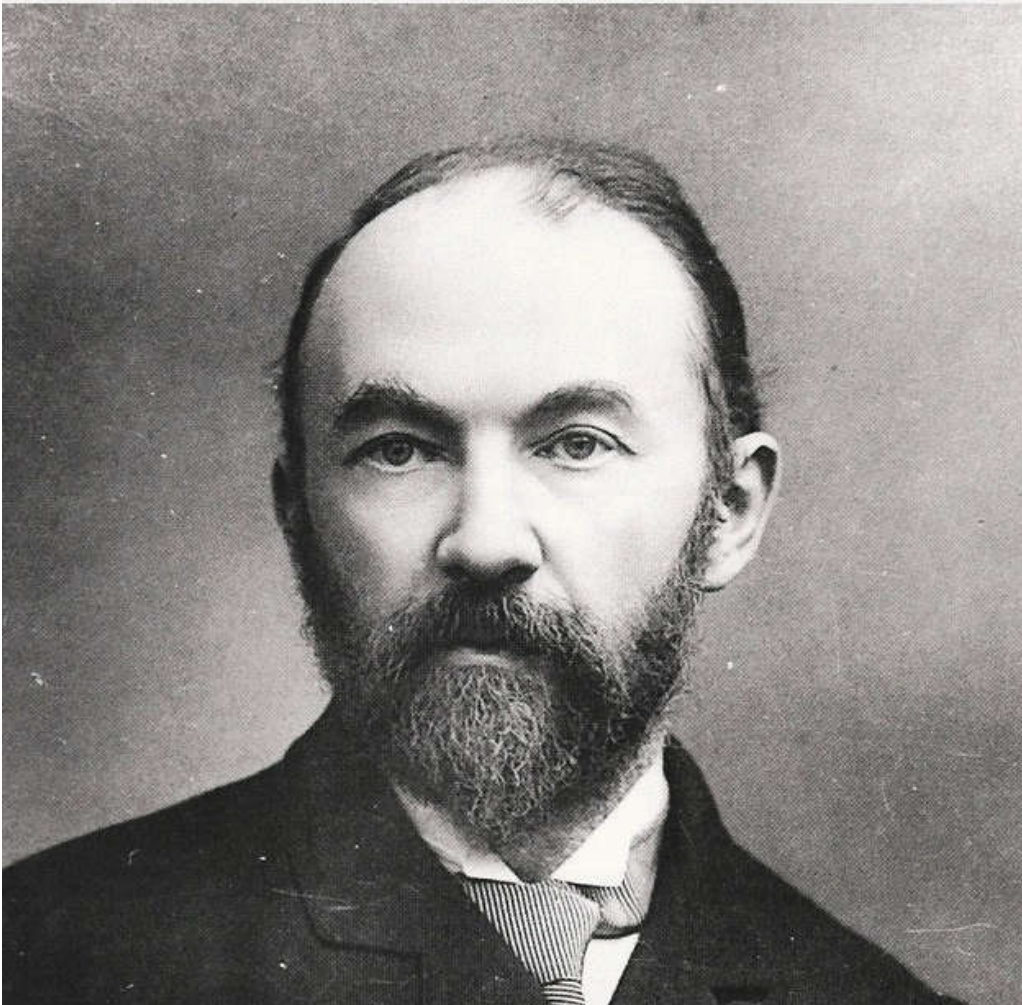




DELPHI
CLASSICS

Thomas Hardy
Complete Works



Series One

The Complete Works of
THOMAS HARDY

(1840-1928)



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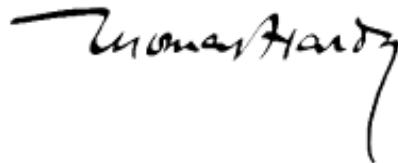
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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Hardy". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style with a long, thin tail on the letter 'y'.

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Version 8

The Complete Works of
THOMAS HARDY



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Complete Works of Thomas Hardy



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The Novels

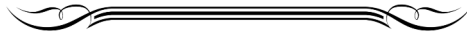


Thomas Hardy's birthplace, Higher Bockhampton, Dorset



Thomas Hardy's parents — his father Thomas was a successful stonemason and his mother Jemima was well-educated.

The Poor Man and the Lady



This was the title of Hardy's very first novel, written in 1867 and never published. After the manuscript had been rejected by several publishers, Hardy gave up his attempts to sell the novel in its original form. Nevertheless, he used some of the novel's scenes and themes in later works, particularly in the poem "The Poor Man and the Lady" and in the novella *An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress* (1878).

Sadly, the manuscript no longer exists. Hardy destroyed the last surviving fragment in his last years, after giving up an attempt of rewriting the novel.

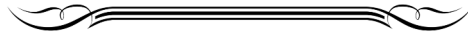
This is the surviving poem based on the lost novel, with the novella (*An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress*) following:

AN EXPOSTULATION

The Poor Man and the Lady

Why want to go afar
Where pitfalls are,
When all we swains adore
Your featness more and more
As heroine of our artless masquings here,
And count few Wessex' daughters half so dear?
Why paint your appealing face,
When its born grace
Is such no skill can match
With powder, puff, or patch,
Whose every touch defames your bloomfulness,
And with each stain increases our distress?
Yea, is it not enough
That (rare or rough
Your lines here) all uphold you,
And as with wings enfold you,
But you must needs desert the kine-cropt vale
Wherein your foredames gaily filled the pail?

An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress



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Hardy in 1856, aged 16

PART I.

CHAPTER I.



*WHEN I WOULD pray and think, I think and pray
To several subjects: heaven hath my empty words;
Whilst my invention, hearing not my tongue,
Anchors on Isabel.*

The congregation in Tollamore church were singing the evening hymn, the people gently swaying backwards and forwards like trees in a soft breeze. The heads of the village children, who sat in the gallery, were inclined to one side as they uttered their shrill notes, their eyes listlessly tracing some crack in the old walls, or following the movement of a distant bough or bird, with features rapt almost to painfulness.

In front of the children stood a thoughtful young man, who, was plainly enough the schoolmaster; and his gaze was fixed on a remote part of the aisle beneath him. When the singing was over, and all had sat down for the sermon, his eyes still remained in the same place. There was some excuse for their direction, for it was in a straight line forwards; but their fixity was only to be explained by some object before them, This was a square pew, containing one solitary sitter. But that sitter was a young lady, and a very sweet lady was she.

Afternoon service in Tollamore parish was later than in many others in that neighbourhood; and as the darkness deepened during the progress of the sermon, the rector's pulpit candles shone to the remotest nooks of the building, till at length they became the sole lights of the congregation. The lady was the single person besides the preacher whose face was turned westwards, the pew that she occupied being the only one in the church in which the seat ran all round. She reclined in her corner, her bonnet and dark dress growing by degrees invisible, and at last only her upturned face could be discerned, a solitary white spot against the black surface of the wainscot. Over her head rose a vast marble monument, erected to the memory of her ancestors, male and female; for she was one of high standing in that parish. The design consisted of a winged skull and two cherubim, supporting a pair of tall Corinthian columns, between which spread a broad slab, containing the roll of ancient names, lineages, and deeds, and surmounted by a pediment, with the crest of the family at its apex.

As the youthful schoolmaster gazed, and all these details became dimmer, her face was modified in his fancy, till it seemed almost to resemble the carved marble skull immediately above her head. The thought was unpleasant enough to arouse him from his half-dreamy state, and he entered on rational considerations of what a vast gulf lay between that lady and himself, what a troublesome world it was to live in where such divisions could exist, and how painful was the evil when a man of his unequal history was possessed of a keen susceptibility.

Now a close observer, who should have happened to be near the large pew, might have noticed before the light got low that the interested gaze of the young man had been returned from time to time by the young lady, although he, towards whom her glances were directed, did not perceive the fact. It would have been guessed, that something in the past was common to both, notwithstanding their difference in social standing. What that was may be related in a few words.

One day in the previous week there had been some excitement in the parish on account of the introduction upon the farm of a steam threshing-machine for the first time, the date of these events being some thirty years ago. The machine had been hired by a farmer who was a relative of the schoolmaster's, and when it was set going all the people round about came to see it work. It was fixed in a corner of a field near the main road, and in the afternoon a passing carriage stopped outside the hedge. The steps were let down, and Miss Geraldine Allenville, the young woman whom we have seen sitting in the church pew, came through the gate of the field towards the engine. At that hour most of the villagers had been to the spot, had gratified their curiosity, and afterwards gone home again; so that there were only now left standing beside the engine the engine-man, the farmer, and the young schoolmaster, who had come like the rest. The labourers were at the other part of the machine, under the cornstack some distance off.

The girl looked with interest at the whizzing wheels, asked questions of the old farmer, and remained in conversation with him for some time, the schoolmaster standing a few paces distant, and looking more or less towards her. Suddenly the expression of his face changed to one of horror; he was by her side in a moment, and, seizing hold of her, he swung her round by the arm to a distance of several feet.

