my trunk, George. It is heavy for me, but nothing for your great shoulders. Bring it to the bower here; I don't want to open it in the house, because, because – well, you'll soon know why, when you follow my course of reasoning."

I brought him his trunk, and he put it on a table, where people had tea in the park sometimes, to watch a game of cricket from a sheltered place. "Come quite close," he said very kindly, throwing open the trunk, and then making for the door, while I rashly stooped over his property. In another minute I was lying down, actually sneezed off my legs, and unable to open my eyes from some spasmodic affection or affliction.

"That's right," said Harold, in a tone of satisfaction; "don't be uneasy, my dear brother. For at least a fortnight you are immune from the biggest enterprises of the most active Local Board. You may sit upon the manholes of the best sanitated town; you may sleep in the House of Commons; you may pay a medical fee, and survive it. It is my own discovery. See those boxes?"

"Not yet. But I shall as soon as my eyes get right!" I was able now to leave off sneezing, almost for a second. And when I had chewed a bit of leaf he gave me, there seemed to be something great in this new idea.

"You are concluding with your usual slur" – my brother began again, as soon as I was fit to receive reason instead of sympathy – "that this is nothing more than an adaptation of *Lundy Foote*, *Irish blackguard*, or *Welsh Harp*. George, you are wrong, as usual. You need not be capable of speech for that. Your gifts of error can express themselves in silence."

"Cowardly reasoner," I began, but the movement of larynx, or whatever it might be, threw me out of "ratiocination." He had me at his mercy, and he kept me so. To attempt to repeat what he said would convict me of crankiness equal to his own, and worse – because he could do it, and I cannot. But the point he insisted on most of all, and which after my experience I could not but concede, was that no known preparation of snuff without his special chemistry could have achieved this excellence.

"Pteroxylon, euphorbium, and another irritant unknown as yet to Chemists, have brought this to the power needful. But this is not a merely speculative thing. You feel a true interest in it now, George."

"As men praise mustard, with tears in their eyes. But let me never hear of it, think of it, most of all never smell the like again. My nose will be red, and my eyes sore for a fortnight."

Harold tucked my arm under his, with a very affectionate manner of his own, which he knew that I never could resist. "Four pockets always in your waistcoat," he observed, "and a flap over every one to keep it dry. Now I very seldom ask a favour, do I, George, of you? Here are three hundred little boxes here, as well as the bulk of my preparation. The boxes are perfectly air-tight, made from my own design, very little larger and not much thicker than an old crown-piece. You touch a spring here, and the box flies open. Without that you never would know that it was there. Promise me that you will always carry this, and open it whenever you come to a place where the Local Boards have got the roads up. One of my best friends, and I have not many, has lost his only little girl, – such a darling, she used to sit upon my knee and promise to marry me the moment she was big enough, – but now she has gone to a better world, through the new parish authorities. Diphtheria in the worst form, my dear boy!"

His eyes filled with tears, for he was very tender-hearted, and in the warmth of the moment, I promised to carry that little box of his, as a safeguard against sanitation.

"My dear George, you will never regret it. You will find it most useful, I can assure you." He spoke with some gratitude, for he knew how much I hated all such chemistry. Little did I think how true his words would prove.

"Why, there goes that extraordinary fellow Stoneman!" I exclaimed suddenly, to change the subject. "What a first-rate horse he always rides! But there is something I ought to tell you about that

great Stockbroker. I have not told the Governor yet, because I was not meant to do so, and must not, without the man's consent. But you ought to know it, and he would not object to that."

"What has he discovered? I have often thought that men, who fall into the thick of humanity, ought to get their minds into an extremely active state; like mariners straining their eyes to discover –"

"The Gold Coast. There is nothing else they care for. But there I am wronging Jackson Stoneman. He is a man of the world, if there ever was one; and yet he is taken above the world, by love."

"Love of what?" asked my brother, who was sometimes hard upon people who despised all the things he cared for. "Love of gold? Love of rank? Love of dainty feeding? Love of his own fat self perhaps?"

"He is not fat. He is scarcely round enough. He is one of the most active men in the kingdom. There are very few things that he cannot do. And now he is deeply and permanently in love –"

"With filthy lucre. If there is anything I hate, it is the scorn of humanity that goes with that." Harold, in a lofty mood, began to strap up the trunk that was to save mankind.

"If filthy lucre means our Grace," I said with much emphasis, for it was good to floor him, "you have hit the mark. But our Grace has not a farthing." I very nearly added – "thanks to you." But it would have been cruel, and too far beyond the truth.

"Ridiculous!" he answered, trying not to look surprised, though I knew that I had got him there. "Why, his grandfather kept a shoe-shop."

"That is a vile bit of lying gossip. But even if it were so, the love of humanity should not stop short of their shoes. I am afraid you are a snob, Harold, with all your vast ideas."

"I am a little inclined to that opinion myself," he answered very cordially. "But come, this is very strange news about Grace. Has she any idea of the honour done her?"

"Not the smallest. So far as I know at least. And I think it is better that she should not know. Just at present, I mean, until he has had time."

"But surely, George, you would not encourage such a thing. Putting aside the man's occupation, which may be very honourable if he is so himself, what do we know of his character, except that he gives himself airs, and is rather ostentatious?"

"He gives himself no airs. What you call ostentation is simply his generosity. You forget that in right of his wealth he stands in the place we have lost through our poverty. That makes it a delicate position for him, especially in his behaviour to us. And do what he will, we should scarcely do our duty to ourselves, unless we made the worst of it."

"How long have you turned Cynic? Why, you put that rather neatly; I did not think it was in you, George." It should be explained that my brother Harold could never be brought to see that it was possible for me to do anything even fairly well; unless it were in manual labour, or sporting, or something else that he despised. And this was all I got for my admiration of his powers!

"Never mind about me," I replied; "I am not a Cynic, and I never shall be one. And when I spoke thus, I had not the least intention of including my father, who is above all such stuff. But mother, and you and I, and no doubt Grace herself, although she thinks so well of everybody, – it would be against all human nature for us to take a kind or even candid view of our successor's doings. And as for his station in life, as you might call it, you must live entirely out of the world, even in the heart of London, not to know that he is placed far above us now. Everywhere, except among the old-fashioned people who call themselves the County families, a man of his wealth would be thought much more of, than we should have a chance of being. What good could we do to anybody now? you must learn to look up to him, Harold my boy."

"Very well. I'll study him, whenever I get the chance. I can't look up to any man for his luck alone; though I may for the way he employs it. But he must not suppose that his money will buy Grace. If ever there was a girl who tried to think for herself and sometimes succeeded, probably it is

our Grace. She cannot do much. What woman has ever yet made any real discovery, although they are so inquisitive? But she has a right to her own opinion."

"At any rate as to the disposal of herself." Here I was on strong ground; though I never could argue with Harold upon scientific questions. But I knew my dear Grace much better than he did; and she always said that she liked me best, whenever I put that question to her; not only to make up for mother's preferences in the wrong direction, but also because she could understand me, – which did not require much intelligence, – not to mention that I was much bigger and stronger than Harold, though nothing like so good-looking, as anybody could see with half an eye.

"Leave it so," said Harold; for he liked sometimes to assert himself, as he had the right to do, when he cast away scientific weaknesses. "Let such things take their course, old fellow. If Grace takes a liking to him, that will prove that he is worthy of it. For she is uncommonly hard to please. And she never seems to care about understanding me; perhaps because she knows it would be hopeless. I want to go on to Godalming to-morrow. There will be a meeting of Sanitary Engineers – the largest minds of the period. I speak of them with deference; though as yet I am unable to make out what the dickens they are up to. Can you get me the one-horse trap from *The Bell*?"

"Most likely. I will go and see about it by-and-by. Old Jacob will always oblige me if he can. But you won't take away your sneezing trunk? You owe it to your native parish first."

"My native parish must abide its time. In country places there is seldom any outbreak of virulent diseases, until they set up a Local Board. I shall leave a score of Hygiotarmic boxes in your charge. The rest are meant for places where the authorities stir up the dregs of infection, and set them in slow circulation. And the first thing a Local Board always does is that."

I did not contradict him, for the subject was beyond me. And fond as I was of him, and always much enlarged by his visits, and the stirring up of my dull ideas, it so happened that I did not want him now, when so many things had to be considered, in which none of his discoveries would help me. In fact it seemed to me that he thought much more of his hygienic boxes, than of his and my dear sister.

When he was gone in the old rattle-trap from *The Bell*, with his trunk beneath his feet, my mother seemed inclined at first to think that no one had made enough of him.

"All for the benefit of others!" she exclaimed, after searching the distance for one last view of him, if, haply, the sun might come out for the purpose of showing his hat above some envious hedge; "Does that poor boy ever think of himself? What makes it the more remarkable is that this age is becoming so selfish, so wedded to all the smaller principles of action, so incapable of taking a large view of anything. But Harold, my Harold" – no words of the requisite goodness and greatness occurred to my dear mother, and so she resorted to her handkerchief. "It seems as if we always must be parted. It is for the good of mankind, no doubt; but it does seem hard, though no one except myself seems so to regard it. It was five o'clock yesterday before he came. It is not yet half-past ten, and to think of the rapidly-increasing distance –"

"I defy him to get more than five miles an hour out of that old screw," I said. "Not even with one of his Hygiotarmic boxes tied beneath the old chap's tail. Why, you can hear his old scuffle still, mother."

She listened intently, as if for a holy voice; while Grace looked at me with a pleasant mixture of reproach and sympathy. For who did all the real work? Who kept the relics of the property together? Who relieved the little household of nearly all its trouble? Who went to market to buy things without money, and (which is even harder still) to sell them when nobody wanted them? Who toiled like a horse, and much longer than a horse – however, I never cared to speak up for myself. As a general rule, I would rather not be praised. And as for being thanked, it is pleasant in its way, but apt to hurt the feelings of a very modest man; and, of course, he knows that it will not last. After such a speech from my dear mother, no one could have blamed me very severely, if I had put my fishing-rod together and refused to do another stroke of work that day.

CHAPTER VII

KUBAN

That evening we stuck to our work, like Britons, and got all the ricks combed down so well, and topped up ready for thatching, that the weather was welcome to do what it pleased, short of a very heavy gale of wind. Not a mowing-machine, nor a patent haymaker, had been into our meadows, nor any other of those costly implements, which farmers are ordered by their critics to employ, when they can barely pay for scythe and rake. All was the work of man and horse, if maids may be counted among the men – for, in truth, they had turned out by the dozen, from cottage, and farm, and the great house itself, to help the poor gentleman who had been rich, and had shown himself no prouder then than now.

For about three weeks, while the corn began to kern, and Nature wove the fringe before she spread the yellow banner, a man of the farm, though still wanted near at hand, might take a little change and look about him more at leisure, and ask how his neighbours were getting on, or even indulge in some distractions of his own. Now, in summer, a fellow of a quiet turn, who has no time to keep up his cricket, and has never heard of golf, – as was then the case with most of us, – and takes no delight in green tea-parties, neither runs after moths and butterflies, however attractive such society may be, this man finds a riverbank, or, better still, a fair brook-side, the source of the sweetest voices to him. Here he may find such pleasure as the indulgence of Nature has vouchsafed to those who are her children still, and love to wander where she offers leisure, health, and large delights. So gracious is she in doing this, and so pleased at pleasing us, that she stays with us all the time, and breathes her beauty all around us, while we forget all pains and passions, and administer the like relief to fish.

Worms, however, were outside my taste. To see a sad creature go wriggling in the air, and then, cursing the day of its birth, descend upon the wet storm of the waters, and there go tossing up and down, without any perception of scenery – this (which is now become a very scientific and delicate art in delusion of trout) to me is a thing below our duty to our kin. A fish is a fellow that ought to be caught, if a man has sufficient skill for it. But not with any cruelty on either side; though the Lord knows that they torment us more, when they won't bite on any conditions, than some little annoyance we may cause them – when we do pull them out – can balance.

Certain of the soundness of these views, if, indeed, they had ever occurred to me, but despairing to convince my sister of them, – for women have so little logic, – I fetched out a very ancient fly-book, with most of the hackles devoured by moth-grubs, and every barb as rusty as old enmity should grow. Harold never fished; he had no patience for it; and as for enjoying nature, his only enjoyment was to improve it. Tom Erricker, who was lazy enough to saunter all day by a river, while he talked as if examiners were scalping him, not an atom did he know of any sort of fishing, except sitting in a punt, and pulling roach in, like a pod of seedy beans upon a long beanstick. Therefore was everything in my book gone rusty, and grimy, and maggoty, and looped into tangles of yellow gut, – that very book which had been the most congenial love of boyhood. If I had only taken half as well to Homer, Virgil, Horace, I might have been a Fellow of All Souls now (*Bene natus, bene vestitus*) and brought my sister Grace to turn the heads of Heads of Houses, in the grand old avenue, where the Dons behold the joys that have slipped away from them.

But perhaps I should never have been half as happy. To battle with the world, instead of battenning in luxury, is the joy of life, while there is any pluck and pith. And I almost felt, as a man is apt to feel, when in his full harness, and fond of it, that to step outside of it, even for a few hours, was a bit of self-indulgence unworthy of myself. However, I patched up a cast of two flies, which was quite enough, and more than enough, for a little stream like the Pebblebourne, wherein I had resolved to wet my line.