In speaking to the farmer she had inadvertently stepped backwards, and had drawn so near to the band which ran from the engine to the drum of the thresher that in another moment her dress must have been caught, and she would have been whirled round the wheel as a mangled carcass. As soon as the meaning of the young man's act was understood by her she turned deadly pale and nearly fainted. When she was well enough to walk, the two men led her to the carriage, which had been standing outside the hedge all the time.

"You have saved me from a ghastly death!" the agitated girl murmured to the schoolmaster. "Oh! I can never forget it!" and then she sank into the carriage and was driven away.

On account of this the schoolmaster had been invited to Tollamore House to explain the incident to the squire, the young lady's only living parent. Mr. Allenville thanked her preserver, inquired the history of his late father, a painter of good family, but unfortunate and improvident; and finally told his visitor that, if he were fond of study, the library of the house was at his service. Geraldine herself had spoken very impulsively to the young man — almost, indeed, with imprudent warmth — and his tender interest in her during the church service was the result of the sympathy she had shown.

And thus did an emotion, which became this man's sole motive power through many following years, first arise and establish itself. Only once more did she lift her eyes to where he sat, and it was when they all stood up before leaving. This time he noticed the glance. Her look of recognition led his feelings onward yet another stage. Admiration grew to be attachment; he even wished that he might own her, not exactly as a wife, but as a being superior to himself in the sense in which a servant may be said to own a master. He would have cared to possess her in order to exhibit her glories to the world, and he scarcely even thought of her ever loving him.

There were two other stages in his course of love, but they were not reached till some time after to-day. The first was a change from this proud desire to a longing to cherish. The last stage, later still, was when her very defects became rallying-points for defence, when every one of his senses became special pleaders for her; and that not through blindness, but from a tender inability to do aught else than defend her against all the world.

CHAPTER II.



*SHE WAS ACTIVE, stirring, all fire —
Could not rest, could not tire —
Never in all the world such an one!
And here was plenty to be done,
And she that could do it, great or small,
She was to do nothing at all.*

Five mornings later the same young man was looking out of the window of Tollamore village school in a fixed and absent manner. The weather was exceptionally mild, though scarcely to the degree which would have justified his airy situation at such a month of the year. A hazy light spread through the air, the landscape on which his eyes were resting being enlivened and lit up by the spirit of an unseen sun rather than by its direct rays. Every sound could be heard for miles. There was a great crowing of cocks, bleating of sheep, and cawing of rooks, which proceeded from all points of the compass, rising and falling as the origin of each sound was near or far away. There were also audible the voices of people in the village, interspersed with hearty laughs, the bell of a distant flock of sheep, a robin close at hand, vehicles in the neighbouring roads and lanes. One of these latter noises grew gradually more distinct, and proved itself to be rapidly nearing the school. The listener blushed as he heard it.

“Suppose it should be!” he said to himself.

He had said the same thing at every such noise that he had heard during the foregoing week, and had been mistaken in his hope. But this time a certain carriage did appear in answer to his expectation. He came from the window hastily; and in a minute a footman knocked and opened the school door.

“Miss Allenville wishes to speak to you, Mr. Mayne.”

The schoolmaster went to the porch — he was a very young man to be called a schoolmaster — his heart beating with excitement.

“Good morning,” she said, with a confident yet girlish smile. “My father expects me to inquire into the school arrangements, and I wish to do so on my own account as well. May I come in?”

She entered as she spoke, telling the coachman to drive to the village on some errand, and call for her in half an hour.

Mayne could have wished that she had not been so thoroughly free from all apparent consciousness of the event of the previous week, of the fact that he was considerably more of a man than the small persons by whom the apartment was mainly filled, and that he was as nearly as possible at her own level in age, as wide in sympathies, and possibly more inflammable in heart. But he soon found that a sort of fear to entrust her voice with the subject of that link between them was what restrained her. When he had explained a few details of routine she moved away from him round the school.

He turned and looked at her as she stood among the children. To his eyes her beauty was indescribable. Before he had met her he had scarcely believed that any

woman in the world could be so lovely. The clear, deep eyes, full of all tender expressions; the fresh, subtly-curved cheek, changing its tones of red with the fluctuation of each thought; the ripe tint of her delicate mouth, and the indefinable line where lip met lip; the noble bend of her neck, the wavy lengths of her dark brown hair, the soft motions of her bosom when she breathed, the light fall of her little feet, the elegant contrivances of her attire, all struck him as something he had dreamed of and was not actually seeing. Geraldine Allenville was, in truth, very beautiful; she was a girl such as his eyes had never elsewhere beheld; and her presence here before his face kept up a sharp struggle of sweet and bitter within him.

He had thought at first that the flush on her face was caused by the fresh air of the morning; but, as it quickly changed to a lesser hue, it occurred to Mayne that it might after all have arisen from shyness at meeting him after her narrow escape. Be that as it might, their conversation, which at first consisted of bald sentences, divided by wide intervals of time, became more frequent, and at last continuous. He was painfully soon convinced that her tongue would never have run so easily as it did had it not been that she thought him a person on whom she could vent her ideas without reflection or punctiliousness — a thought, perhaps, expressed to herself by such words as, “I will say what I like to him, for he is only our schoolmaster.”

“And you have chosen to keep a school,” she went on, with a shade of mischievousness in her tone, looking at him as if she thought that, had she been a man capable of saving people’s lives, she would have done something much better than teaching. She was so young as to habitually think thus of other persons’ courses.

“No,” he said simply; “I don’t choose to keep a school in the sense you mean, choosing it from a host of pursuits, all equally possible.”

“How came you here, then?”

“I fear more by chance than by aim.”

“Then you are not very ambitious?”

“I have my ambitions, such as they are.”

“I thought so. Everybody has nowadays. But it is a better thing not to be too ambitious, I think.”

“If we value ease of mind, and take an economist’s view of our term of life, it may be a better thing.”

Having been tempted, by his unexpectedly cultivated manner of speaking, to say more than she had meant to say, she found it embarrassing either to break off or to say more, and in her doubt she stooped to kiss a little girl.

“Although I spoke lightly of ambition,” she observed, without turning to him, “and said that easy happiness was worth most, I could defend ambition very well, and in the only pleasant way.”

“And that way?”

“On the broad ground of the loveliness of any dream about future triumphs. In looking back there is a pleasure in contemplating a time when some attractive thing of the future appeared possible, even though it never came to pass.”

Mayne was puzzled to hear her talk in this tone of maturity. That such questions of success and failure should have occupied his own mind seemed natural, for they had been forced upon him by the difficulties he had encountered in his pursuit of a career. He was not just then aware how very unpractical the knowledge of this sage lady of seventeen really was; that it was merely caught up by intercommunication with people of culture and experience, who talked before her of their theories and beliefs till she insensibly acquired their tongue.

The carriage was heard coming up the road. Mayne gave her the list of the children, their ages, and other particulars which she had called for, and she turned to go out. Not a word had been said about the incident by the threshing-machine, though each one could see that it was constantly in the other's thoughts. The roll of the wheels may or may not have reminded her of her position in relation to him. She said, bowing, and in a somewhat more distant tone: "We shall all be glad to learn that our schoolmaster is so — nice; such a philosopher." But, rather surprised at her own cruelty in uttering the latter words, she added one of the sweetest laughs that ever came from lips, and said, in gentlest tones, "Good morning; I shall always remember what you did for me. Oh! it makes me sick to think of that moment. I came on purpose to thank you again, but I could not say it till now!"

Mayne's heart, which had felt the rebuff, came round to her with a rush; he could have almost forgiven her for physically wounding him if she had asked him in such a tone not to notice it. He watched her out of sight, thinking in rather a melancholy mood how time would absorb all her beauty, as the growing distance between them absorbed her form. He then went in, and endeavoured to recall every word that he had said to her, troubling and racking his mind to the utmost of his ability about his imagined faults of manner. He remembered that he had used the indicative mood instead of the proper subjective in a certain phrase. He had given her to understand that an old idea he had made use of was his own, and so on through other particulars, each of which was an item of misery.

The place and the manner of her sitting were defined by the position of her chair, and by the books, maps, and prints scattered round it. Her "I shall always remember," he repeated to himself, aye, a hundred times; and though he knew the plain import of the words, he could not help toying with them, looking at them from all points, and investing them with extraordinary meanings.

CHAPTER III.



*BUT WHAT IS this? I turn about.
And find a trouble in thine eye.*

Egbert Mayne, though at present filling the office of village schoolmaster, had been intended for a less narrow path. His position at this time was entirely owing to the death of his father in embarrassed circumstances two years before. Mr. Mayne had been a landscape and animal painter, and had settled in the village in early manhood, where he set about improving his prospects by marrying a small farmer's daughter. The son had been sent away from home at an early age to a good school, and had returned at seventeen to enter upon some professional life or other. But his father's health was at this time declining, and when the painter died, a year and a half later, nothing had been done for Egbert. He was now living with his maternal grandfather, Richard Broadford, the farmer, who was a tenant of Squire Allenville's. Egbert's ideas did not incline to painting, but he had ambitious notions of adopting a literary profession, or entering the Church, or doing something congenial to his tastes whenever he could set about it. But first it was necessary to read, mark, learn, and look around him; and, a master being temporarily required for the school until such time as it should be placed under government inspection, he stepped in and made use of the occupation as a stop-gap for a while.

He lived in his grandfather's farmhouse, walking backwards and forwards to the school every day, in order that the old man, who would otherwise be living quite alone, might have the benefit of his society during the long winter evenings. Egbert was much attached to his grandfather, and so, indeed, were all who knew him. The old farmer's amiable disposition and kindness of heart, while they had hindered him from enriching himself one shilling during the course of a long and laborious life, had also kept him clear of every arrow of antagonism. The house in which he lived was the same that he had been born in, and was almost a part of himself. It had been built by his father's father; but on the dropping of the lives for which it was held, some twenty years earlier, it had lapsed to the Squire.

Richard Broadford was not, however, dispossessed: after his father's death the family had continued as before in the house and farm, but as yearly tenants. It was much to Broadford's delight, for his pain at the thought of parting from those old sticks and stones of his ancestors, before it had been known if the tenure could be continued, was real and great.

On the evening of the day on which Miss Allenville called at the school Egbert returned to the farmhouse as usual. He found his grandfather sitting with his hands on his knees, and showing by his countenance that something had happened to disturb him greatly. Egbert looked at him inquiringly, and with some misgiving.

"I have got to go at last, Egbert," he said, in a tone intended to be stoical, but far from it. "He is my enemy after all."

"Who?" said Mayne.

“The squire. He’s going to take seventy acres of neighbour Greenman’s farm to enlarge the park; and Greenman’s acreage is to be made up to him, and more, by throwing my farm in with his. Yes, that’s what the squire is going to have done. . . . Well, I thought to have died here; but ’t isn’t to be.”

He looked as helpless as a child, for age had weakened him. Egbert endeavoured to cheer him a little, and vexed as the young man was, he thought there might yet be some means of tiding over this difficulty. “Mr. Allenville wants seventy acres more in his park, does he?” he echoed mechanically. “Why can’t it be taken entirely out of Greenman’s farm? His is big enough, Heaven knows; and your hundred acres might be left you in peace.”

“Well mayest say so! Oh, it is because he is tired of seeing old-fashioned farming like mine. - He likes the young generation’s system best, I suppose.”

“If I had only known this this afternoon!” Egbert said.

“You could have done nothing.”

“Perhaps not.” Egbert was, however, thinking that he would have mentioned the matter to his visitor, and told her such circumstances as would have enlisted her sympathies in the case.

“I thought it would come to this,” said old Richard vehemently. “The present Squire Allenville has never been any real friend to me. It was only through his wife that I have stayed here so long. If it hadn’t been for her, we should have gone the very year that my poor father died, and the house fell into hand. I wish we had now. You see, now she’s dead, there’s nobody to counteract him in his schemes; and so I am to be swept away.”

They talked on thus, and by bedtime the old man was in better spirits. But the subject did not cease to occupy Egbert’s mind, and that anxiously. Were the house and farm which his grandfather had occupied so long to be taken away, Egbert knew it would affect his life to a degree out of all proportion to the seriousness of the event. The transplanting of old people is like the transplanting of old trees; a twelvemonth usually sees them wither and die away.

The next day proved that his anticipations were likely to be correct, his grandfather being so disturbed that he could scarcely eat or drink. The remainder of the week passed in just the same way. Nothing now occupied Egbert’s mind but a longing to see Miss Allenville. To see her would be bliss; to ask her if anything could be done by which his grandfather might retain the farm and premises would be nothing but duty. His hope of good results from the course was based on the knowledge that Allenville, cold and hard as he was, had some considerable affection for or pride in his daughter, and that thus she might influence him.

It was not likely that she would call at the school for a week or two at least, and Mayne therefore tried to meet with her elsewhere. One morning early he was returning from the remote hamlet of Hawksgate, on the further side of the parish, and the nearest way to the school was across the park. He read as he walked, as was customary with him, though at present his thoughts wandered incessantly. The path took him through a shrubbery running close up to a remote wing of the mansion. Nobody seemed to be stirring in that quarter, till, turning an angle, he saw Geraldiae’s own graceful figure close at hand, robed in fur, and standing at ease outside an open French casement.

She was startled by his sudden appearance, but her face soon betrayed a sympathetic remembrance of him. Egbert scarcely knew whether to stop or to walk on, when, casting her eyes upon his book, she said, “Don’t let me interrupt your reading.”

“I am glad to have—” he stammered, and for the moment could get no farther. His nervousness encouraged her to continue. “What are you reading?” she said.

The book was, as may possibly be supposed by those who know the mood inspired by hopeless attachments, “Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage,” a poem which at that date had never been surpassed in congeniality to the minds of young persons in the full fever of virulent love. He was rather reluctant to let her know this but as the inquiry afforded him an opening for conversation he held out the book, and her eye glanced over the page.

“Oh, thank you,” she said hastily, “I ought not to have asked that — only I am interested always in books. Is your grand father quite well, Mr. Mayne? I saw him yesterday, and thought he seemed to be not in such good health as usual.”

“His mind is disturbed,” said Egbert.

“Indeed, why is that?”

“It is on account of his having to leave the farm. He is old, and was born in that house.”

“Ah, yes, I have heard something of that,” she said with a slightly regretful look. “Mr. Allenville has decided to enlarge the park. Born in the house, was he?”

“Yes. His father built it. May I ask your opinion on the point, Miss Allenville? Don’t you think it would be possible to enlarge the park without taking my grandfather’s farm? Greenman has already five hundred acres.”

She was perplexed how to reply, and evading the question said; “Your grandfather much wishes to stay?”

“He does, intensely — more than you can believe or think. But he will not ask to be let remain. I dread the effect of leaving upon him. If it were possible to contrive that he should not be turned out I should be grateful indeed.”

“I — I will do all I can that things may remain as they are,” she said with a deepened colour. “In fact, I am almost certain that he will not have to go, since it is so painful to him,” she added in the sanguine tones of a child. “My father could not have known that his mind was so bent on staying.”

Here the conversation ended, and Egbert went on with a lightened heart. Whether his pleasure arose entirely from having done his grandfather a good turn or from the mere sensation of having been near her, he himself could hardly have determined.

CHAPTER IV.



*OH, FOR MY sake, do you with fortune chide
The guilty goddess of my harmful deed,
That did not better for my life provide.*

Now commenced a period during which Egbert Mayne's emotions burnt in a more unreasoning and wilder worship than at any other time in his life. The great condition of idealization in love was present here, that of an association in which, through difference in rank, the petty human elements that enter so largely into life are kept entirely out of sight, and there is hardly awakened in the man's mind a thought that they appertain to her at all.

He deviated frequently from his daily track to the spot where the last meeting had been, till, on the fourth morning after, he saw her there again; but she let him pass that time with a bare recognition. Two days later the carriage drove down the lane to the village as he was walking away. When they met she told the coachman to stop.

"I am glad to tell you that your grandfather may be perfectly easy about the house and farm," she said; as if she took unfeigned pleasure in saying it. "The question of altering the park is postponed indefinitely. I have resisted it: I could do no less for one who did so much for me."

"Thank you very warmly," said Egbert so earnestly that she blushed crimson as the carriage rolled away.

The spring drew on, and he saw and spoke with her several times. In truth he walked abroad much more than had been usual with him formerly, searching in all directions for her form. Had she not been unreflecting and impressionable — had not her life dragged on as uneventfully as that of one in gaol, through her residing in a great house with no companion but an undemonstrative father; and, above all, had not Egbert been a singularly engaging young man of that distracting order of beauty which, grows upon the feminine gazer with every glance, this tender waylaying would have made little difference to anybody. But such was not the case. In return for Egbert's presence of mind at the threshing she had done him a kindness, and the pleasure that she took in the act shed an added interest upon the object of it. Thus, on both sides it had happened that a deed of solicitude casually performed gave each doer a sense of proprietorship in its recipient, and a wish still further to establish that position by other deeds of the same sort.

To still further kindle Geraldine's indiscreet interest in him, Egbert's devotion became perceptible ere long even to her inexperienced eyes; and it was like a new world to the young girl. At first she was almost frightened at the novelty of the thing. Then the fascination of the discovery caused her ready, receptive heart to palpitate in an ungovernable manner whenever he came near her. She was not quite in love herself, but she was so moved by the circumstance of her deliverer being in love, that she could think of nothing else. His appearing at odd places startled her; and yet she rather liked that kind of startling. Too often her eyes rested on his face; too often her thoughts surrounded his figure and dwelt on his conversation.