This was a swift bright stream, as yet ungriddled by any railway works, and unblocked by any notice-boards menacing frightful penalties. For although the time was well-nigh come when the sporting rights over English land should exceed the rental in value, the wary trout was not yet made of gold and rubies; and in many places any one, with permission of the farmers, was welcome to wander by the babbling brook, and add to its music, if the skill were in him, the silvery tinkle of the leaping fish. And though all this valley was but little known to me, a call at a lonely farm-house on the hill, a mile or two further on than Ticknor's Mew, made me free of the water and them that dwelled therein.

Now why should I go to this Pebblebourne, rather than to some other Surrey stream, fishful, picturesque, and better known to anglers? Partly I believe through what Robert Slemmick said, and Farmer Ticknor after him, and partly through my own memories. There can be no prying air, or pushing appearance about a gentle fisherman, who shows himself intent upon the abstract beauties of a rivulet, or the concrete excellence of the fish it holds. My mother liked nothing better than a dish of trout, my father (though obliged to be very careful about the bones) considered that fish much superior to salmon, ever since salmon had been propagated into such amazing rarity. So I buckled on a basket, which would hold some 50lb., took an unlimited supply of victuals, and set forth to clear the Pebblebourne of trout.

My mother had no supper except toasted cheese that night, although I returned pretty early; neither did my father find occasion to descant upon the inferiority of salmon. And the same thing happened when I went again. I could see great abundance of those very pleasing fish, and they saw an equal abundance of me. They would come and look at my fly, with an aspect of gratifying approval, as at a laudable specimen of clever plagiarism, and then off with them into the sparkles and wrinkles of the frisky shallows, with a quick flop of tail, and yours truly till next time. And yet I kept out of sight and cast up-stream, and made less mark than a drop of rain on the silver of the stream.

I was half inclined to drop any third attempt, having daintily treated some meadows of brook, without any token of fish to carry home, or of human presence to stow away in heart, although I had persisted to the very door, which had swallowed that fair vision, in the twilight of the May. Her little shrine and holy place I never had profaned, feeling that a stranger had no business there; neither could I bring myself to hang about in ambush, and lurk for the hour of her evening prayer and hymn. But my dear mother seemed to lose her fine faith in my skill; for ladies are certain to judge by the event; moreover to accept a beating lightly was entirely against my rules. So I set forth once again, saying to myself – "the third time is lucky. Let us have one more trial."

On that third evening of my labour against stream, I was standing on the bank, where the bridle-track came through, and packing up my rod, after better luck with fish, for I had found a fly which puzzled them, and had taken a good dozen – when who should come up gambolling round my heels, and asking, as it seemed to me, for a good word, or a pat, but that magnificent and very noble dog who had reviewed, and so kindly approved of me, from the battlements near the upper door? "What is your name, my stately friend?" I said to him, not without some misgivings that he might resent this overture. But he threw up his tail like a sheaf of golden wheat, and made the deep valley ring, and the heights resound, with a voice of vast rejoicing, and a shout of glorious freedom.

But was it this triumph that provoked the fates? While the echoes still were eddying in the dimples of the hills, a white form arose on the crest of the slope some fifty yards behind us. A vast broad head, with ears prickled up like horns of an owl, and sullen eyes under patches of shade, regarded us; while great teeth glimmered under bulging jowls, and squat red nostrils were quivering with disdain. It was *Grab*, Farmer Ticknor's savage bull-dog; and hoping that he would be scared, as most dogs are, when they have no business, by the cast of a stone, I threw a pebble at him, which struck the ground under his burly chest. He noticed it no more than he would heed a grasshopper, but began to draw upon us, as a pointer draws on game, with his wiry form rigid, and his hackles like a tooth-brush, and every roll of muscle like an oak burr-knot.

I drew the last loops of my line through the rings, and wound up the reel in all haste, and detaching the butt of my rod stood ready, for it looked as if he meant to fly at me. But no, he marched straight up to my noble friend, with blazing eyes fixed on him, and saluted him with a snarl of fiendish malice. Clearly my dog, as I began to consider him, had no experience of such low life. He was a gentleman by birth and social habits, not a coarse prize-fighter; so he stood looking down with some surprise at this under-bred animal, yet glancing pleasantly as if he would accept a challenge to a bout of gambols, as my lord will play cricket with a pot-boy. Nay, he even went so far as to wag his courtly tail, and draw his taper fore-legs, which shone like sable, a little beneath the arch of his body, to be ready for a bound, if this other chap meant play. *Grab* spied the mean chance, and leaped straight at his throat, but missed it at first, or only plunged his hot fangs into a soft rich bed of curls. My dog was amazed, and scarcely took it in earnest yet. His attitude was that of our truly peaceful nation – "I don't want to fight, but, by Jingo, if I must, it won't be long before this little bully bites the dust."

"At him, *Grab*, at him, boy! Show 'un what you be made of! Tip 'un a taste of British oak. Give 'un a bellyful. By the Lord in Heaven, would you though?"

I stretched my rod in front of Ticknor, as he appeared from behind a ridge, dancing on his heavy heels at the richness of the combat, and then rushing at the dog, my friend, with a loaded crab-stick, because he had got the bull-dog down and was throwing his great weight upon him. He had tossed him up two or three times as if in play, for he seemed even now not to enter into the deadliness of the enemy.

"Fair play, farmer!" I said sternly. "It was your beast that began it. Let him have a lesson. I hope the foreign dog will kill him."

No fair-minded person could help perceiving the chivalry of the one, and bestiality of the other; while the combat grew furious for life or death, with tossing and whirlings, and whackings of ribs, and roars of deep rage on the part of my friend, while the other scarcely puffed or panted, but fought his fight steadily from the ground, and in deadly silence.

"Furriner can't hurt 'un much," said the farmer, as I vainly strove to get between them; "made of iron and guttaperk our *Grab* is. I've been a'biding for this, for two months. I sent 'e fair warning, Master George, by that fellow Slemmick, that you might not lose it. Fair play, you says; and I say the very same. Halloa! our *Grab* hath got his hold at last. Won't be long in this world for your furriner now. Well done, our *Grab*! Needn't tell 'un to hold fast."

To my dismay, I saw that it was even so. My noble foreign friend was still above the other, but his great frame was panting and his hind-legs twitching, and long sobs of exhaustion fetching up his golden flanks. The sleuth foe, the murderer, had him by his gasping throat, and was sucking out his breath with bloody fangs deep-buried.

"Let 'un kill 'un. Let 'un kill 'un!" shouted Farmer Ticknor. "Serve 'un right for showing cheek to an honest English dog – "

But I sent Ticknor backwards, with a push upon his breast, and then with both hands I tugged at his brutal beast. As well might I have striven, though I am not made of kid gloves, to pull an oak in its prime from the root-hold. The harder I tugged the deeper went the bulldog's teeth, the faster fell the gout of red into his blazing eyes, and the feebler grew the gasps of his exhausted victim. Then I picked up my ashen butt and broke it on the backbone of the tyrant, but he never even yielded for the rebate of a snarl. Death was closing over those magnificent brown eyes, as they turned to me faintly their last appeal.

A sudden thought struck me. I stood up for a moment, although I could scarcely keep my legs, and whipping out of my waistcoat my brother's patent box, I touched the spring and poured the whole contents into the bloody nostrils of that tenacious beast. Aha, what a change! His grim set visage puckered back to his very ears, as if he were scalped by lightning; the flukes of his teeth fell away from their grip, as an anchor sags out of a quicksand, he quivered all over, and rolled on his back, and his gnarled legs fell in on the drum of his chest, while he tried to scrub his squat nose in an agony

of blisters. Then he rolled on his panting side, and sneezed till I thought he would have turned all his body inside out.

As for me, I set both hands upon my hips, though conscious of some pain in doing so, and laughed until the tears ran down my cheeks. My enjoyment was becoming actual anguish when the pensive Ticknor stooping over his poor pet inhaled enough of the superfluous snuff to send him dancing and spluttering across the meadow, vainly endeavouring between his sneezes to make an interval for a heartfelt damn.

But suddenly this buffoonery received a tragic turn. From the door in the ivied wall came forth a gliding figure well known to me, but not in its present aspect. The calm glory of the eyes was changed to grief and terror, the damask of the cheeks was blurred with tears, the sweet lips quivered with distress and indignation.

"Ah, *Kuban, Kuban*, Daretza, Dula, *Kuban*!" This, or something like this, was her melancholy cry, as she sank on her knees without a glance at us, and covered that palpitating golden form with a shower of dark tresses, waving with sobs like a willow in the breeze.

"Ah, *Kuban, Kuban*!" and then some soft words uttered into his ear, as if to speed his flight.

I ran to the brook and filled my hat with water, for I did not believe that this great dog could be dead. When I came back the young lady was sitting with the massive head helpless on her lap, and stroking the soft dotted cheeks, and murmuring, as if to touch the conscience of Farmer Ticknor, "Ah, cruel, cruel! How men are cruel!"

"Allow me one moment," I said, for she seemed not even to know that I was near. "Be kind enough to leave the dog to me. I may be able yet to save his life. Do you understand English, Mademoiselle?"

"His life, it is gone?" Another sob stopped her voice, as she put her little hand, where she thought his heart must be. "Yes, sir, I understand English too well."

"Then if you will be quick, we may save his life yet. I am used to dogs; this noble fellow is not dead; though he will be very soon, unless we help him. There is a wound here that I cannot bind up with anything I have about me. Bring bandages and anything long and soft. Also bring wool, and a pot of grease, and a sponge with hot water, and a bowl or two. I will not let him die, till you come back!"

"If that could be trusted for, when would I come back?" She glanced at me, having no time to do more, with a soft thrill of light, such as hope was born in; and before I could answer it she was gone, leaving me unable to follow with my eyes; for it was the turning-point of *Kuban's* life – if that were the name of this high-souled dog. The throttling was gone, and the barbed strangulation, and devil's own tug at his windpipe; but the free power of breath was not restored, and the heart was scarcely stirring. Lifting his eyelids, I saw also that there was concussion of the brain to deal with; but the danger of all was the exhaustion.

Luckily in the breast-pocket of my coat was a little silver flask with a cup at the bottom, Tom Erricker's present on my last birthday. I had filled it with whiskey, though I seldom took spirits in those young days, but carried this dram in case of accidents, when fishing. Instead of dashing cold water out of my hat on the poor dog's face, as I had meant to do, – which must in such a case have been his last sensation, – I poured a little whiskey into the silver cup, and filled it with the residue of water that was leaking quickly from my guaranteed felt. Then I held up the poor helpless head, and let the contents of the cup trickle gently over the black roots of the tongue. Down it went, and a short gurgle followed, and then a twitch of the eyelids, and a long soft gasp. The great heart gave a throb, and the brown eyes looked at me, and a faint snort came from the flabby nostrils, and I shouted aloud, "*Kuban* is saved."

There was nobody to hear me, except the dog himself, and he was too weak to know what I meant. Ticknor was gone, with that beast at his heels, for at the end of the meadow I saw *Grab*, the British champion, slouching along, like a vanquished cur, with his ropy stomach venting heavy

sneezes; and to the credit of his wisdom, I may add that even a lamb in that valley ever after was sacred from a glance of his bloodthirsty goggles.

With his long form laid between my legs, while I sat down on the sod and nursed him, my wounded dog began more and more to recover his acquaintance with the world, and to wonder what marvel had befallen him. He even put out his tongue, and tried to give me a lick, and his grand tail made one or two beats upon the ground; but I held up my hand, for he had several frightful wounds, and he laid down his ears with a grateful little whine. For the main point was to keep him quite still now, until the dangerous holes could be stopped from bleeding.

So intent was I upon doing this, that before I was at all aware of it, three or four people were around me. But I had eyes for only one, the lovely mistress of the injured dog; while she for her part had no thought whatever of anything, or any one, except that blessed *Kuban*. That was right enough of course, and what else could be expected? Still I must admit that this great fellow rose even higher in my estimation, when he showed that he knew well enough where to find the proper course of treatment, and was not to be misled even by the warmest loyalty into faith in feminine therapeutics.

"He has turned his eyes away from me. Oh, *Kuban, Kuban!* But I care not what you do, beloved one, if only you preserve your life. Do you think that he can do that, sir, with all these cruel damages?"

Now that she was more herself, I thought that I had never heard any music like her voice, nor read any poetry to be compared to the brilliant depths of her expressive eyes. And the sweetness of her voice was made doubly charming by the harsh and high tones of her attendants, who were jabbering in some foreign tongue, probably longing to interfere, and take the case out of my management.

"If they would not make such a noise," I said, "it would be all the better for my patient. Can you persuade them to stand out of my light, and let the fresh air flow in upon us? Oh, thank you, that is a great deal better. There! I think now if we let him rest a minute, and then carry him home, he will be all right. How clever you must be, to bring the right things so well!"

For this bit of praise I was rewarded with a smile more lovely than I should have thought possible, since the fair cheeks of Eve took the fatal bite, and human eyes imbibed Satan. But she was truthful, as Eve was false.

"Without Stepan I could have done nothing. Stepan, come forth, and receive the praise yours. You must now take *Kuban* in your arms, and follow this gentleman into the fort. Understand you? He has very little English yet. He can do everything except learn. Stepan is too strong for that. But he has not the experience that I have. Nevertheless, he is very good. I am praising thee, oh, Stepan. Lose not the opportunity of thanking me."