One day when they met on a bridge, they did not part till after a long and interesting conversation on books, in which many opinions of Mayne's (crude and unformed enough, it must be owned) that happened to take her fancy, set her glowing with ardour to unfold her own.

After any such meeting as this, Egbert would go home and think for hours of her little remarks and movements. The day and minute of every accidental rencounter became registered in his mind with the indelibility of ink. Years afterwards he could recall at a moment's notice that he saw her at eleven o'clock on the third of April, a Sunday; at four on Tuesday, the twelfth; at a quarter to six on Thursday the twenty-eighth; that on the ninth it rained at a quarter past two, when she was walking up the avenue; that on the seventeenth the grass was rather too wet for a lady's feet; and other calendrical and meteorological facts of no value whatever either to science or history.

On a Tuesday evening, when they had had several conversations out of doors, and when a passionate liking for his society was creeping over the reckless though pure girl, slowly, insidiously, and surely, like ripeness over fruit, she further committed herself by coming alone to the school. A heavy rain had threatened to fall all the afternoon, and just as she entered it began. School hours were at that moment over, but he waited a few moments before dismissing the children, to see if the storm would clear up. After looking round at the classes, and making sundry inquiries of the little ones in the usual manner of ladies who patronize a school, she came up to him.

"I listened outside before I came in. It was a great pleasure to hear the voices — three classes reading at three paces." She continued with a laugh: "There was a rough treble voice bowling easily along, an ambling sweet voice earnest about fishes in the sea, and a shrill voice spelling out letter by letter. Then there was a shuffling of feet — then you sang. It seemed quite a little poem."

"Yes," Egbert said. "But perhaps, like many poems, it was hard prose to the originators."

She remained thinking, and Mayne looked out at the weather. Judging from the sky and wind that there was no likelihood of a change that night, he proceeded to let the children go. Miss Allenville assisted in wrapping up as many of them as possible in the old coats and other apparel which Egbert kept by him for the purpose. But she touched both clothes and children rather gingerly, and as if she did not much like the contact.

Egbert's sentiments towards her that evening were vehement and curious. Much as he loved her, his liking for the peasantry about him — his mother's ancestry — caused him sometimes a twinge of self-reproach for thinking of her so exclusively, and nearly forgetting all his old acquaintance, neighbours, and his grandfather's familiar friends, with their rough but honest ways. To further complicate his feelings to-night there was the sight, on the one hand, of the young lady with her warm rich dress and glowing future, and on the other of the weak little boys and girls — some only five years old, and none more than twelve, going off in their different directions in the pelting rain, some for a walk of more than two miles, with the certainty of being drenched to the skin, and with no change of clothes when they reached their home. He watched the rain-spots thickening upon the faded frocks, worn-out tippets, yellow straw hats and bonnets, and coarse pinafores of his unprotected little flock as they walked down the path, and was thereby reminded of the hopelessness of his attachment, by perceiving how much more nearly akin was his lot to theirs than to hers.

Miss Allenville, too, was looking at the children, and unfortunately she chanced to say, as they toddled off, "Poor little wretches!"

A sort of despairing irritation at her remoteness from his plane, as implied by her pitying the children so unmercifully, impelled him to remark, "Say poor little children, madam." She was silent — awkwardly silent.

"I suppose I must walk home," she said, when about half a minute had passed. "Nobody knows where I am, and the carriage may not find me for hours."

"I'll go for the carriage," said Egbert readily.

But he did not move. While she had been speaking, there had grown up in him a conviction that these opportunities of seeing her would soon necessarily cease. She would get older, and would perceive the incorrectness of being on intimate terms with him merely because he had snatched her from danger. He would have to engage in a more active career, and go away. Such ideas brought on an irresistible climax to an intense and long felt desire. He had just reached that point in the action of passion upon mind at which it masters judgment.

It was almost dark in the room, by reason of the heavy clouds and the nearness of the night. But the fire had just flamed up brightly in the grate, and it threw her face and form into ruddy relief against the grey wall behind.

Suddenly rushing towards her, he seized her hand before she comprehended his intention, kissed it tenderly, and clasped her in his arms. Her soft body yielded like wool under his embrace. As suddenly releasing her he turned, and went back to the other end of the room.

Egbert's feeling as he retired was that he had committed a crime. The madness of the action was apparent to him almost before it was completed. There seemed not a single thing left for him to do, but to go into lifelong banishment for such sacrilege. He faced round and regarded her. Her features were not visible enough to judge of their expression. All that he could discern through the dimness and his own agitation was that for some time she remained quite motionless. Her state was probably one of suspension as with Ulysses before Melanthus, she may have

entertained a breast

That in the strife of all extremes did rest.

In one, two, or five minutes — neither of them ever knew exactly how long — apparently without the motion of a limb, she glided noiselessly to the door and vanished.

Egbert leant himself against the wall, almost distracted. He could see absolutely no limit to the harm that he had done by his wild and unreasoning folly. "Am I a man to thus ill-treat the loveliest girl that ever was born? Sweet injured creature — how she will hate me!" These were some of the expressions that he murmured in the twilight of that lonely room.

Then he said that she certainly had encouraged him, which, unfortunately for her, was only too true. She had seen that he was always in search of her, and she did not put herself out of his way. He was sure that she liked him to admire her. "Yet, no," he murmured, "I will not excuse myself at all."

The night passed away miserably. One conviction by degrees overruled all the rest in his mind — that if she knew precisely how pure had been his longing towards her, she could not think badly of him. His reflections resulted in a resolve to get an interview with her, and make his defence and explanation in full. The decision come to, his impatience could scarcely preserve him from rushing to Tollamore House that very daybreak, and trying to get into her presence, though it was the likeliest of suppositions that she would never see him.

Every spare minute of the following days he hovered round the house, in hope of getting a glimpse of her; but not once did she make herself visible. He delayed taking the extreme step of calling, till the hour came when he could delay no longer. On a certain day he rang the bell with a mild air, and disguised his feelings by looking as if he wished to speak to her merely on copy-books, slates, and other school matters, the school being professedly her hobby. He was told that Miss Allenville had gone on a visit to some relatives thirty-five miles off, and that she would probably not return for a month.

As there was no help for it, Egbert settled down to wait as he best could, not without many misgivings lest his rash action, which a prompt explanation might have toned down and excused, would now be the cause of a total estrangement between them, so that nothing would restore him to the place he had formerly held in her estimation. That she had ever seriously loved him he did not hope or dream; but it was intense pain to him to be out of her favour.

CHAPTER V.



*So I SOBERLY laid my last plan
To extinguish the man,
Round his creep-hole, with never a break
Ran my fires for his sake;
Over head did my thunder combine
With my underground mine:
Till I looked from my labour content
To enjoy the event.
When sudden — how think ye the end?*

A week after the crisis mentioned above, it was secretly whispered to Egbert's grandfather that the park enlargement scheme was after all to be proceeded with; that Miss Allenville was extremely anxious to have it put in hand as soon as possible. Farmer Broadford's farm was to be added to Greenman's, as originally intended, and the old house that Broadford lived in was to be pulled down as an encumbrance.

"It is she this time!" murmured Egbert gloomily. "Then I did offend her, and mortify her; and she is resentful."

The excitement of his grandfather again caused him much alarm, and even remorse. Such was the responsiveness of the farmer's physical to his mental state that in the course of a week his usual health failed, and his gloominess of mind was followed by dimness of sight and giddiness. By much persuasion Egbert induced him to stay at home for a day or two; but indoors he was the most restless of creatures, through not being able to engage in the pursuits to which he had been accustomed from his boyhood. He walked up and down, looking wistfully out of the window, shifting the positions of books and chairs, and putting them back again, opening his desk and shutting it after a vacant look at the papers, saying he should never get settled in another farm at his time of life, and evincing all the symptoms of nervousness and excitability.

Meanwhile Egbert anxiously awaited Miss Allenville's return, more resolved than ever to obtain audience of her, and beg her not to visit upon an unoffending old man the consequences of a young one's folly. Any retaliation upon himself he would accept willingly, and own to be well deserved.

At length, by making off-hand inquiries (for he dared not ask directly for her again) he learnt that she was to be at home on the Thursday. The following Friday and Saturday he kept a sharp look-out; and, when lingering in the park for at least the tenth time in that half-week, a sudden rise in the ground revealed her coming along a path

Egbert stayed his advance, in order that, if she really objected to see him, she might easily strike off into a side path or turn back.

She did not accept the alternatives, but came straight on to where he lingered, averting her face waywardly as she approached. When she was within a few steps of

him he could see that the trimmings of her dress trembled like leaves. He cleared his dry throat to speak.

“Miss Allenville,” he said, humbly taking off his hat, “I should be glad to say one word to you, if I may.”