Stepan, a huge fellow, dressed very wonderfully according to my present ideas, stood forth in silence, and held up his arms, to show that they were ready for anything. But I saw that a hard leather bandoleer, or something of that kind, with a frill of leather cases, hung before his great chest, and beneath the red cross which all of them were wearing. "Stepan is strong as the ox," said the lady.

That he might be, and he looked it too. "Can he pull off that great leather frill?" I asked, seeing that it would scrub the poor dog sadly, as well as catch and jerk his bandages.

"He cannot remove it. That is part of Stepan." His young mistress smiled at him, as she said this.

"Then put him up here," I said, holding out my arms, though not sure that I could manage it, for the dog must weigh some twelve stone at least, and one of my arms had been injured. Stepan lifted him with the greatest ease; but not so did I carry him, for he must be kept in one position, and most of his weight came on my bad arm. So difficult was my task indeed, that I saw nothing of the place they led me through, but feared that I should drop down at every rough spot – which would have meant the death of poor *Kuban*. And down I must have come, I am quite sure of that, if I had not heard the soft sweet voice behind me – "It is too much for the kind gentleman. I pray you, sir, to handle him to the great Stepan."

When I was all but compelled to give in, by the failure of the weak arm, and the fear of dropping my patient fatally, a man of magnificent appearance stood before me, and saw my sad plight at a glance.

"Permit me," he said, in a deep rich tone, yet as gentle as a woman's voice. "This is over-trying your good will. I see what it is. I have only just heard. I will bear him very gently. Take *Orla* away."

For another dog was jumping about me now, most anxious to know what on earth had befallen that poor *Kuban*, and displaying, as I thought, even more curiosity than sympathy. But when the weight was taken from me, and my companions went on, I turned aside with pains and aches, which came upon me all the worse.

"I have done all I can. I am wanted no more; the sooner I get home the better."

Thinking thus I made my way towards the black door of our entrance, now standing wide open in the distance; and I felt low at heart through the failure of my strength, and after such a burst of excitement.

"I am not wanted here. I have no right here. What have I to do with these strange people?" I said to myself, as I sat for a moment to recover my breath, on a bench near the door. "I have quite enough to do at home, and my arm is very sore. They evidently wish to live in strict seclusion; and as far as concerns me, so they may. If they wanted me, they would send after me. A dog is more to them than a Christian perhaps. What on earth do they wear those crosses for?"

I would not even look around, to see what sort of a place it was; but slipped through the door, and picked up my shattered rod and half-filled creel, and set off, as the dusk was deepening, on the long walk to my father's cottage.

CHAPTER VIII

THROUGH THE CORN

According to Farmer Bandilow (who was now our last old tenant, striving to escape from the wreck of plough, by paddling with spade and trowel), the London season begins with turnip-tops, and ends with cabbage-grubs. But this year it must have lasted well into the time of turnip-bottoms; otherwise how could my sister, Lady Fitzragon, have been in London? Not that we knew very much about the movements of her ladyship, for she found our cottage beyond the reach of her fat and glittering horses; only that she must have been now in town, because our Grace was with her. And this was a lucky thing for me; for if Grace had been at home, she must have known all about my wounded arm, and a nice fuss she would have made of it. But my mother, though equally kind and good, was not very quick of perception; and being out of doors nearly all the day now, and keeping my own hours, I found it easy enough to avoid all notice and escape all questions. For the people at the cottage very seldom came to my special den, the harness-room; and I kept my own little larder in what had once been a kennel close at hand, and my own little bed up a flat-runged ladder, and so troubled none but a sweetly deaf old dame. And this arrangement grew and prospered, whenever there was no Grace to break through it.

However, there is no luck for some people. One night, when I felt sure that all the cottage was asleep, I had taken off the bandages, and was pumping very happily on my left forearm, where the flesh had been torn, when there in the stableyard before me, conspicuous in the moonlight, with a blazing satin waistcoat, stood the only man who could do justice to it. For this gallant fellow had a style of his own, which added new brilliance to the most brilliant apparel.

"Why, Tom," I cried, "where on earth do you come from? I can't shake hands, or I shall spoil some of your charms. Why, you must have been dining with the governor. New togs again! What a coxcomb it is!"

"Never would I have sported these, and indeed I would never have come down at all, if I had known Grace was out of the way."

He was allowed to call her *Grace* to me.

"How slow it is without her! But I say, old chap, what a frightful arm you've got! Pitchfork again, I suppose" – for I had received a scratch before – "only ten times as bad. Why, you mustn't neglect this. You'll have it off at the elbow, if you do. Why, even by this light – By Jove, what a whacking arm you've got! Why, it is twice the size of mine. I could never have believed it. Let me pull off my coat, and show you."

"But you cannot want one the size of mine" – I answered with a laugh, for it was thoroughly like Tom to fetch everything into his own person; "you could never put it into a waistcoat like that."

"George, you are an ass," was his very rude reply, and it seemed to ring into me far beyond his meaning. "My dear fellow, you will be, in your own parish, what nobody has seen anywhere, – a dead jackass, – if you go on like this. There is a black stripe down your arm; the same as you see on a 'mild-cured-haddy' when he shines by moonlight. What does that mean? Putrefaction."

"Rot!" I replied, meaning his own words. "I'll pump on you, waistcoat and all, my dear Tom, if you go on with this sort of rubbish." And yet I had some idea that he might be right. But the worst – as I need not tell any strong young fellow – of the absurdities our worthy doctors try to screw into us now – that a man must not draw the breath the Lord breathed into him, for fear of myrio-mycelia-micro-somethings, neither dare to put his fork into the grand haunch of mutton which his Maker ordered him to arise and eat – of all such infantile stuff the harm is this, that it makes a healthy man deride the better sense that is in them.

"Come to my hole, and have a smoke," I said to my dear friend. "And mind you, not a word about this scratch to my good people. To-morrow we shall cut our first field of wheat. Though it won't pay for cutting and binding, Tom, the sight is as glorious as ever. What a pity for our descendants, if we ever have any, to get no chance of ever seeing the noblest sight of Old England! Come to this gate, and take a look. In a few more years, there will be no such sight."

"Poetry is all very fine in its way," replied Tom, who had about as much as I possess, although he could make a hook and eye of rhyme sometimes. "But the moon will go on all the same, I suppose; and she does most of our poetry."

She was doing plenty of it now, in silence, such as any man may feel, but none can make another feel. We waited a minute or two by the gate, till a white cloud veiled the quivering disc, and then all the lustre flowed softly to our eyes, like a sea of silver playing smoothly on a shore of gold.

"After all, love is rot," said Tom, carried away by larger beauty, after some snub of the day before. "I should like to see any girl who could compare with that. And a man must be a muff who could look at this, and then trouble his head about their stupid little tricks. Look at the breadth of this, look at the depth of it! Why, it lifts one; it makes one feel larger, George; that is the way to take things."

"Especially when some one has been making you feel small," I answered at a venture, for I understood my friend; and this abstract worship of beauty was not so satisfactory to me now. "But come into my place, and tell me all about it, my dear Tom. You were so mysterious the other day, that I knew you were after some other wild goose."

"I am happy, most happy," Tom went on to say, after pouring forth the sorrows of his last love-tale, through many a blue eye and bright curl of smoke; "I feel that I cannot be thankful enough at the amount of side that girl puts on. And the beauty of it is, that she hasn't got a rap, and her husband would have to help to keep her mother. How lucky for me she never can have heard of the glorious Tinman, or my oofy maiden-aunt; wouldn't she have jumped at me, if she had? A fellow can't be too careful, George, when you come to think. But you'll never make a fool of yourself. Not a bit of romance about you, Farmer Jarge; and a fellow of your size and family has a right to go in for ten thousand a-year. How about those gipsies in the valley, though? You mustn't go on with that, even if you could, my friend. Great swells, I daresay, but no tin."

"What business of yours? What do you know about them? I'll thank you to hold your tongue upon subjects that are above you."

"Ha, ha! Ho, ho! Tinmen must look up to tinkers, must they? How dare I call them tinkers? Well, it is just like this. These people are gipsies, all gipsies are tinkers, therefore these people are tinkers. But don't get in a wax, George. I was only chaffing. It may be Cleopatra herself, for all I know, come to look after her needle – would not look at it, while her own, will look at nothing else, when lost. Oh, I know what women are."

"And I know what idiots are," I answered with a superior smile; not being quite such a fool, I trust, as to pretend to that knowledge which even the highest genius denies to man. "And an idiot you are to-night, Tom."

"Well, I may be a little upset," said he, striking his glorious waistcoat, and then stroking it to remove the mark. "I confess I did like that girl. And she liked me; I am sure of that. Why, bless her little heart, she cried, my boy! However, it was not to be. And when I told her that I must look higher (meaning only up to heaven) for gradual consolation, what a wax she did get in! Never mind. Let it pass. There are lots of pretty girls about. And no man can be called mercenary, for I am blest if any of them have got a bit of tin. I thank the Lord, every night of my life, that my old aunt never was a beauty. And that makes her think all the more of me. Sir, your most obedient!"

Behind my chair was an old looking-glass, which Grace had insisted upon hanging there, to make the place look rather smart; and Tom, who had not seen himself for some hours, stood up before it in the weak candle-light, and proceeded in his usual manner. "Tom, my friend, you don't

look so much amiss. If your heart is broken, there is enough of it left to do a little breaking on its own account. Don't be cast down, my boy. You may not be a beauty, though beautiful girls think better of you than your modesty allows you to proclaim. But one thing you may say, Tom; whoever has the luck to get you, will find you a model husband."

This I thought likely enough; if only he should get a wife with plenty of sense and love to guide him. But what was the opinion of a tall, hard man who stood in the doorway with a long gun on his arm, criticising Erricker's sweet self-commune with a puzzled and yet a very well-contented gaze?

"Mr. Stoneman!" I exclaimed, giving Tom a little push, for he stood with his back to him, in happy innocence of critics. "We did not expect this pleasure so late at night. This is an old friend of mine – Mr. Erricker. Allow me to introduce you, Tom, to Mr. Jackson Stoneman." My old friend turned round, without a symptom of embarrassment, and bowed almost as gracefully as he had been salaaming to himself.

"I have heard of Mr. Erricker, and have great pleasure in making his acquaintance," our new visitor replied, and I saw that the pleasure was genuine, and knew why; to wit, that he was thinking in his heart, "That little fop to make up to Grace Cranleigh!" For no doubt he had heard of Tom's frequent visits, and the inference drawn by neighbours. "But I must beg pardon," he continued, "for daring to look in at such a time. It was only this, I have been down to the pond at the bottom of the long shrubbery, to look for some shoveller ducks I heard of, and see that no poachers are after them. I don't want to shoot them, though I brought my gun; and going back, I happened to see your light up here."

"Sit down, Mr. Stoneman," said Tom, as if he were the master of the place. "I have often wished to see you, and I will tell you why. I am a bit of a sportsman, when I can get the chance. But this fellow, Cranleigh, is so hard at work always that he never will come anywhere to show me where to go."

"And he has not many places to take you to now." I spoke without thinking, for to beg permission from this new landowner was about the last thing I would do. And I was vexed with my friend for his effrontery.

"Of course I should never dream," proceeded Tom, for he had some reason in him after all, "to ask leave to shoot on any land of yours, or where you have taken the shooting rights. But there is a little warren with a lot of rabbits, on Bandilow's farm, where Sir Harold gives me leave. But I must go a mile round to get at it, unless I may cross the park with my gun. May I do so, without firing, of course?"

"To be sure. As often as you like. Any friend of Mr. Cranleigh may do much more than that. And I am come to ask a favour, too. I have three fellows doing next to nothing. They have just finished bundling a lot of furze. Capital fellows with a hook, I believe; and so I don't want to turn them off. I hear you intend to begin reaping to-morrow. Can you find a job for them, just for a few days?"

This was a very pretty way to put it. I knew that he had plenty of work for the men, but wanted to help us with our harvest labour, having heard, no doubt, that we were short of hands. I thanked him warmly, for these men would be of the greatest service to us. And then he turned upon me severely, as if my health were under his superintendence, and I was trying to elude it, by keeping my arm from his notice.

"You are doing a very stupid thing. You have a shocking wound in your left arm, caused by the tooth or the claws of a dog; and instead of having it treated properly, all you do is to pump upon it."

"Halloa!" cried Tom Erricker, "a dog. I wouldn't have that for a thousand pounds. George, how could you play me such a trick? You told me it was a pitchfork."

"I told you nothing of the kind. I simply said nothing whatever about it. It can concern nobody but myself. And I will thank Mr. Stoneman, and you, too, to attend to your own business."

"It may be no business of mine, perhaps," the stockbroker answered severely; "but it is the undoubted business of any intimate friend of yours, and most of all that of your family. Such behaviour of yours is not true manliness, as I daresay you suppose, but foolhardy recklessness, and

want of consideration for your friends. And what does that come to but selfishness, under one of its many disguises?"

Tom chimed in to the same effect, even going so far as to ask me what my father and mother could do without me, even if they survived the trial of seeing me smothered under a feather-bed. But when both my friends had killed me of rabies to their entire satisfaction, I showed them in very few words how little they knew about what they were talking of. For I had done for myself all that could be done, as well as any doctor could have managed it, and now there was nothing for it but cold water, and an easy mind, and trust in Providence.

As soon as Tom Erricker heard of Providence, he began to yawn, as if he were in church; so I begged him to go to bed, for which he was quite ready, while I had a little talk with our tenant.

"How did you hear of this affair?" I asked, hoping for some light upon other matters; "none of our people know it. They make such a fuss about a dog-bite, that I was obliged to keep it close. I will beg you to do the same, if you wish to oblige me."

"There is nothing I wish for more than that." Stoneman drew his chair over as he spoke, and offered me one of his grand cigars; and I was not above accepting it, with my knowledge of his feelings. "I have your permission to call you *George*. I will do so, now that your bright young friend is gone. When I think of the reports that reached me – but I will say no more. A fine young fellow, no doubt, or he would not be a friend of yours." The vision of Tom Erricker at the mirror brought a smile to his firm lips; but for my sake he suppressed it. "Now I want to talk to you seriously, George. And you will not take it as a liberty, knowing my very warm regard for – for you."

"You may say what you like. I shall take it kindly. I am well aware that you know a thousand times as much of the world as I do."

"And a very poor knowledge it is," he replied, gazing at a cloud of his own smoke. "When the question is of deeper matters, the wisdom of the world is a broken reed. And yet I want to bring it into play just now. In the case of another, that is so much easier; just as any fool can pass judgment on the labour he has never tried with his own hand. Excuse me, George, if I speak amiss, I do it out of good-will, as some of them do not, but to show their own superiority. To cut the matter short – I know all about – no, not all, but a lot about your new friends down in the valley."

"They can scarcely be called my friends, if I require to be informed about them." My mind had been full of them, although it was clear that they cared not to hear any more of me.

"You are surprised, perhaps, at my knowledge of what occurred the other day. That was by the purest accident; for I am not the sort of man to play the spy. You know that, I hope. Very well, I took the liberty then of inquiring for my own sake, and that of the neighbourhood, who these mysterious settlers were, and I knew where to go for my information. Like most things, when you get nearer to them, there is no real mystery at all. The only wonder is that they can have been there so long, without attracting notice. If the country had been hunted, as it used to be, when people could afford to keep up the pack, they would never have been left so quiet. The parson of the parish, as a general rule, routs up every newcomer for church purposes, no matter what his creed may be; and I know that they seldom give much start even to the tax-collectors. But the parson of that parish is a very old man, and has no one to look after him, and the country is very thinly peopled. Well, they seem to have bought the place for an old song, so that nobody can interfere with them. And they soon put it into better order – "

"But who are they? And what are they doing there? And how long do they mean to stop?"

"Don't be in a hurry, my good friend. There is plenty of time for another cigar. Pipes you prefer? Very well, fill again. However, for fear of being knocked on the head, I will resume my parable. Nothing can be done without paying for it. That is the golden rule in England, and everywhere else upon this planet. And wherever money passes, it can be followed up. The strange thing is that these people seem to care very little about concealment, though they are not sociable. What their native language is, we do not know, though they seem to be great linguists. French, German, Russian,

Arabic, and I don't know what else, and some of them very good in our beloved tongue, the hardest to learn of all the lot. They are of Eastern race, that appears quite certain, though neither Jews, Turks, nor Armenians. But what they are here for seems pretty plain – forgery!"

"Ridiculous!" I exclaimed, though without showing any wrath. "They are people of high rank, I am sure of that. Political exiles, refugees, Anarchists, or even Nihilists – though I cannot think that. But as for forgers – "

"It scarcely sounds nice; and yet I have little doubt about it; and the police have come to that conclusion, and are keeping a sharp eye upon them. For what other purpose can they want a mill? And a mill which they have set up themselves, to suit themselves. The old water-wheel they had, and the cogs and all that, left from the old corn-grinding time; but they have refitted it for quite a different purpose, and done almost all of it with their own hands. What for? Plain as a pikestaff – to make their own paper, and get stamping power, and turn out forged notes, foreign of course, Russian rouble, the simplest of all."

He had made up his mind. He was sure of this solution. He had no doubt whatever. Ah, but he had never seen the majestic man who met me, much less that beautiful nymph of the shrine!

"Stoneman, all this sounds very fine." I met his smile of confidence, and as it seemed to me of heartless triumph, with a gaze of faith in humanity – which some people might call romance. "But there is not a word of truth in it. What inference does a policeman draw? The worst he can imagine – grist for his own mill. They make the world a black chapter, to suit their own book. But I have no motive. What motive could I have, to make out that people are better than they seem? I tell you, and you may take my word for it, that this little colony, of whatever race it may be, has no evil purpose in coming among us. I might even go further and say that I am sure of their having an excellent object, a noble object, some great discovery, perhaps surpassing all my brother's, and something that will be of service to entire humanity."

"Money, to wit. You know what the last great forger who was hanged, before we left off that wise plan, what he said when exhorted to repentance, 'You make money for yourself, sir, I make it for the good of the public.' No doubt they take that view of the case."

"Very well, you take a lesson from them, and improve the morals of the Stock Exchange."

The stockbroker smiled very pleasantly, as one who was thoroughly at home with that old joke; then he took up his gun, and marched off for the Hall, leaving me to make the best of things.

Feeling how small are the minds of mankind, even the best of them, when they listen to the police, and knowing that I could not sleep as yet, I went once more to the gate at the top of the yard, and gazed over the wheat which was to lie low on the morrow. Although I had just received proof of friendship, from two very nice fellows better than myself, which should have encouraged me to think the best, sadness came into my heart, and a sombre view of life depressed me. There are two things only that can save a man from deep dejection occasionally. One of them is to have no thought whatever, except for affairs of the moment; and the other and surer is to believe with unchangeable conviction that all is ordered by a Higher Power, benevolent ever, and ever watchful for those who commit themselves to it. That atom of humanity, which is myself, has never been able to sink to the depth of the one condition, or soar to the height of the other. So there must be frequent ups and downs with ordinary mortals, gleams of light, and bars of shade; and happy is the man who can keep the latter from deepening as his steps go on. But who am I to moralise?

Enough that any fellow worth his salt must be grieved and lowered, when suspicions arise, concerning those of whom he has formed a high opinion. How much worse, when his own judgment owns that things look rather black, and memory quotes against his wishes more than one such disappointment. If it were so, if those who had made so deep an impression on me were skulking rogues and stealthy felons, no wonder they had not cared to ask what became of the stranger, who by remarkable presence of mind had saved the life of their valued warder, and then with a modesty no less rare, had vanished before they could thank him, if they ever had the grace to intend it. "All

the better," I said to myself, with the acumen of the wisest fox that ever entered vineyard, "even if all had been right, it never could have led to any good; and see what a vast amount of work is coming on all at once, with no one else to do it! And all the time is there any one but myself to see to my young sister's doings? Here is this fellow Stoneman sweet upon her, wonderfully sweet, quite spoony – who could have believed it of a stockbroker? What do I know about him? Nothing, except that he has endless tin, and spends it certainly like a brick. Is he worthy of her, and if he is, will she even look at him? Rather a romantic girl, too fond of her own opinions, and yet a little prone to hero-worship. She might fall in love with some hero in London who hasn't got a half-penny – halloa, what can that be, winding in and out so, through the wheat?"

The moon, now very nearly full, was making that low round of the sky which is all it can manage in August, and seemed rather to look along the field than heartily down upon it. The effect was very different now from that which Tom and I had watched. For the surface of the luxuriant corn, instead of imbibing and simpering with light, was flawed and patched (like a flowing tide) with flittings and hoverings of light and shade. And along a sweep of darkness near the shadow of a tree, there was something moving stealthily like the figure of a man.

For a moment or two, I did not enjoy that calmness of mind which is believed (by Britons) to be the prerogative of Britons. The period of the night, and the posture of the moon, and peculiar tone of things not to be told, as well as some dread of a mischief to my brain – through what had befallen me recently – took away from me that superior gift which had enabled me to beat the bull-dog. However, I might just as well not have been afraid – as we generally find out afterwards – for the other apparition, whatever it might be, was ever so much more afraid of me.

"What on earth are you about there?" I shouted bravely, when this welcome truth came to my knowledge. "Can't you stand up like a man, and say what you are about?"

In reply to my challenge an undersized figure scarcely any taller than the corn arose, showing a very strange head-dress and other outlandish garments, and a loose idea generally of being all abroad. "You are the little chap I saw the other day," said I.

He nodded his head, and said something altogether outside of my classical attainments; and then he pulled forth from a long coat, whose colours no moon, or even rainbow could render, a small square package, which he lifted to his eyes. With a rush of my heart into the situation, I seized him by his collar, or the thing that represented it, and twisted him over the gate; and he looked thankful, having some fear perhaps of English five-bars.

In half a minute, I had this little fellow in my den, where he trembled and blinked at the light, and then grinned, as if to propitiate a cannibal. And I was pleased to see that he had pluck enough to put one hand upon the hilt of a little blue skewer which he wore in his belt, and then he looked at me boldly. With a smile to reassure him, I offered to take the missive from his other hand. But that was not the proper style of doing business with him. He drew back for a pace or two, and made the utmost of his puny figure, and then with a low bow stretched forth both hands, and behold there was a letter in the end of a cleft stick! Where he found the cleft stick is more than I can tell. At the same time, he said *Allai*, which turned out afterwards to be his own name.

"Sit down in that corner, little chap," I said as graciously as if he knew English. "And make yourself at home, while I get on with this." Perhaps he was out of practice in the art of sitting down, for instead of accepting the chair I offered, he clapped himself in some wonderful manner upon a hassock. But it was impossible for me to attend to him much, until I knew what he had brought.

Now there was nothing particularly foreign about this. It looked like an ordinary English letter, except that the paper was not like ours, and the envelope was secured with silk, as well as sealed. But the writing was the daintiest that ever I did see; and I longed to get rid of that "darkie" in the corner, whose eyes flashed at me from the gloomy floor. And his hand was playing with his *kinjal* all the time, for so they call those deadly bits of steel, without which they never think their attire complete. Being unaccustomed to be looked at so, I could not enter into my fair letter as I wished; though that little

fellow would have flown up to the slates, before he could get near me with that hateful snakish thing. And to tell the truth, I did him wrong by any such suspicion; for there could never be a more loyal, honest, and zealous retainer than Allai. "Here you are," I said, addressing him in English, though well aware now that he was none the wiser; "here's a drop of good beer for you, young man. You take a pull at that, while I write my answer. Ah, you won't get such stuff as that in – well, I don't know where you hail from; but all over the world I defy you to get anything like it."

Allai gave a grunt which I took for acquiescence; and leaving him to enjoy himself, I wrote a few lines and enclosed them in a cover. Then I found a bit of sealing wax, and sealed it very carefully, and fixed it in the cleft wand, and handed it to Allai.

"You go straight away, quick-sticks, with this, and don't you lose it, or I'll break your neck. Why, I'm blest if the pagan has drunk a drop of his beer! Can such a race ever be brought up to date? Why, he takes it for virulent poison!"

The young savage had poured my good ale upon the floor, and was soaking the point of his dagger in it. He had put the glass to his lips no doubt, and arrived at the sage conclusion that here was swift death for his enemies. However, he possessed some civilisation as to the meaning of a broad crown-piece, which in the fervour of my joy I set before him. To a rich man it would have been well worth the money, to see the glad sparkle of those black eyes, and the grin upon those swarthy cheeks. Suddenly with a deep salaam his slender form turned and was gone like a shadow.

And then I was able at last to dwell upon this very beautiful letter, which might to the outward eye appear to convey not a token of anything more than "Miss Mary Jones presents her compliments;" but to my deeper perception, and hopes higher than any telescope may carry, it showed the sky cast open at the zenith, like a lily, and a host of golden angels letting down a ladder for me. For no longer could I hide my state of mind, or disguise it from myself. Henceforth I shall be open about it, though hitherto ashamed to say half of what I thought, while I had such a little to go upon. But here is my key to Paradise. Let every man judge for himself, bearing in mind that he never can be wise until he has been a fool seventy times seven.

"Sir, – My dear father, Sûr Imar, of Daghestan, has been injured very greatly by your alien conduct to him. Your actions were of high bravery, and great benevolence to us. But when we desired very largely to inform you of our much gratitude, we could not discover you in any place, and we sought for you vainly, with great eagerness of sorrow. And then, for a long space of time, we made endeavour to find out the name of the gentleman who had done us so great a service, but would not permit us to thank him. We are strangers here, and have not much knowledge. After that, a man who possesses three goats pronounced to us that he understood the matter. According to his words, I take the liberty of letter, entreating you, if it is right, to come, and permit us to see to whom we owe so much. And my father is afraid that the gentleman was injured in the conflict with a furious English beast. If, then, this should have happened, he can remedy it, as perhaps you cannot in this country. I desire also, if it is right, to join my own entreaties. I am, Sir, Yours very faithfully, Dariel."

CHAPTER IX

STRANGE SENSATIONS

"Yours very faithfully." Oh, if that were only written in earnest, instead of cold convention! To have, faithfully mine, the most lovely, and perfect, entrancing, enslaving, poetical, celestial – tush, what word is there in our language? None of course; because there has never been anything like it until now. Gentleness, sweetness, gracefulness, purity, simplicity, warmth of heart, gratitude for even such a trifling service – all these were very fine things in their way; but away with them all, if they want to tell me why I love my darling! Because I cannot help it, is the only reason. It must be so, because it is so. Surely this is their own fair logic, and they must feel the force of it.