She looked at him for just one moment, but said nothing; and he could see that the expression of her face was flushed, and her mood skittish. The place they were standing in was a remote nook, hidden by the trunks and boughs, so that he could afford to give her plenty of time, for there was no fear of their being observed or overheard. Indeed, knowing that she often walked that way, Egbert had previously surveyed the spot and thought it suitable for the occasion, much as Wellington antecedently surveyed the field of Waterloo.

Here the young man began his pleading speech to her. He dilated upon his sensations when first he saw her; and as he became warmed by his oratory he spoke of all his inmost perturbations on her account without the slightest reserve. He related with much natural eloquence how he had tried over and over again not to love her, and how he had loved her in spite of that trying; of his intention never to reveal his passion, till their situation on that rainy evening prompted the impulse which ended in that irreverent action of his; and earnestly asked her to forgive him — not for his feelings, since they were his own to commend or blame — but for the way in which he testified of them to one so cultivated and so beautiful.

Egbert was flushed and excited by the time that he reached this point in his tale.

Her eyes were fixed on the grass; and then a tear stole quietly from its corner, and wandered down her cheek. She tried to say something, but her usually adroit tongue was unequal to the task. Ultimately she glanced at him, and murmured, “I forgive you;” but so inaudibly, that he only recognized the words by their shape upon her lips.

She looked not much more than a child now, and Egbert thought with sadness that her tear and her words were perhaps but the result, the one of a transitory sympathy, the other of a desire to escape. They stood silent for some seconds, and the dressing-bell of the house began ringing. Turning slowly away without another word she hastened out of his sight.

When Egbert reached home some of his grandfather’s old friends were gathered there, sympathizing with him on the removal he would have to submit to if report spoke truly. Their sympathy was rather more for him to bear than their indifference; and as Egbert looked at the old man’s bent figure, and at the expression of his face, denoting a wish to sink under the earth, out of sight and out of trouble, he was greatly depressed, and he said inwardly, “What a fool I was to ask forgiveness of a woman who can torture my only relative like this! Why do I feel her to be glorious? Oh that I had never seen her!”

The next day was Sunday, and his grandfather being too unwell to go out, Egbert went to the evening service alone. When it was over, the rector detained him in the churchyard to say a few words about the next week’s undertakings. This was soon done, and Egbert turned back to leave the now empty churchyard. Passing the porch he saw Miss Allenville coming out of the door.

Egbert said nothing, for he knew not what to say; but she spoke. “Ah, Mr. Mayne, how beautiful the west sky looks! It is the finest sunset we have had this spring.”

“It is very beautiful,” he replied, without looking westward a single degree. “Miss Allenville,” he said reproachfully, “you might just have thought whether, for the sake of reaching one guilty person, it was worth while to deeply wound an old man.”

“I do not allow you to say that,” she answered with proud quickness. “Still, I will listen just this once.”

“Are you glad you asserted your superiority to me by putting in motion again that scheme for turning him out?”

“I merely left off hindering it,” she said.

“Well, we shall go now,” continued Egbert,” and make room for newer people. I hope you forgive what caused it all.”

“You talk in that strain to make me feel regrets; and you think that because you are read in a few books you may say or do anything.”

“No, no. That’s unfair.”

“I will try to alter it — that your grandfather may not leave. Say that you forgive me for thinking he and yourself had better leave — as I forgive you for what you did. But remember, nothing of that sort ever again.”

“Forgive you? Oh, Miss Allenville!” said he in a wild whisper, “I wish you had sinned a hundred times as much, that I might show how readily I can forgive all.”

She had looked as if she would have held out her hand; but, for some reason or other, directly he had spoken with emotion it was not so well for him as when he had spoken to wound her. She passed on silently, and entered the private gate to the house.

A day or two after this, about three o’clock in the afternoon, and whilst Egbert was giving a lesson in geography, a lad burst into the school with the tidings that Farmer Broadford had fallen from a cornstack they were threshing, and hurt himself severely.

The boy had borrowed a horse to come with, and Mayne at once made him gallop off with it for a doctor. Dismissing the children, the young man ran home full of forebodings. He found his relative in a chair, held up by two of his labouring men. He was put to bed, and seeing how pale he was, Egbert gave him a little wine, and bathed the parts which had been bruised by the fall.

Egbert had at first been the more troubled at the event through believing that his grandfather’s fall was the result of his low spirits and mental uneasiness; and he blamed himself for letting so infirm a man go out upon the farm till quite recovered. But it turned out that the actual cause of the accident was the breaking of the ladder that he had been standing on. When the surgeon had seen him he said that the external bruises were mere trifles; but that the shock had been great, and had produced internal injuries highly dangerous to a man in that stage of life.

His grandson was of opinion in later years that the fall only hastened by a few months a dissolution which would soon have taken place under any circumstances, from the natural decay of the old man’s constitution. His pulse grew feeble and his voice weak, but he continued in a comparatively firm state of mind for some days, during which he talked to Egbert a great deal.

Egbert trusted that the illness would soon pass away; his anxiety for his grandfather was great. When he was gone not one of the family would be left but himself. But in spite of hope the younger man perceived that death was really at hand. And now arose a question. It was certainly a time to make confidences, if they were ever to be made; should he, then, tell his grandfather, who knew the Allenvilles so well, of his love for Geraldine? At one moment it seemed duty; at another it seemed a graceful act, to say the least.

Yet Egbert might never have uttered a word but for a remark of his grandfather’s which led up to the very point. He was speaking of the farm and of the squire, and thence he went on to the daughter.

“She, too,” he said, “seems to have that reckless spirit which was in her mother’s family, and ruined her mother’s father at the gaming-table, though she’s too young to show much of it yet.”

“I hope not,” said Egbert fervently.

“Why? What be the Allenvilles to you — not that I wish the girl harm?”

“I think she is the very best being in the world. I — love her deeply.”

His grandfather’s eyes were set on the wall. “Well, well, my poor boy,” came softly from his mouth. “What made ye think of loving her? Ye may as well love a mountain, for any return you’ll ‘ever get. Do she know of it?”

“She guesses it. It was my saving her from the threshing-machine that began it.”

“And she checks you? “

“Well — no.”

“Egbert,” he said after a silence, “I am grieved, for it can but end in pain. Mind, she’s an inexperienced girl. She never thinks of what trouble she may get herself into with her father and with her friends. And mind this, my lad, as another reason for dropping it; however honourable your love may be, you’ll never get credit for your honour. Nothing you can do will ever root out the notion of people that where the man is poor and the woman is high-born he’s a scamp and she’s an angel.”

“She’s very good.”

“She’s thoughtless, or she’d never encourage you. You must try not to see her.”

“I will never put myself in her way again.”

The subject was mentioned no more then. The next day the worn-out old farmer died, and his last request to Egbert was that he would do nothing to tempt Geraldine Allenville to think of him further.

CHAPTER VI.



HATH MISERY MADE thee blind

To the fond workings of a woman's mind?

And must I say — albeit my heart rebel

With all that woman feels but should not tell;

Because, despite thy faults, that heart is moved —

It feared thee, thank'd thee, pitied, maddend, loved?

It was in the evening of the day after Farmer Broadford's death that Egbert first sat down in the house alone. The bandy-legged little man who had acted as his grandfather's groom of the chambers and stables simultaneously had gone into the village. The candles were not yet lighted, and Mayne abstractedly watched upon the pale wall the latter rays of sunset slowly changing into the white shine of a moon a few days old. The ancient family clock had stopped for want of winding, and the intense silence that prevailed seemed more like the bodily presence of some quality than the mere absence of sound.

He was thinking how many were the indifferent expressions which he had used towards the poor body lying cold up-stairs — the only relation he had latterly had upon earth — which might as well have been left unsaid; of how far he had been from practically attempting to do what in theory he called best — to make the most of every pulse of natural affection; that he had never heeded or particularly inquired the meaning of the different pieces of advice which the kind old man had tendered from time to time; that he had never even thought of asking for any details of his grandfather's history.

His musings turned upon Geraldine. He had promised to seek her no more, and he would keep his promise. Her interest in him might only be that of an exceedingly romantic and freakish soul, awakened but through "lack of other idleness," and because sound sense suggested to her that it was a thing dangerous to do; for it seemed that she was ever and only moved by the superior of two antagonistic forces. She had as yet seen little or no society, she was only seventeen; and hence it was possible that a week of the town and fashion into which she would soon be initiated might blot out his very existence from her memory.

He was sitting with his back to the window, meditating in this minor key, when a shadow darkened the opposite moonlit wall. Egbert started. There was a gentle tap at the door; and he opened it to behold the well-known form of the lady in his mind.

"Mr. Mayne, are you alone?" she whispered, full of agitation.

"Quite alone, excepting my poor grandfather's body up-stairs," he answered, as agitated as she.