All this jumped with reason well, and was plainer than a pikestaff. But the path of true love still was crossed by one little bar, without a sign-post. In the name of the zodiac, where was Daghestan?

Man had not quite hatched board-schools yet; though already, under the tread of Progress, incubating of them. Having been only at a public school, and then for two years at Oxford, no opportunity had I found for hearing of Modern Geography. That such a thing existed, I could well believe, from the talk of undergraduates, whose lot it was to cram for competition of a lower kind. I had been a prefect at Winchester, and passed my little-go at Oxford, and might have gone in for honours there, though very likely not to get them. But in all this thoroughly sound education, I had never dreamed of Modern Geography. I could have told you, though it is all gone now, the name of every village in Peloponnese, and of every hill in Attica, and the shape of every bay and island, and a pestilent lot of them there was, from the Hellespont to Tænarus. But if you had asked me the names and number of the counties of England, and other wild questions of that sort, I should have answered, as a friend of mine did, who got an open scholarship at Oxford, and then went in for something in London, "There are about half a hundred, more or less; but Parliament is always changing them." And this man got the highest marks in the geography of that year; because the examiner was a Welshman, and therefore laid claim to Monmouth.

But wherever Daghestan might be, I felt sure of its being the noblest country (outside the British dominions) of all the sun could shine upon. Moreover, it sounded as if it had no little to do with the Garden of Eden. Ispahan, and Teheran, and other rhymes for caravan, had a gorgeous oriental sound, as of regions of romance, inhabited by Peris, and paved with gold and diamonds. And the glow that flickered through the wheat that day, as the mellow fountains danced before the blue half-moon of sickle, was warmer than an English sun can throw, and quickened with a brilliance of heavenly tints, such as Hope alone, the Iris of the heart, may cast.

"Farmer Jarge, here's nuts for you. What do you suppose I have found out now?"

This was that lazy fellow Tom, sprawling in the yellow stubble, with his back against a stook, and a pipe in his mouth, and a dog's-eared novel on his lap. We had knocked off work for half an hour in the middle of the day, just to get a bit to eat; and I was not best pleased with Erricker, because of the difference between the noble promise of the breakfast table, and the trumpery performance in the field.

"Get away," I said; "you can talk, and nothing else. All you have found out is where the beer-can is; you are not even worthy of your bread and cheese." However, I gave him some, and he began to munch.

"Won't you laugh, when I tell you about this? And it upsets all your theories that you are so wonderfully wise with. I must have heard you say a thousand times, that it is only a fool that ever falls in love."

"You never understand a thing that anybody says. There are limitations, and conditions, and a whole variety of circumstances, that may make all the difference; otherwise a man would be a fool to talk like that."

"Fool to do it? Or fool to talk about it? You seem to be getting a bit mixed, friend George. It's the stooping that has done it. By Jove! I couldn't stand that. Nature never meant me for a reaper, George. And you may thank the Lord that I did not cut your legs off. But what do you think 'Stocks and Stones' has done? And you can't call him a fool altogether. Head over heels, 'Stocks and Stones' has fallen in love with our Grace!"

"*Our Grace*, indeed! Have you a sister of that name? If you should happen to refer to my sister, I will thank you to call her 'Miss Cranleigh'! Is there anything this fellow does not meddle with?"

"Mr. George Cranleigh, Mr. Jackson Stoneman aspires to the hand of Miss Grace Cranleigh, daughter of Sir Harold Cranleigh, Bart. Is that grand enough, Mr. Cranleigh? And if so, what do you think of it?"

What I thought of it was that there scarcely could have been a more unlucky complication than was likely now to be brought about by Tom's confounded discovery. It was not in his nature to hold his tongue; and if he should once let this knowledge escape him, in the presence of my father and mother, or worst of all in that of my sister, it would be all up with Stoneman's chance of marrying Grace Cranleigh. And as to binding Tom to secrecy, as well might one blow the kitchen bellows at a dandelion ball, and beg it not to part with a particle of its plumage. On the spur of the moment, I said more than facts would bear me out in, when they came up at leisure.

"Don't tell me, you stupid fellow. How many more mare's nests must come out of your eyes, before you see anything? But if you must take in such rubbish, just do this, Tom, will you? Keep your eyes wide open, my boy. You know how sharp you are, Tom. But not a word to any one, or it would spoil your game altogether. By the by, where is Daghestan, Tom? You are such a swell at geography."

"Daghestan! I seem to have heard of it, and yet I can't be certain. Persian, I think. No, that is Ispahan. Tut, tut, what a fool I am! – of course I know all about it. Why it's in the United States, a prime place for scalping and buffaloes."

"No, you old muff, that is Dakota. Quite another pair of shoes. I don't want to disturb the Governor, or I could find out in a moment. Never mind, it doesn't matter; and here we go to work again. Now what is the sweetest smell, do you think, in all the world of farming? Not a great overpowering scent, but a delicate freshness through the air."

"I should say the hay on an upland meadow, when it begins to make. Or perhaps a field of new bean-blossom. I never knew that till this year; but upon my word it was stunning."

"No, the most delicate of all scents is from the clover first laid bare among the wheat where it was sown. No blossom of course; but the fragrance of the leaf, among the glossy quills that sheltered it. But come along; if you can't swing hook without peril of manslaughter, you can bind, or you can set up stooks, or earn your keep some little. Why, Grace is worth a score of you! Poor Tom, is your finger bleeding? You must come harvesting in kid gloves."

"I will tell you what it is," said Tom, after keeping his place among the binders for about five minutes. "I am a thoroughgoing countryman, and I know a lot about farming; and you know how I can jump and run, and a good light weight with the gloves I am; but this job beats me altogether. 'Pay your footing, sir, pay your footing!' You'll have to pay for my headstone, George, if you keep me on much longer. How you can go on all day long – but I want you to do something for me, and by the Powers, I have earned it."

He wanted me to promise, in return for all his labours, to give up my plans for the evening, and present myself at dinner-time for the ceremony at the cottage. This, though a very simple business, must be done in the proper form; and then it would be my duty perhaps to offer to take a hand at whist, and be ready for the wearisome wrangle, which even well-bred people make of it. But I had nobler fish to fry.

"Tom, I can't do it. You like that sort of thing; and my mother is delighted with your sprightly little tales. Go and put your brave apparel on. Everybody admires you; and you love that."

He knew that he did. Why should he deny it? The happiness of mankind is pleasure, though it passes without our knowledge, because we never can stop to think of it, – as a man in a coach sees the hedges race by; and if it comes to that, where may you find true bliss so near at home, as in being pleased with your own good self? Our Tom had a happy time. Nothing long tormented him. He carried a lofty standard with him, and flopped its white folds joyously at little gnats and buzzing bees; and he never failed to come up to it, because that standard was himself. "What else could it be?" he says to me. "And that is why everybody likes me."

CHAPTER X

UPON THE GROUND

Alas! to come down from those pleasant heights, if ever I did attain to them, to the turbulent dissatisfaction with oneself, and contempt of every creature in the world, save one, which lonely love engenders! Never had I seemed to myself so low, so awfully prosaic and unpicturesque, as when I was trying to make myself look decent that very evening. Since then I have learned that even pretty girls, who are roses to thistles in comparison with us, are never quite certain at their looking-glass that another touch might not improve them. And what did I behold? A square-built fellow, with a stubby yellow moustache, and a nose fit for the ring, – or to have a ring through it, – a great bulky forehead, like Ticknor's bull-dog, and cheeks like a roasted coffee-berry. The only thing decent was the eyes, firm and strong, of a steadfast blue, and the broad full chin that kept the lips from drooping in a tremble even now. Proud as I was of my Saxon breed, and English build and character, in the abasement of the moment I almost longed for a trace of the comely Norman traits. "As if any girl could love you!" I exclaimed, in parody of that handsome Tom's self-commune.

In for a penny, in for a pound. Without a trial, there's no denial. Handsome is that handsome does. Beauty is only skin-deep. And so on – I laboured to fetch myself up to the mark, but it was a very low one. The neap of the tide, or the low spring water, – which goes ever so much further out, – was ebbing away on the shores of self-esteem as I entered the glen of St. Winifred. Tom Erricker would have descended, as if the valley and its contents belonged to him. Heaviness of heart may sometimes visit even a healthy and robust young man, living the life intended for us, working in the open air all day, and sleeping on a hard palliasse at night. Heaviness and diffidence, and clownish hesitation, and fear of losing precious landmarks in a desert-dazzle. Surely it were better to turn back before they can have seen me, set the sheepish face to the quiet hill, and thank my stars that not one of them yet has turned into a comet.

Sadly was I perpending this, slower and slower at every step, while the shadows of the trees grew longer, and the voice of birds was lower, and the babble of the brook began to sink into the lisping of a cradled child, as the draught of the valley hushed it; and falling into harmony with all these signs, my breath was beginning to abate me, when along a trough of sliding mist like a trysting track for the dusk, appeared the form of my friend *Kuban*. Courage at once arose within me, and spirit of true patronage. To men and women I may be nought, but to him I am a hero. Lo, how he licks my hand, and whines, as if he had never seen my like, and would never believe it, if he did! He longs to roll upon his back, and offer himself a prostrate sacrifice. But he knows that I should be vexed at that, because it would not be safe for him. The labour of his great heart is to show me all his damages, and make me understand that, but for me, he could not display them. What with love, and what with fear, and the utter unsettlement of my mind, down I went on the grass beside him, and took him paw by paw, to feel how much of him was still existing.

Now if I had thought of it in the coldest blood – if there still were cold blood in me – there was nothing in the world I could have done so wise as this abasement. What says Ovid in the "Art of Love"? Many low things, I am afraid, that no Englishman would stoop to. But if that great Master arose anew, to give lessons to an age of milder passion, probably he would have said to me, "Water those wounds with your tears, my friend."

My eyes, being British, were dry as a bone; but upon them fell, as they looked up, the lustre of a very different pair, like bright stars extinguishing a glow-worm. And the glory of these was deepened by the suffusion of their sparkle with a tender mist of tears. No blush was lurking in the petal of the cheeks, no smile in the brilliant bud of lips; pity and gentle sorrow seemed to be the sole expression.

I dropped the dog's great legs, and rose, and with all the grace that in me lay – and that was very little – took off my hat, and made a bow, the former being of the bowler order, and the latter of the British.

"No, no. Please not to do that," she said, "it is so very grievous. Forgive me, if I am sad to look at. It always comes upon me so, when I behold things beautiful."

"But," I replied, being quite unable to consider myself of that number, even upon such authority, "it is I that should be shedding tears; it is I that behold things beautiful."

"It was of the dog I meant my words," – this was rather a settler for me, – "and the beautiful tokens he manifests of gratitude to the kind gentleman. And we have been desiring always; but the place we could not find. It is my father who will best speak, for he has great talent of languages. He was hoping greatly that you would come. I also have been troubling in my mind heavily, that we must appear so ungrateful. It is now ten days that have passed away. But we could not learn to what place to send; neither did we know the name of Mr. – but I will not spoil it, until you have told me how to pronounce."

"*Cranleigh, Cran-lee*; as if it were spelled with a double e coming after the letter l," said I to her. While to my all abroad self I whispered, "May the kind powers teach her to spell it, by making it her own, while she looks like that."

For sometimes it is vain to think, and to talk is worse than lunacy. Her attitude and manner now, and her way of looking at me, – as if I were what she might come to like, but would rather know more about it, – and the touches of foreign style (which it is so sweet to domicile), and the exquisite music which her breath made, or it may have been her lips, with our stringy words – I am lost in my sentence, and care not how or why, any more than I cared how I was lost then, so long as it was in Dariel's eyes.

If Dariel's eyes will find me there, and send me down into her heart, what odds to me of the earth or heaven, the stars, the sun, or the moon itself – wherein I am qualified to walk with her?

Possibly that sweet Dariel saw, but could not comprehend my catastrophe. She drew back, as if from something strange, and utterly beyond her knowledge. Then she cast down those eyes, that were so upsetting me; and I felt that as yet I had no right to perceive the tint, as of heaven, before the earth has glimpsed the dawn, which awoke in welcome wonder on the wavering of her face. See it I did however, and a glow went through me.

Who can measure time when time acts thus? *Kuban* arose, as if his wounds were all a sham, or as if we at least were taking them in that light, and hating – as a good dog always does – to play second fiddle, turned his eyes from one to the other of the twain, in a manner so tragic that we both began to laugh. And when Dariel laughed, there could be nothing more divine, unless it were Dariel crying.

"Oh, how he does love you, Mr. *Cran-lee*!" she exclaimed with a little pout, pretending to be vexed. "What a wicked dog he is to depart from his mind so! Why, he always used to think that there was nobody like me."

"If he would only think that I am like you, or at any rate try to make you like me, what a blessed animal he would be!" This I said with pathos, and vainly looking at her.

"I am not very strong of the English language yet. It has so many words that are of turns incomprehensible. And when one thinks to have learned them all, behold they are quite different! To you I seem to speak it very, very far from native."

"To me you seem to speak it so that it is full of music, of soft clear sounds, and melody, that no English voice can make of it. It is like the nightingale I heard when first – I mean one summer evening long ago; only your voice is sweeter."