Then out it all came. "I couldn't help coming — I hope — oh, I do so pray - that it was not through me that he died. Was it I, indeed, who killed him? They say it was the effect of the news that he was to leave the farm. I would have done anything to hinder his being turned out had I only reflected! And now he is dead. It was so cruel

to an old man like him; and now you have nobody in the world to care for you, have you, Egbert — except me?”

The ice was wholly broken. He took her hand in both his own and began to assure her that her alarm was grounded on nothing whatever. And yet he was almost reluctant to assure her out of so sweet a state. And when he had said over and over again that his grandfather's fall had nothing to do with his mental condition, that the utmost result of her hasty proceeding was a sadness of spirit in him, she still persisted, as is the custom of women, in holding to that most painful possibility as the most likely, simply because it wounded her most. It was a long while before she would be convinced of her own innocence, but he maintained it firmly, and she finally believed.

They sat down together, restraint having quite died out between them. The fine-lady portion of her existence, of which there was never much, was in abeyance, and they spoke and acted simply as a young man and woman who were beset by common troubles, and who had like hopes and fears.

“And you will never blame me again for what I did?” said Egbert.

“I never blamed you much,” she murmured with arch simplicity. “Why should it be wrong for me to be honest with you now, and tell everything you want to know?”

Mayne was silent. That was a difficult question for a conscientious man to answer. Here was he nearly twenty-one years of age, and with some experience of life, while she was a girl nursed up like an exotic, with no real experience; and but little over seventeen — though from the fineness of her figure she looked more womanly than she really was. It plainly had not crossed her young mind that she was on the verge of committing the most horrible social sin — that of loving beneath her, and owning that she so loved. Two years thence she might see the imprudence of her conduct, and blame him for having led her on. Ought he not, then, considering his grandfather's words, to say that it was wrong for her to be honest; that she should forget him, and fix her mind on matters appertaining to her order? He could not do it — he let her drift sweetly on.

“I think more of you than of anybody in the whole world,” he replied. “And you will allow me to, will you not? — let me always keep you in my heart, and almost worship you?”

“That would be wrong. But you may think of me, if you like to, very much; it will give me great pleasure. I don't think my father thinks of me at all — or anybody, except you. I said the other day I would never think of you again, but I have done it, a good many times. It is all through being obliged to care for somebody whether you will or no.”

“And you will go on thinking of me?”

“I will do anything to — oblige you.”

Egbert, on the impulse of the moment, bent over her and raised her little hand to his lips. He revered her too much to think of kissing her cheek. She knew this, and was thrilled through with the delight of being adored as one from above the sky.

Up to this day of its existence their affection had been a battle, a species of antagonism wherein his heart and the girl's had faced each other, and being anxious to do honour to their respective parts. But now it was a truce and a settlement, in which each one took up the other's utmost weakness, and was careless of concealing his and her own.

Surely, sitting there as they sat then, a more unreasoning condition of mind as to how this unequal conjunction would end never existed. They swam along through the passing moments, not a thought of duty on either side, not a further thought on his but that she was the dayspring of his life, that he would die for her a hundred times;

superadded to which was a shapeless uneasiness that she would in some manner slip away from him. The solemnity of the event that had just happened would have shown up to him any ungenerous feeling in strong colours — and he had reason afterwards to examine the epoch narrowly; but it only seemed to demonstrate how instinctive and uncalculating was the love that worked within him.

It was almost time for her to leave. She held up her watch to the moonlight. Five minutes more she would stay; then three minutes, and no longer. “Now I am going,” she said. “Do you forgive me entirely?”

“How shall I say ‘yes’ without assuming that there was something to forgive?”

“Say ‘yes.’ It is sweeter to fancy I am forgiven than to think I have not sinned.”

With this she went to the door. Egbert accompanied her through the wood, and across a portion of the park, till they were about a hundred yards from the house, when he was forced to bid her farewell.

The old man was buried on the following Sunday. During several weeks afterwards Egbert’s sole consolation under his loss was in thinking of Geraldine, for they did not meet in private again till some time had elapsed. The ultimate issue of this absorption in her did not concern him at all: it seemed to be in keeping with the system of his existence now that he should have an utterly inscrutable to-morrow.

CHAPTER VII.



*COME FORWARD, SOME great marshal, and organize
equality in society.*

The month of August came round, and Miss Allenville was to lay the foundation-stone of a tower or beacon which her father was about to erect on the highest hill of his estate, to the memory of his brother, the general. It was arranged that the school children should sing at the ceremony. Accordingly, at the hour fixed, Egbert was on the spot; a crowd of villagers had also arrived, and carriages were visible in the distance, wending their way towards the scene. When they had drawn up alongside and the visitors alighted, the master mason appeared nervous.

"Mr. Mayne," he said to Egbert, "you had better do what's to be done for the lady. I shall speak too loud, or too soft, or handle things wrong. Do you attend upon her, and I'll lower the stone."

Several ladies and gentlemen now gathered round, and presently Miss Allenville stood in position for her office, supported on one side by her father, a hard-featured man of five-and-forty, and some friends who were visiting at the house; and on the other by the school children, who began singing a song in keeping with the occasion. When this was done, Geraldine laid down the sealed bottle with its enclosed memorandum, which had been prepared for the purpose, and taking a trowel from her father's hand, dabbled confusedly in the mortar, accidentally smearing it over the handle of the trowel.

"Lower the stone," said Egbert, who stood close by, to the mason at the winch; and the stone began to descend.

The dainty-handed young woman was looking as if she would give anything to be relieved of the dirty trowel; but Egbert, the only one who observed this, was guiding the stone with both hands into its place, and could not receive the tool of her. Every moment increased her perplexity.

"Take it, take it, will you?" she impatiently whispered to him, blushing with a consciousness that people began to perceive her awkward handling.

"I must just finish this first," he said.

She was resigned in an instant. The stone settled down upon its base, when Egbert at once took the trowel, and her father came up and wiped her glove. Egbert then handed her the mallet.

"What must I do with this thing?" she whispered entreatingly, holding the mallet as if it might bite her.

"Tap with it, madam," said he.

She did as directed, and murmured the form of words which she had been told to repeat.

"Thank you," she said softly when all was done, restored to herself by the consciousness that she had performed the last part gracefully. Without lifting her eyes she added, "It was thoughtful of you to remember that I shouldn't know, and to stand by to tell me."

Her friends now moved away, but before she had joined them Egbert said, chiefly for the pleasure of speaking to her: "The tower, when it is built, will be seen many miles off."

"Yes," she replied in a discreet tone, for many eyes were upon her. "The view is very extensive." She glanced round upon the whole landscape stretched out before her, in the extreme distance of which was visible the town of Westcombe.

"How long does it take to go to Westcombe across this way?" she asked of him while they were bringing up the carriage.

"About two hours," he said.

"Two hours — so long as that, does it? How far is it away?"

"Eight miles."

"Two hours to drive eight miles — who ever heard of such a thing!"

"I thought you meant walking"

"Ah, yes; but one hardly means walking without expressly stating it."

"Well, it seems just the other way to me — that walking is meant unless you say driving."

That was the whole of their conversation. The remarks had been simple and trivial, but they brought a similar thought into the minds of both of them. On her part it spread a sudden gloom over her face, and it made him feel dead at heart. It was that horrid thought of their differing habits and of those contrasting positions which could not be reconciled.

Indeed, this perception of their disparity weighed more and more heavily upon him as the days went on. There was no doubt about their being lovers, though scarcely recognized by themselves as such; and, in spite of Geraldine's warm and unreflecting impulses, a sense of how little Egbert was accustomed to what is called society, and the polite forms which constant usage had made almost nature with her, would rise on occasion, and rob her of many an otherwise pleasant minute. When any little occurrence had brought this into more prominence than usual, Egbert would go away, wander about the lanes, and be kept awake a great part of the night by the distress of mind such a recognition brought upon him. How their intimacy would end, in what uneasiness, yearning, and misery, he could not guess. As for picturing a future of happiness with her by his side there was not ground enough upon which to rest the momentary imagination of it. Thus they mutually oppressed each other even while they loved.

In addition to this anxiety was another; what would be thought of their romance by her father, if he were to find it out? It was impossible to tell him, for nothing could come of that but Egbert's dismissal and Geraldine's seclusion; and how could these be borne?

He looked round anxiously for some means of deliverance. There were two things to be thought of, the saving of her dignity, and the saving of his and her happiness. That to accomplish the first he ought voluntarily to leave the village before their attachment got known, and never seek her again, was what he sometimes felt; but the idea brought such misery along with it that it died out under contemplation.

He determined at all events to put the case clearly before her, to heroically set forth at their next meeting the true bearings of their position, which she plainly did not realise to the full as yet. It had never entered her mind that the link between them might be observed by the curious, and instantly talked of. Yes, it was his duty to warn her, even though by so doing he would be heaping coals of fire on his own head. For by acting upon his hint she would be lost to him, and the charm that lay in her false notions of the world be forever destroyed.