"Is it? Then I am glad, because my father hears it always. And he knows everything I think, before I have time to tell him. And he can speak the English well, – as well as those who were born in it. Seven different languages he can speak. Oh, how he is learned! To hear me talk is nothing –

nothing – folly, trifles, nothing more than deficiency of wisdom, and yet of himself he thinks no more, perhaps not so much as you do."

"I think nothing of myself at all. How can I, when I am with you? Yet a great many different people think highly of me, and I do my best to deserve it." This was no vain word, although it is not like my usual manner to repeat it.

"I am glad of that," she answered simply, looking with kind approval at me; and I saw that her own clear nature led her to believe everything she heard. "That is the proper way for people, and as the good Lord intended. But how long we have been discoursing, without anything to be said, while the dusk of the night is approaching! It is my father beyond all doubt whom you have come by this long road to see. And he has been desiring for many days to obtain the privilege of seeing you; not only that he may return his thanks, but to learn that you did not receive a wound; for he says that the wound of a dog is very dangerous in this country."

"Yes, I did receive a wound, and a bad one rather," – how mean of me it was to speak like this! Although I was telling the simple truth, for there was a deep gash all down my left forearm. "But I would gladly receive a hundred wounds, for the sake of anything that you loved. For what am I? Who could find any good in me, compared with you, or even with *Kuban*?"

But this fine appeal to the tender emotions did not obtain any success that time. If the pity, so ignobly fished for, felt any tendency to move, it took good care not to show itself in the fountains watched by me.

"Mr. Cran-lee speaks much from his good-will to please. For there must be good in him, even to compare with *Kuban*, if a great many people think highly of him, and he does his best to deserve it. But is it not the best thing to hasten at once with this very bad wound to the one who can cure it? Let us waste no more time, but go at once to meet my father."

There was no getting out of this; and I said to myself that Miss Dariel was not quite so soft after all. What had she told me about herself? Nothing. How much about her father? Very little. And here was I being towed off to him, when I wanted to talk with her, study her, make way with her, find out whether there was any other villain in pursuit of her marvellous attractions, – in a word, make my best love to her.

But this was the very thing she would not have at present; and I felt like a man tumbling out of a tree, through making too lofty a grab at the fruit. So I fell into the opposite extreme of manner, to make it come home to her that I was hurt. This was another mistake; because, as I came to understand long afterwards, the feminine part of mankind is never struck all of a heap, as we are. If you will only think twice, you will see that it never could be expected. For drop as we may – and the ladies too often call upon us now to drop it – the sense that is inborn in us, of a purer and higher birth in them, which they kept and exalted by modesty – even if at their own demand we let fall every atom of that, and endeavour to regard them as bipeds on a wheel, with limbs rounder than our own, – I say that we ought to try still to regard them as better than ourselves, though they will not have it so. And what could say more for their modesty?

I looked at Dariel, and saw that she was not thinking of me at all, except as a matter of business. And fearing to have gone too far, I tried to behave in every way as a well-conducted stranger. This put her into a friendly state of mind, and even more than that. For it was now her place to be hospitable; and I displayed such bashfulness, that believing her father to be the greatest man on earth, she concluded that I was terribly afraid of him.

"You must not be uneasy about meeting him;" she spoke in a voice as gentle as the whisper of the wind in May, when it tempts a young lamb to say "Ba!" "I assure you, Mr. Cran-lee, although he can be very stern with persons at all wicked, to those who are upright and good, he is a great deal less austere and rigid than even I am. And I am afraid that you have discovered much harshness in my character, for you appear to dread a walk with me."

I had fallen behind as we approached the door, partly to show my humility, and partly to admire the grace and true perfection of her slender figure in motion. English girls may have lovely figures, but none of them can walk like that.

"No," I said after some delay, to make her turn her head again, and repeat that look of penitence; "you have been as kind as I could expect, perhaps more kind than the ladies of your country are to a mere stranger."

If ever I deserved a good hearty kick, and too often that has been my merit, here was a solid occasion for it. She stopped and spread both hands to me, and looked at me with her clear chin raised, and trembling lips, and soft dark eyes, whose radiant depths appeared to thrill with tender sorrow and self-reproach. What eyes to tell the tale of love, to the happy man who shall inspire it!

No dawn was there now of any warmth, but light alone, the light of kindness and good-will, and the tranquil beams of gratitude. What more could I expect as yet, though myself in such a hurry?

"What a beautiful place! I had no idea that it would be like this."

I spoke as we stood within the wall, for the maiden now seemed timid. "Why, I must have lost my wits altogether, when I was here the other day, for I do not remember a bit of this. What a wonderful man your father is! What taste, and skill, and knowledge! But it must have taken him many years to bring it into this condition. It was nothing but a pile of ruins, inside an old ruinous wall, at the time when I used to come home from Winton. And how beautifully it is laid out! I should like to know who planned it. Why you must have quite a number of men to keep it in such order. It is almost like a dream to me. But how rude I must appear to you! Though really if the light were good, I could sit here for an hour together and like to look at nothing else but all this perfect loveliness."

She had come quite close to me as I spoke, with a bright smile of pleasure on her face, – for I warmed my description knowingly, – and as I said *perfect loveliness*, I think she knew where I found it. For she turned away, as if to look at the distance I was praising; and being in rapid chase of ever so trifling a thing to encourage me, after the many mistakes I had made, I tried with the greatest delight to believe that she did that to rob me of a conscientious blush. But the wonder of all these zig-zag ways, when a straight solid man tumbles into them, is that they tussle him to and fro, a hundred times as much as they upset a slippery fellow whose practice is to slide in and out at pleasure. "Oh, for the wits of Tom Erricker now!" was the only thought of things outside, that came to me in this crisis. Then again in a moment I scorned that wish. For a strong heart from its depth despises surface gloss and frothy scum.

"What is the proper expression for me? I see your noble father in the distance. How shall I accost him?" That I used such a word as *accost* – which I hate, but no better word would come to me – shows the state of mind I had fallen into; not about him, but his daughter. For the great Sûr – whatever they might mean – I did not care a fig as yet, and in fact felt rather annoyed with him. But it was of the utmost moment now to make her prize my deference. That she did, far beyond the value, and smiled at me with a superior light.

"In his own land he is a prince," she said; "not as those Russians call everybody; but a Prince of the longest generations. He, however, makes lightness of that; for he must have been the same without it. I have read that you are proud of your English race, which comes down to you naturally. But my father is purer than to dwell upon that. He allows no one to call him *Prince*. And I never call him anything but Father. We have not many names in our country. He is Imar; and I am only Dariel."

Before I could go further into that important subject, I found myself looking up at the most magnificent man I ever saw.

CHAPTER XI

SÛR IMAR

Although it may seem very wonderful to those who have never been in that state, nevertheless it is quite true, that in this condition of my feelings, the magnitude of no man was a question that concerned me. Let him be taller than the son of Kish, or wiser than Solomon the son of David, with supreme indifference I could scan the greatness of his body, or even of his mind. If Shakespeare had marched up to me, at that moment, with "Hamlet" in his right hand, and the "Tempest" in his left, I should only have said to him – "My good sir, are you the father of Dariel?"

But the beauty of goodness has some claim too, although more rarely recognised, because so rarely visible. Sûr Imar's face invited love as well as admiration, not only when his glance was resting on his gentle daughter, but even when he had his eyes on me, who was longing all the time to steal her. And I put on a manner whence he might conclude that it had never occurred to me to look at her.

But Dariel was above all thoughts of that, as much as I wished him to be.

She rose on her purple sandals, which I had not observed till then, and kissed her dear father, as if she had not seen him for a month; but I suppose it is their fashion, and he glanced at me as if he meant to say – "Nature first; manners afterwards." Then he looked again with some surprise; and her face, which could tell all the world without a word, seemed to say to me – "Now be on your very best behaviour."

I was afraid she would use some foreign language, but her breeding was too fine for that.

"Father, at last we have the pleasure to see and know the kind gentleman who was so very brave, and who did us that great benefit. You behold him; and his name is Mr. Cran-lee. Mr. Cran-lee, you behold Sûr Imar."

Being still in the skies to a certain extent, I longed for a hat of greater dignity, to make a better bow withal; but still I stood up as an Englishman should, in the presence of the biggest foreigner, until he knows more about him. I have thought sometimes that as every player at chess, golf, or billiards, knows almost at the first contact when he has met his better, so we (without any sense of rivalry, and without being ever on the perk about ourselves) by some wave of Nature's hand along the scale of her gifts to us, are aware, without a thought, when we come into converse with a larger mind. Not of necessity a quicker one, not peradventure a keener one, possibly one that we could outdo, in the game of chuck-farthing, now the highest test we have.

This foreigner made me no bow at all, though I expected a very grand one; he took me quietly by both hands, and said, "I am very glad to know you. Will you do me the favour of coming to my room?"

The light of my eyes, and of his as well, – for that could be seen in half a glance, – vanished with a smile; and I followed my host through a narrow stone-passage to an ancient door, studded with nails and iron fleurs-de-lis. That solid henchman was standing on guard, whom I had seen before, and known as Stepan; and inside lay that other mighty dog, of whom I had seen but little as yet, *Orla*, the son of *Kuban*. The room was not large, but much loftier than the rooms of an old dwelling-house would be, and the walls were not papered nor painted, but partly covered with bright hangings, among which mirrored sconces were fixed, with candles burning in some of them. Stepan soon set the rest alight, so that the cheerful and pleasant aspect of the whole surprised me. But against the walls were ranged on shelves, betwixt the coloured hangings, metallic objects of a hundred shapes, tools, castings, appliances, implements unknown to me, and pieces of mechanism, enough to puzzle my brother Harold, or any other great inventor. But although they were not in my line at all, I longed to know what they were meant for.

"One of the great and peculiar features of the English nation," my host said, with a friendly smile, and slow but clear pronunciation, "according to my experience is, that they never show much

curiosity about things that do not concern them. A Frenchman, a German, an Italian would scarcely have cast his eyes round this room, without eager desire arising in his bosom to know what the use of all these things may be. Even if he were too polite to enquire, he would contrive to fill me with some conclusion of a duty to him – the duty of exposing to him my own affairs. With you it is entirely different. You do not even entertain a wish, you are free from all little desires to learn what could not in any way be your own business."

All this he put not as a question, but a statement of facts long proven. Whereas I was pricked internally with a very sharp curiosity. Could he be chaffing me? I almost thought he must be, so far were his words from describing my condition. But on the other hand it would be too absurd, for a foreigner to attempt to chaff an Englishman in his own language, and at the first conversation. So I tried to look as if I deserved the whole of his compliments, and more. For I never like to think that a man is chaffing me; not even one of my own nation, and of proper rank to do it. Two bad turns of mind at once ensue, contempt of myself for being slow, and anger with him for discovering it.

"That is all a trifle," continued Prince Imar; for so I felt inclined to call him now, to console myself for having such a cut beyond me – "But I did not bring you here for a trifle, Mr. Cranleigh. You Englishmen think very little of yourselves. Not in comparison with foreigners, I mean; for when it comes to that you have much self-respect. I mean with regard to your own bodies. You detest what you call a fuss about them, such as the gallant Frenchman makes. But, as this has happened to you on our behalf, you will not deny my right to learn what it is. I am not a man of medicine, but I have been present among many wounds. Will you do me the favour of allowing me to see what has happened?"

It would not be right for any one to say that I had fallen under this man's influence. No doubt I did that, when I came to know him better. But as for any abject prostration of will, on the part of any healthy and sane man to another, at first sight, and through some occult power, some "odylic force," and so on – let the people believe in that, who can do, or feel it. Nevertheless I showed him what had happened, because that was common sense.

And he took it strictly as a thing of common sense. "You have done the very best that could be done," he said, after looking at it carefully; "it is a bad rent, even worse than I expected, and there will always be a long scar there. But it will not lessen the power of the arm, if there is no other mischief. One thing is very important to know. Of the two dogs, which inflicted that wound?"

I told him that I could not pretend to say, having been in the thick of it between the two. And it had not occurred to me to think it out since then. But remembering all I could of the ups and downs, I thought it more likely that his dog had done it, having been so much more up in the air, while the bull-dog fought low, and was striving to grip upward. Probably *Kuban* was making a rush at his foe, while I tried to get him by the neck.

"I hope with all my heart that it was so," my host replied very cheerfully; "for then we need have no fear of any bad effects. There is no venom in the teeth of our noble mountain breed. But you will leave yourself to me."

This I did with the utmost confidence, and while he was using various applications carefully and with extraordinary skill, I ventured to ask in a careless tone – "Of what mountain race is *Kuban*?"

"Is it possible that you do not know? He is of the noblest race of dogs from the noblest mountains of the earth. A wolfhound of the Caucasus."

Sûr Imar's voice was very sad, as he dropped for a moment the herb he was using, and fixed his calm dark eyes on mine. For the first time then I became aware that the general expression of his face was not that of a happy man, but of one with a sorrow deeply stored, though not always at interest in the soul. He was very unlikely, in his proud quiet way, to enlarge upon that; but of the common grief he spoke, with less heat and much greater resignation, than we feel about a railway overcharge.