That they would ultimately be found out, and Geraldine be lowered in local estimation, was, indeed, almost inevitable. There was one grain of satisfaction only among this mass of distresses. Whatever should become public, only the fashionable side of her character could be depreciated; the natural woman, the specimen of English girlhood that he loved, no one could impugn or harm.

Meetings had latterly taken place between them without any pretence of accident, and these were facilitated in an amazing manner by the duty imposed upon her of visiting the school as the representative of her father. At her very next appearance he told her all he thought. It was when the children had left the room for the quarter of an hour's airing that he gave them in the middle of the morning.

She was quite hurt at being treated with justice, and a crowd of tears came into her sorrowful eyes. She had never thought of half that he feared, and almost questioned his kindness in enlightening her.

"Perhaps you are right," she murmured, with the merest motion of lip. "Yes, it is sadly true. Should our conduct become known, nobody will judge us fairly. 'She was a wild, weak girl,' they will say."

"To care for such a man — a village youth. They will even suppress the fact that his father was a painter of no mean power, and a gentleman by education, little as it would redeem us; and justify their doing so by reflecting that in adding to the contrast they improve the tale.

And calumny meanwhile shall feed on us
As worms devour the dead: what we have done
None shall dare vouch, though it be truly known.

And they will continue, 'He was an artful fellow to win a girl's affections in that way — one of the mere scum of the earth,' they'll say."

"Don't, don't make it so bad!" she implored, weeping outright. "They cannot go so far. Human nature is not so wicked and blind. And they dare not speak so disrespectfully of me, or of any one I choose to favour." A slight haughtiness was apparent in these words. "But, oh, don't let us talk of it — it makes the time miserable."

However, she had been warned. But the difficulty which presented itself to her mind was, after all, but a small portion of the whole. It was how should they meet together without causing a convulsion in neighbouring society. His was more radical and complex. The only natural drift of love was towards marriage. But how could he picture, at any length of years ahead, her in a cottage as his wife, or himself in a mansion as her husband? He in the one case, she in the other, were alike painfully incredible.

But time had flown, and he conducted her to the door. "Good-bye, Egbert," she said tenderly.

"Good-bye, dear, dear madam," he answered; and she was gone.

Geraldine had never ~hinted to him to call her by her Christian name, and finding that she did not particularly wish it he did not care to do so. "Madam" was as good a name as any other for her, and by adhering to it and using it at the warmest moments it seemed to change its nature from that of a mere title to a soft pet sound. He often wondered in after days at the strange condition of a girl's heart, which could allow so much in reality, and at the same time permit the existence of a little barrier such as that; how the keen, intelligent mind of woman could be ever so slightly hoodwinked by a sound. Yet, perhaps, it was womanlike, after all, and she may have caught at it as the only straw within reach of that dignity or pride of birth which was drowning in her impetuous affection.

CHAPTER VIII.



*THE WORLD AND its ways have a certain worth,
And to press a point while these oppose
Were a simple policy: heat wait,
And we lose no friends, and gain no foes.*

The inborn necessity of ransacking the future for a germ of hope led Egbert Mayne to dwell for longer and longer periods on the at first rejected possibility of winning and having her. And apart from any thought of marriage, he knew that Geraldine was sometimes a trifle vexed that their experiences contained so little in common — that he had never dressed for dinner, or made use of a carriage in his life; even though in literature he was her master, thanks to his tastes.

For the first time he seriously contemplated a visionary scheme which had been several times cursorily glanced at; a scheme almost as visionary as any ever entertained by a man not yet blinded to the limits of the possible. Lighted on by impulse, it was not taken up without long calculation, and it was one in which every link was reasoned out as carefully and as clearly as his powers would permit. But the idea that he would be able to carry it through was an assumption which, had he bestowed upon it one hundredth part of the thought spent on the details of its working, he would have thrown aside as unfeasible.

To give up the school, to go to London or elsewhere, and there to try to rise to her level by years of sheer exertion, was the substance of this scheme. However his lady's heart might be grieved by his apparent desertion, he would go. A knowledge of life and of men must be acquired, and that could never be done by thinking at home.

Egbert's abstract love for the gigantic task was but small; but there was absolutely no other honest road to her sphere. That the habits of men should be so subversive of the law of nature as to indicate that he was not worthy to marry a woman whose own instincts said that he was worthy, was a great anomaly, he thought, with some rebelliousness; but this did not upset the fact or remove the difficulty.

He told his fair mistress at their next accidental meeting (much sophistry lay in their definition of "accidental" at this season) that he had determined to leave Tollamore. Mentally she exulted at his spirit, but her heart despaired. He solemnly assured her that it would be much better for them both in the end; and she became submissive, and entirely agreed with him. Then she seemed to acquire a sort of superior insight by virtue of her superior rank, and murmured, "You will expand your mind, and get to despise me for all this, and for my want of pride in being so easily won; and it will end unhappily."

Her imagination so affected her that she could not hinder the tears from falling. Nothing was more effective in checking his despair than the sight of her despairing, and he immediately put on a more hopeful tone.

"No," he said, taking her by the hand, "I shall rise, and become so learned and so famous that—" He did not like to say plainly that he really hoped to win her as his wife, but it is very probable that she guessed his meaning nearly enough.

“You have some secret resources!” she exclaimed. “Some help is promised you in this ambitious plan.”

It was most painful to him to have to tell her the truth after this sanguine expectation, and how uncertain and unaided his plans were. However, he cheered her with the words, “Wait and see.” But he himself had many misgivings when her sweet face was turned away.

Upon this plan he acted at once. Nothing of moment occurred during the autumn, and the time for his departure gradually came near. The sale of his grandfather’s effects having taken place, and notice having been given at the school, there was very little else for him to do in the way of preparation, for there was no family to be consulted, no household to be removed. On the last day of teaching, when the afternoon lessons were over, he bade farewell to the school children. The younger ones cried, not from any particular reflection on the loss they would sustain, but simply because their hearts were tender to any announcement couched in solemn terms. The elder children sincerely regretted Egbert, as an acquaintance who had not filled the post of schoolmaster so long as to be quite spoiled as a human being.

On the morning of departure he rose at half past three, for Tollamore was a remote nook of a remote district, and it was necessary to start early, his plan being to go by packet from Melport. The candle-flame had a sad and yellow look when it was brought into his bedroom by Nathan Brown, one of his grandfather’s old labourers, at whose house he had taken a temporary lodging, and who had agreed to awake him and assist his departure. Few things will take away a man’s confidence in an impulsive scheme more than being called up by candlelight upon a chilly morning to commence working it out. But when Egbert heard Nathan’s great feet stamping spiritedly about the floor downstairs, in earnest preparation of breakfast, he overcame his weakness and bustled out of bed.

They breakfasted together, Nathan drinking the hot tea with rattling sips, and Egbert thinking as he looked at him that Nathan had never appeared so desirable a man to have about him as now when he was about to give him up.

“Well, good mornen, Mistur Mayne,” Nathan said, as he opened the door to let Egbert out. “And mind this, sir; if they used ye bad up there, th’lt always find a hole to put thy head into at Nathan Brown’s, I’ll warrant as much.”

Egbert stepped from the door, and struck across to the manor-house. The morning was dark, and the raw wind made him shiver till walking warmed him. “Good heavens, here’s an undertaking!” he sometimes thought. Old trees seemed to look at him through the gloom, as they rocked uneasily to and fro; and now and then a dreary drop of rain beat upon his face as he went on. The dead leaves in the ditches, which could be heard but not seen, shifted their positions with a troubled rustle, and flew at intervals with a little rap against his walking-stick and hat. He was glad to reach the north stile, and get into the park, where, with an anxious pulse, he passed beneath the creaking limes.

“Will she wake soon enough; will she be forgetful, and sleep over the time?” He had asked himself this many times since he rose that morning, and still beset by the inquiry, he drew near to the mansion.

Her bedroom was in the north wing, facing towards the church, and on turning the brow of the hill a faint light in the window reassured him. Taking a few little stones from the path he threw them upon the sill, as they had agreed, and she instantly opened the window, and said softly, “The butler sleeps on the ground floor on this side, go to the bow-window in the shrubbery.”

He went round among the bushes to the place mentioned, which was entirely sheltered from the wind. She soon appeared, bearing in her hand a wax taper, so small that it scarcely gave more light than a glowworm. She wore the same dress that she had worn when they first met on the previous Christmas, and her hair was loose as at that time. Indeed, she looked throughout much as she had looked then, except that her bright eyes were red, as Egbert could see well enough.

"I have something for you," she said softly as she opened the window. "How much time is there?"

"Half an hour only, dearest."

She began a sigh, but checked it, at the same time holding out a packet to him.