"I am banished from the land where I was born. Of that I have no complaint to make. If I had been on the victorious side, perhaps I should have done the like to those who fought against me. Perhaps I should have been obliged to do so, whether it was just or otherwise. That question cannot

have any interest for you; and I owe you an apology for speaking of it. But I am so grateful to the hospitable land which receives me as if I belonged to it, and allows me to go anywhere without a passport, that I wish every Englishman to understand that I shall never make mean of their benefit. Will you do me the favour of tasting this? You have borne much pain without a sign. It is Kahiti, the choice wine of the Caucasus, made within sight of Kazbek."

Where Kazbek was, or what Kazbek might be, I had not the least idea then, though I came to know too well afterwards; but in fear of hurting his feelings, and perhaps his opinion of myself, I looked as if I knew all about it. And as he began to pour out a pinkish liquid from an old black bottle, with a fine smile sparkling in his quiet eyes, I could not help saying to myself – "He deserves to be an Englishman." He was worthy also of that crown of bliss, and came uncommonly near to it, when he praised his liquor, as a good host does, with geniality conquering modesty.

"If you could only make this in England!" he exclaimed, after drinking my health most kindly; and I answered, "Ah, if we only could!" with a smack of my lips, which meant – "I hope we never should."

"Is this scratch likely to require further treatment? Or can I manage it myself now?" My question recalled him from some delightful vision, perhaps of grapes blushing on the slopes of some great mountain, perhaps of the sun making a sonnet of beauty, perhaps of his own honeymoon among them, with the lovely mother of Dariel. It was rude of me to disturb him; but why, if he wanted true politeness, why not send for a certain nymph to taste her native Helicon?

"*Orla*, come and show your teeth," he said; "now, Mr. Cranleigh, his teeth are the very similarity of his father's. That is the one that inflicted the wound, the right canine; quite different would have been that of the bull-dog. You need have no alarm. Shall I give you a – what call you it – written testimony, to set your family at ease? What? Have you never told them? Ah, but you take things with composure. It is therefore all the more necessary for me to administer the proper measures. I shall require to see you in three days from this, and then at least once a week for the following two months."

Oh, what a chance, what a glorious chance of improving my acquaintance with Dariel! Of course I could not expect to meet her every time, still now and then – and as for that big Stepan, I warrant he knows what a crown-piece is, as well as little Allai. With admirable self-denial, I contended that such visits never could be needful, and that it was out of the question to spare so much time, etc., etc. But the great Caucasian stopped all that, by declaring that unless I trusted him entirely, and obeyed him implicitly, he should consider it his duty to inform my friends, that they might place me under strict medical treatment. Thereupon, what could I do but consent to everything he required? Till with many directions as to my own conduct, he led me as far as the door of *Little Guinib*, as he playfully called his snug retreat, and showed me before closing it behind me, how to obtain entrance at any time by pressing my hand against an upper panel, and he gave me leave to do so, as he said "Good-night."

"No stranger would dare to enter thus, with *Kuban* and *Orla* loose inside, but you have made them both your faithful slaves. Good-night, and the Lord be with you."

Now, though a Briton may be, and generally is, a very loose-seated Christian, only gripping on his steed when he is being taught to ride, or when he has to turn him into Pegasus, he is able to stand up in his stirrups high enough to look down upon every other pilgrim. When the Prince opened that bottle of wine, I said in my heart, "Hurrah, this great father of Dariel cannot be a thoroughgoing Islamite;" and now when he committed me to the Lord, instead of any Anti-British Allah, a strong warmth of the true faith – which had been languishing, until I should know what Dariel's was – set me quite firmly on my legs again. Thus I went upon my way rejoicing, and the beautiful ideas that flowed into my mind were such as come to no man, except when deep in love, and such as no man out of it deserves or cares to hear of.

CHAPTER XII

IN THE BACKGROUND

Surely as the world of night goes round, with clusters of stars thronging after one another, and loose wafts of vapour ever ready to flout them, and the spirit of dreams flitting over us, without any guidance of mind or matter, so surely will the dawn of our own little days bring new things to us, which we cannot understand in the clearest light of our wits beneath the sun. And of this I must give an instance now, sorry as I am to do it.

My sister Grace (the very sweetest girl, always excepting one of course, that ever tied a hat-string), what did she do but take a little touch of Cupid, without knowing anything about it? She denied it strongly, and hotly even; as a Swiss hotel-keeper abjures scarlet fever. But I insisted the more upon it; because it was quite picturesque to see Grace Cranleigh in a passion. I found it worth while to go as near the brink of a downright lie as a truthful man can step, without falling over, in order to rouse and work up this dear girl, till she actually longed to stamp her feet. There was a vivid element – the father calls it gold, and the brother calls it carrots – in her most abundant locks; and if you could only hit upon a gentle strain of chaff, which must have a little grain left in it, and pour it upon her with due gravity, she became a charming sight to a philosopher.

Her affection was so deep, and her character so placid, that a sharp word or two, or a knowing little sneer, produced nothing better than a look of wonder, or sometimes a smile that abased us. She made no pretence to any varied knowledge, or power to settle moot questions, – though she would have known where Daghestan was, – and as for contradiction, her tongue was never made for it, though her mind must have whispered to her often enough that brother George's words outran his wits. In spite of all this, it was possible to put her in a very noble passion, when one had the time to spare. And it certainly was worth while for the beauty of the sight, as well as for increase of perception concerning the turns of the feminine mind. The first sign of success for the most part was a deepening of the delicate and limpid tint that flitted on the soft curves of cheek; and then if one went on with calm aggravation, that terrible portent, lightning in the blue sky of the eyes, and a seam (as of the finest needlework of an angel who hems her own handkerchief), just perceptible and no more, in the white simplicity of forehead. And after that (if you had the heart to go on), no tears, none of that opening of the dikes, which the Low Country quenches an invasion with, but a genuine burst of righteous wrath – queenly figure, and all that sort of thing, such as Britannia alone can achieve, when unfeeling nations have poked fun at her too long.

Filled with a spirit of discontent, and a longing to know how girls behave, when they are beginning to think about somebody, – for Dariel must be a girl, as well as an Arch-female-Angel, – I contrived to fetch Grace to a prime state of wrath, the very first morning after her return from London. And I assure you that I learned a lot of things by that, which served me a good turn in my own case. A woman might call this a selfish proceeding. But what is love, except self flown skyward, and asking its way among the radiance of Heaven?

"This is a nice trick of yours," I said, with a careless air and an elderly smile, "to go waltzing about in hot weather with young Earls, as if you thought nothing of your brother hard at work."

"I have not the least idea what you mean, brother George. I am thinking of you, George, wherever I may be. I never see anybody to compare with you."

"Thousands of much better fellows everywhere." True enough that was, although I did not mean it. "Brilliant young men in gorgeous apparel. I am not fit to hold a candle for them."

"Then hold it for yourself, George, as you have the right to do. And for all of us as well. For if ever there was an industrious, simple, unselfish fellow – "

"I never like to hear about that, as you know. The little I can do is altogether useless. I only want to hear about the romantic young Earls."

"Young Earls!" exclaimed Grace, with an innocence so pure that it required a little mantle on her cheeks; "I fear that you have not been looked after properly, while I have been away, dear George; or else you have over-exerted yourself. Coming home also so late at night, several times, they tell me! Continuing your labours for our benefit, nobody seems to know exactly where! Such frightful work makes you quite red in the face."

If that were true, all that I can say is, that the idea of being brought to book by a young girl like this, was enough to annoy the most superior brother. But to let her see that was beneath me.

"I have thriven very tidily, while you have been away. My buttons never come off, when I sew them on myself. But you know well enough what I mean about young Earls, and for you to prevaricate is quite a new thing. What I mean is about that young milksop of a fellow who writes verses, makes sonnets, stuff he calls poems – fytt 1, and fytt 2, enough to give you fifty fits. Lord Honey – something. What the deuce is his name?"

"If you mean the Earl of Melladew, the only thing I regret, dear George, is that you have not a particle of his fine imagination. Not that you need write poems, George; that of course would be wholly beyond you; but that the gift of those higher faculties, those sensitive feelings, if that is the right name, makes a man so much larger in his views, so very superior to coarse language, so capable of perceiving that the universe does not consist of men alone."

"Sensitive feelings! I should rather think so. He has got them, and no mistake, my dear girl. Why the year we licked Eton at Lord's, I happened just to graze him on the funny-bone with a mere lob, nothing of a whack at all for a decent fellow; and what did he do but throw down his bat, and roll about as if he was murdered? What could ever be the good of such a Molly-coddle?"

"It comes to this then. Because you hurt him sadly when he was a boy, you are inclined to look down upon him for life. Nice masculine logic! And you nearly broke his arm, I daresay."

"Scarcely took the bark off. But I'll break something else, if I catch him piping love-ditties down here. I should have hoped that you would have shown a little more self-respect."

"Well, I don't quite understand what my crime is, George. And to fly into a passion with anybody who dares so much as to look at me! That is all Lord Melladew has done. And even that seemed too much for his courage. I believe if he had to say boh to a goose, he would call for pen and paper, and write it down. But your anxiety about me is quite a new thing. Is there any favoured candidate of yours down here?"

How sharp girls are! This was too bad of her, when I was doing my utmost for her good. The twinkle in her eyes was enough to show that she suspected something; and if she found it out, all up thenceforth with the whole of my scheme for her benefit.

"Yes, to be sure there is," I answered in some haste, for if I had said no, it would have been untrue, for I thought more highly every day of Jackson Stoneman, whereas Lord Melladew might be soon pulled down as we were, and through the same ruinous policy; "where will you find a nicer fellow, or one more highly esteemed (at any rate by himself), than my old friend, Tom Erricker? And when the tinning business comes to you, Harold will invent you a new process every day, until we are enabled to buy back all our land. Though that would be a foolish thing to do, unless he could find some new crop to put upon it. I cannot see why you think so little of Tom Erricker."

"Do you think much of him, George, in earnest? Is he a man to lead one's life? Would you like to see your favourite sister the wife of a man she could turn round her finger?"

"Confound it! There is no such thing as pleasing you," I spoke with a sense of what was due to myself, having made the great mistake of reasoning. "All of you girls begin to talk as if you were to rule the universe. No man is good enough for you, unless he is a perfect wonder of intellect. And then if you condescend to accept him, his mind is to be in perfect servitude to yours – yours that are occupied nine minutes out of ten with considerations of the looking-glass."

"Can you say that of me, George? Now with your love of truth, can you find it in your conscience to say such a thing of me?"

"Well, perhaps not. And for excellent reason. You have no need to make a study of it. Whatever you do, or whatever you wear, it makes no difference; for you are always –"

"What? What am I? Come, tell me the worst, while you are so put out with me. What are you going to call me now?"

"The sweetest and the best girl in the world." I should not have put it quite so strongly, except for the way she was looking at me. But it was too late to qualify my words. Before I could think again, Grace was in my arms, and her hair in a golden shower falling on my breast. "After all, this is the best way to reason," she said with a smile that contained a world of logic; and I only answered, "At any rate for women;" because it is not for them to have the last word always.

However I had not changed my opinions, and did not mean to change them. For Jackson Stoneman, whom I had at first repulsed and kept at a very stiff arm's length, was beginning to grow upon me, – as people say, – not through any affection for his money; so far from that indeed, that the true reason was, I could think of him now without thinking of his money. When we first know a man of great wealth, especially if we happen to be very short of cash ourselves, we are apt to feel a certain shyness and desire to keep away from him; not from any dislike of his money, or sense of injustice at his owning such a pile, but rather through uneasiness about ourselves, and want of perfect certainty in the bottom of our hearts, that we may not try – like a man who steals his gas – to tap the "main chance" behind the meter, and fetch a little into our own parlour on the sly. And even if our conscience is too brave to shrink from that, we know that if we walk too much in amity with this man of gold he will want, or at least he ought to want, to pay the piper who besets every path of every kind in England; whereas it hurts our dignity to be paid for, except by our Uncles, or the Government.

But supposing Jackson were to become a member of our family, what could be more inspiring and graceful, as well as delightful, for him, than the privilege which must fall to his share, of endeavouring to please his relatives? And looking at the matter from a point of view even more exalted, I began to perceive the course of duty very clearly staked out for me. And the conversation above recorded made it doubly manifest. My sister had neither admitted, nor denied, that this young Melladew had been attracted by her, while she was staying at her sister's house. She had spoken of his courage with some contempt; and any perception of such a defect would be fatal to his chances with nine girls out of ten. But Grace had her own little pet ideas; and to shoot with swan-shot at a swarm of gnats is better worth the cost than to reason with such girls. They are above reason; and there's an end of it.

To pass from all this to the things one can see, it was either that very same day or the next, that I came away out of the harvest-field, just for a morsel to eat and a pipe, in a snug place under the fringe of a wood, where a very small brook, fit only for minnows and grigs, made a lot of loops and tinkles. Two or three times I had been there before, and in fact was getting fond of it, because I believed, or as good as believed, without knowing every twist of it, that this little water in its own modest way never left off running until it reached the Pebblebourne; and after that it must have gone a little faster, till it came to the place where Dariel lived.

Possibly if I threw in a pint bottle, after scraping off the red pyramid, who could say that it might not land at the very feet to which all the world they ever trod upon must bow?

Encouraging these profound reflections, I sat upon the bank, and pulled out my pocket-knife, being a little sharp-set for the moment, and aware of some thrills in a quarter near the heart. There was very little more to be done that afternoon, the week having ripened into Saturday, when no man of any self-respect does more than congratulate himself upon his industry; and on this point few have a stronger sense of duty than the cultivator of the soil of Surrey. No matter what the weather is, or how important the job in hand may be, his employer may repose the purest confidence in him, that he will make off with holy zeal, right early on a Saturday.

Therefore when I heard a step behind me, I knew that it could be none of our "enlightened operatives;" not even Bob Slemmick would pull his coat off at that hour, though he would sometimes stop long enough to put away his tools. Correct was my reasoning, and with pleasure I beheld the active figure and expressive countenance of Mr. Jackson Stoneman. Not that every one would like this man, or care to have very much to do with him. Universal benevolence was not by any means the polestar of his existence, neither was it his chief employment to saunter amicably in the Milky Way. Butter for his bread, and that the very best butter, had probably been the main quest of his life; until his good stars brought him down into our county, and toward our Grace. He was even beginning to relax his mind, while he braced up his body already; and we thought that a year or two of our fine air would bring a lot of hard gold out of him.

"Glad to see you again. Somebody told us that you were off for the Mediterranean." In this careless manner did I shake hands with this 70 cubit and 20 carat Colossus of gold. There is humbug in all of us – even in me.

"Well, I was thinking of it," he replied, as he sat down beside me, and stretched his long legs, trousered a thousand times better than mine, though I knew which had most inside the cloth; "but after all, what's the good of foreign parts?"

Knowing but little about them as yet, and believing that he might traverse many thousand leagues without finding anything to come up to Surrey, I answered very simply, "You are quite right there."

"But isn't it disgusting, that in your native land, you can never make anything go to your liking?"

This was very difficult for me to answer. I could not get along for a thousand wicked reasons – Free-trade, Democracy, adulteration, sewage-butter, foot-and-mouth complaint, living wage for men who have no life, and all the other wrong end of the stick we get.

"What I mean has nothing to do with your ideas," he continued as if all my ideas must be wrong, just when I was hoping that he began to see the right; "for Constitutional questions, I don't care twopence. It has become a race of roguery between both sides. Don't look savage, George, you know it as well as I do. Your party would do anything to get into power again. When the bone is in their own mouths, will they even try to crack it? But I have not come to talk all that stuff. I am under your directions in a matter nearer home. Are you going to play fast and loose with me, while your sister is being truckled away to an idiot of an Earl?"

If my mind had not been very equable and just, I must have had a quarrel with him over this. And if he had looked at me with any defiance – but his gaze was very sorrowful, as if all his hopes were blasted.

"Jackson," I answered in a rather solemn voice, having sense of my own tribulation, and I saw that he liked me to address him thus, though the name is not purely romantic, "you are not a bit worse off than any other fellow. Do you suppose that nobody has ever been in love before? You look at things from such a narrow point of view. Consider how much worse it must be for a woman."

"Well, I wish it was." His reply upset my arguments; I found it very difficult to re-arrange them on that basis.

"So far as that goes, I can get on well enough," he proceeded as I looked at him sensibly; "I shall feel it for years, no doubt, but still – but still the blackness and the bitterness of it is this, that such a girl, such a girl as never before trod the face of the earth, or inhaled the light of the sun – " "Don't get mixed," I implored, but he regarded me with scorn – "should be sold, I say sold, like a lamb in the market, to an idiot, just because he has a title!"

"You will be sorry when you have offended me," I spoke with extraordinary self-control, taking a side glance at my own case; "for I don't come round in a hurry, I can tell you. But you really don't know what you are talking of. My father and mother have heard of no proposal, neither have I. And as for Grace herself, she despises that milksop as heartily as I do."

"George Cranleigh, I have not known you long; but this I can say without hesitation, and I should like to see any man deny it, you are the very noblest fellow that ever – "

"Trod the face of the earth, or inhaled the light of the sun. And why? Because I happen to agree with you. Ah, Jackson, allow me to improve the moment. Is there any human praise that does not flow from the like source, from the sense that the other fellow thinks as we do, and the subtle flattery of our own wisdom, and concurrence with our wishes."

"Shut up," he cried with a smile, which must have procured him much lucrative business in the City; "what has Farmer Jarge to do with moralising? But are you quite sure of what you said – that she despises him heartily?"

"Unless anybody runs him down, she never has a good word to say for him. He will be here upon some pretext or another; but you need have no fear. I see exactly how to treat the case – to praise him to the nines, and exalt him as the paragon of all manliness, and self-denial, and every tip-top element. And then to let her observe him closely, to see if he comes up to that mark – and behold she finds him a selfish little funk! That is the true policy with women, Jackson Stoneman."

The stock-broker looked at me, with puzzle in his eyes, which were ever so much keener than mine, and had a gift of creating a gable over them, like a pair of dormer-windows with the frames painted black.

"Bless my soul, if you wouldn't do up our way!" he said; and what higher praise could be given to a man? "Friend George, you are a thousand times sharper than I thought. But all I wish is fair play, and no favour; except of course favour in a certain pair of eyes."

"You shall have it, my dear fellow, you shall have it. If only you will keep yourself in the background, and do the most benevolent things you can think of, without letting anybody know it. Your money is the main point against you with her. Could you manage anyhow to be bankrupt?"

"That comes to most of us in the end," he replied, with a sigh, which I did not like at all, but hoped that it was rather of the heart than pocket; "if that were so, George, would you still take my part?"

"Not unless my sister were really committed. But if she had set her heart upon you, Stoneman, your wealth or your poverty would make no difference to me; and I am sure that it would make none to her."

"What more could a man wish? And I am sure you mean it. Come what will, I will play my game in an open and straightforward way. We must never try any tricks with women, George. Bless them, they know us better than we know ourselves. Perhaps because they pay so much more attention to the subject."

CHAPTER XIII

SMILES AND TEARS

If any one has followed my little adventures only half as carefully as I have tried to tell them, he will see that the time had now come and gone, for my second visit to St. Winifred's, otherwise Little Guinib. And I would have set forth what happened then, if it had been worth mentioning. But except for the medical treatment received, I might just as well have stayed away, for I never got a glimpse of Dariel; and her father was in such a sad state of mind, that he scarcely cared to speak at all. Being a most kind and courteous gentleman, he begged me to make due allowance for him, for this was the anniversary of the most unhappy day of his life, and in truth it would have been better for him, if he had died before he saw that day. One of the worst things of being a gentleman, or of having high-culture like Miss Ticknor, is that you must not ask questions, or even hint at your desire to know more, but sit upon the edge of curiosity in silence, although it may be cutting you like hoop-iron on the top-rail. And this feeling was not by any means allayed, when I saw the great henchman Stepan in the court hanging his head, and without his red cross; and when with the tender of five shillings' worth of sympathy, I ventured to ask him to explain his woe, his only answer was – "Me no can."

But when another week had passed, and my next visit became due, the hills, and the valley, and everything else had put on a different complexion. It was not like a sunset when the year is growing old; but as lively and lovely as a morning of the May, when all the earth is clad in fresh apparel, and all the air is full of smiling glances at it. There came to my perception such a bright wink from the west, and so many touches, on the high ground and the low, of the encouragement of heaven to whatsoever thing looks up at it, that in my heart there must have been a sense it had no words for – a forecast of its own perhaps that it was going to be pleased, far beyond the pleasure of the eyes and mind. And in that prophecy it hit the mark, for who should meet me at a winding of the path, but Dariel herself, no other? Dariel, my darling!

As yet she knew not – and I shivered with the thought that she might never care to know – in what lowly but holy shrine she was for ever paramount. But a little blush, such as a white rose might feel at the mark H. C. in an exhibition, answered my admiring gaze; and then I was nowhere in the splendour of her eyes – nowhere, except for being altogether there.

But with no such disturbance was her mind astray. Alas, it was "all there," as sharp as the wits of the last man who wanted to sell me a horse. And she did not want to sell me anything; only to keep her precious value to herself. What a shame it is to leave things so that a poor fellow never knows how to begin! But that was not her meaning. In all her lovely life, she never meant anything that was not kind.

"I am not quite assured," she began, after waiting for me to speak, – as if I could, with the tongue in such a turbulence of eyes and heart! – "it is beyond my knowledge of English society, Mr. Cran-lee, to be confident that I am taking the correct step, in advancing in this manner to declare to you the things that have come into my thoughts. But if I have done wrong, you will pardon me, I hope, because I am so anxious about very dismal things."

"I assure you," I answered, with a flourish of my hat which I had been practising upon the road, "that it is of the very best English society. If we dared, we should insist upon it upon every occasion, Mademoiselle."

"You must not call me that, sir. I am not of the French. I prefer the English nation very greatly. There has only been one name given to me by my father, and that is *Dariel*."

"It is the sweetest name in all the world. Oh, Dariel, am I to call you Dariel?"

"If it is agreeable to you, Mr. Cran-lee, it will be also agreeable to me; for why should you not pronounce me the same as Stepan does, and Allai?" – oh, that was a cruel fall for me. "Although I have passed most of my life in England, and some of it even in London, I have not departed from

the customs of my country, which are simple, very simple. See here is *Kuban* and *Orla* too! Will you not make reply to them?"

How could I make reply to dogs, with Dariel's eyes upon me? Many fellows would have been glad to kick *Kuban* and his son *Orla*, to teach them better than to jump around emotions so far above them. But not I, or at any rate not for more than half a moment; so sweetly was my spirit raised, that I never lifted either foot. Some of Dariel's gentle nature came to strike the balance; for I may have been a little short of that.

"Good dogs, noble dogs, what a pattern to us!" I had a very choice pair of trousers on, worthy of Tom Erricker, – if his had been ever bashful, – and in another minute there scarcely would have been enough of them left to plough in.

But the joy of my heart – as I was beginning already to myself to call her – perceived at a glance the right thing to do; and her smile and blush played into one another, as the rising sun colours the veil he weaves.

"If Mr. Cran-lee will follow me, a step or two, I will show him a place where the dogs dare not to come."

"Follow thee! Follow thee! Wha wud na follow thee?" came into my head, with a worthier sequence, than ever was vouchsafed to Highlanders.

"Where the dogs dare not come" – I kept saying to myself, instead of looking to the right or left. The music of her voice seemed to linger in those words, though they have not even a fine English sound, let alone Italian. But my mind was so far out of call that it went with them into a goodly parable. "All men are dogs in comparison, with her. Let none of them come near, where ever it may be, except the one dog, that is blest beyond all others."

"Are you a Christian?" The question came so suddenly, that it sounded like a mild rebuke – but no, it was not meant so. The maiden turned towards me at a little wicket-gate, and her face expressed some doubt about letting me come in.

"Yes, I am a Christian," I answered pretty firmly, and then began to trim a little – "not a very hot one I should say. Not at all bigoted, I mean; not one of those who think that every other person is a heathen."

I had made a mull of it. For the first time I beheld a smile of some contempt upon the gentle face. And I resolved to be of the strictest Orthodoxy evermore. Feeble religious views did not suit her.

"Christian! I should think so," I proceeded with high courage. "There is scarcely a church-tower for ten miles round, that has not been built by my ancestors." Possibly this assertion needed not only a grain but a block of salt.

But Dariel was of good strong faith, without which a woman deserves only to be a man. She opened the gate, and let me in, so beautifully that I was quite afraid.

"You must not be frightened," she said, with a very fine rally of herself, to encourage mine, "it is the House of the Lord, and you have come into it with your hat on. But you did not know, because there is no roof."

No roof, and no walls, and no anything left, except the sweet presence of this young maid. I took off my hat, and tried to think of the Creed, and the Catechism, and my many pious ancestors, if there had been any. And I almost tumbled over a great pile of ruin stones.

"We will not go in there, because – because we are not thinking of it properly," she pointed, as she spoke, to an inner circle of ruins, with some very fine blackberries just showing colour; and suddenly I knew it as the sanctuary, in which I had first descried her kneeling figure. "But here we may sit down, without – without – it is a long word, Mr. Cran-lee, I cannot quite recall it."

"Desecration," I suggested, and she looked at me with doubt, as if the word had made the thing. "But you do not think it will be that, if I speak of my dear father here?"

I was very near telling her that we think nothing of such old monkish ruins, except to eat our chicken-pie, and drink our bottled beer in their most holy places; but why should I shock her feelings

so? Little knows the ordinary English girl, that when she displays her want of reverence for the things above her, she is doing all she can to kill that feeling towards herself, which is one of her choicest gifts.

"Dariel, you may be quite sure of this," I replied, after taking my seat upon a stone, over against the one she had chosen, but lower, so that I could look up at her; "a place of holy memories like this is the very spot especially fitted for – for consideration of your dear father. Some of my ancestors no doubt were the founders of this ancient chapel, so that I speak with some authority, upon a point of that sort."

All content has a murmur in it, according to the laws of earth; and within a few yards of my joy, the brook with perpetual change of tone, and rise and fall of liquid tune, was making as sweet a melody as a man can stop to hearken. But the brook might have ceased its noise for shame, at the music of my Dariel's voice. She gave me a timid glance at first, not for any care of me, but doubt of unlocking of her heart; and then the power of a higher love swept away all sense of self.

"My father, as you must have learned already, is one of the greatest men that have ever lived. There are many great men in this country also, in their way, which is very good; but they do not appear to cast away all regard for their own interests, in such a degree as my father does; and although they are very high Christians, they stop, or at least they appear to stop short of their doctrines, when the fear arises of not providing for themselves. They call it a question of the public good, and they are afraid of losing commerce.

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