"Here are fifty pounds," she whispered. "It will be useful to you now, and more shall follow."

Egbert felt how impossible it was to accept this. "No, my dear one," he said, "I cannot."

"I don't require it, Egbert. I wish you to have it; I have plenty. Come, do take it." But seeing that he continued firm on this point she reluctantly gave in, saying that she would keep it for him.

"I fear so much that papa suspects me," she said. "And if so, it was my own fault, and all owing to a conversation I began with him without thinking beforehand that it would be dangerous."

"What did you say?"

"I said," she whispered, "Suppose a man should love me very much, would you mind my being acquainted with him if he were a very worthy man?" "That depends upon his rank and circumstances," he said. "Suppose," I said, "that in addition to his goodness he had much learning, and had made his name famous in the world, but was not altogether rich?" "I think I showed too much earnestness, and I wished that I could have recalled my words. 'When the time comes I will tell you,' he said, 'and don't speak or think of these matters again.'"

In consequence of this new imprudence of hers Egbert doubted if it would be right to correspond with her. He said nothing about it then, but it added a new shade to the parting.

"I think your decision a good and noble one," she murmured, smiling hopefully. "And you will come back some day a wondrous man of the world, talking of vast schemes, radical errors, and saying such words as the 'backbone of society,' the 'tendency of modern thought,' and other things like that. When papa says to you, 'My lord the chancellor,' you will answer him with 'A tall man, with a deep-toned voice — I know him well.' When he says, 'Such and such were Lord Hatton's words, I think,' you will answer, 'No, they were Lord Tyrrell's; I was present on the occasion;' and so on in that way. You must get to talk authoritatively about vintages and their dates, and to know all about epicureanism, idleness, and fashion; and so you will beat him with his own weapons, for he knows nothing of these things. He will criticise you; then he will be nettled; then he will admire you."

Egbert kissed her hand devotedly, and held it long.

"If you cannot in the least succeed," she added, "I shall never think the less of you. The truly great stand on no middling ledge; they are either famous or unknown."

Egbert moved slowly away amongst the laurestines. Holding the light above her bright head she smiled upon him, as if it were unknown to her that she wept at the same time.

He left the park precincts, and followed the turnpike road to Melpert. In spite of the misery of parting he felt relieved of a certain oppressiveness, now that his

presence at Tollamore could no longer bring disgrace upon her. The threatening rain passed off by the time that he reached the ridge dividing the inland districts from the coast. It began to get light, but his journey was still very lonely. Ultimately the yellow shore-line of pebbles grew visible, and the distant horizon of water spreading like a grey upland against the sky, till he could soon hear the measured flounce of the waves.

He entered the town at sunrise, just as the lamps were extinguished, and went to a tavern to breakfast. At half past eight o'clock the boat steamed out of the harbor, and reached London after a passage of five-and-forty hours.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.



*He, like a captain who beleaguers round
Some strong-built castle on a rising ground,
Views all the approaches with observing eyes;
This and that other part in vain he tries,
And more on industry than force relies.*

Since Egbert Mayne's situation is not altogether a new and unprecedented one, there will be no necessity for detailing in all its minuteness his attempt to scale the steep of fame. For notwithstanding the fact that few, comparatively, have reached the top, the lower tracts of that troublesome incline have been trodden by as numerous a company as any allegorical spot in the world.

The reader must then imagine five years to have elapsed, during which rather formidable slice of human life Egbert had been constantly striving. It had been drive, drive from month to month; no rest, nothing but effort. He had progressed from newspaper work to criticism, from criticism to independent composition of a mild order, from the latter to the publication of a book which nobody ever heard of, and from this to the production of a work of really sterling merit, which appeared anonymously. Though he did not set society in a blaze, or even in a smoke, thereby, he certainly caused a good many people to talk about him, and to be curious as to his name.

The luminousness of nature which had been sufficient to attract the attention and heart of Geraldine Allenville had, indeed, meant much. That there had been power enough in the presence, speech, mind, and tone of the poor painter's son to fascinate a girl of Geraldine's station was of itself a ground for the presumption that he might do a work in the world if he chose. The attachment to her was just the stimulus which such a constitution as his required, and it had at first acted admirably upon him. Afterwards the case was scarcely so happy.

He had investigated manners and customs no less than literature; and for a while the experience was exciting enough. But several habits which he had at one time condemned in the ambitious classes now became his own. His original fondness for art, literature, and science was getting quenched by his slowly increasing habit of looking upon each and all of these as machinery wherewith to effect a purpose.

A new feeling began to animate all his studies. He had not the old interest in them for their own sakes, but a breathless interest in them as factors in the game of sink or swim. He entered picture-galleries, not, as formerly, because it was his humor to dream pleasantly over the images therein expressed, but to be able to talk on demand about painters and their peculiarities. He examined Correggio to criticise his flesh shades; Angelico, to speak technically of the pink faces of his saints; Murillo, to say fastidiously that there was a certain silliness in the look of his old men; Rubens for his sensuous women; Turner for his Turnerescqueness. Romney was greater than Reynolds because Lady Hamilton had been his model, and thereby hung a tale. Bonozzi Gozzoli was better worth study than Raffaele, since the former's name was a learned sound to utter, and all knowledge got up about him would tell.

Whether an intense love for a woman, and that woman Geraldine, was a justifiable reason for this desire to shine it is not easy to say.

However, as has been stated, Egbert worked like a slave in these causes, and at the end of five full years was repaid with certain public applause, though, unfortunately, not with much public money. But this he hoped might come soon.

Regarding his love for Geraldine, the most noteworthy fact to be recorded of the period was that all correspondence with her had ceased. In spite of their fear of her father, letters had passed frequently between them on his first leaving home, and had been continued with ardor for some considerable time. The reason of its close will be perceived in the following note, which he received from her two years before the date of the present chapter: —

“Tollamore House.

“MY DEAR EGBERT, —

“How shall I tell you what has happened! and yet how can I keep silence when sooner or later you must know all?

“My father has discovered what we feel for each other. He took me into his room and made me promise never to write to you, or seek you, or receive a letter from you. I promised in haste, for I was frightened and excited, and now he trusts me — I wish he did not — for he knows I would not be mean enough to lie. So don’t write, poor Egbert, or expect to hear from miserable me. We must try to hope; yet it is along, dreary thing to do. But I *will* hope, and not be beaten. How could I help promising, Egbert, when he compelled me? He is my father. I cannot think what we shall do under it all. It is cruel of life to be like this towards us when we have done no wrong.

.....

“We are going abroad for a long time. I think it is because of you and me, but I don’t know. He does not tell me where we shall go. Just as if a place like Europe could make me forget you. He doesn’t know what’s in me, and how I can think about you and cry at nights — he cannot. If he did, he must see how silly the plan is.

“Remember that you go to church on Sunday mornings, for then I think that perhaps we are reading in the same place at the same moment; and we are sometimes, no doubt. Last Sunday when we came to this in the Psalms, ‘And he shall be like a tree planted by the waterside that will bring forth his fruit in due season: his leaf also shall not wither; and look, whatsoever he doeth, it shall prosper,’ I thought, ‘That’s Egbert in London.’ I know you were reading that same verse in your church — I felt that you said it with us. Then I looked up to your old nook under the tower arch. It was a misery to see the wood and the stone just as good as ever, and you not there. It is not only that you are gone at these times, but a heavy creature — blankness — seems to stand in your place.

“But how can I tell you of these thoughts now that I am to write no more? Yet we will hope, and hope. Remember this, that should anything serious happen, I will break the bond and write. Obligation would end then. Good-bye for a time, I cannot put into words what I would finish with. Good-bye, good-bye.

“G. A.

“P.S. Might we not write just one line at very wide intervals? It is too much never to write at all.”

On receiving this letter Egbert felt that he could not honorably keep up a regular correspondence with her. But a determination to break it off would have been more than he could have adhered to if he had not been strengthened by the hope that he might soon be able to give a plausible reason for renewing it. He sent her a line

bidding her to expect the best results from the prohibition, which, he was sure, would not be for long. Meanwhile, should she think it not wrong to send a line at very wide intervals he would promptly reply.

But she was apparently too conscientious to do so, for nothing had reached him since. Yet she was as continually in his thought and heart as before. He felt more misgivings than he had chosen to tell her of on the ultimate effect of the prohibition, but could do nothing to remove it. And then he had learnt that Miss Allenville and her father had gone to Paris, as the commencement of a sojourn abroad.

These circumstances had burdened him with long hours of depression, till he had resolved to throw his whole strength into a production which should either give him a fair start towards fame, or make him clearly understand that there was no hope in that direction for such as he. He had begun the attempt, and ended it, and the consequences were fortunate to an unexpected degree.

CHAPTER II.



*Towards the loadstar of my one desire
I flitted like a dizzy moth, whose flight
Is as a dead leaf's so the owlet light.*

Mayne's book having been launched into the world and well received, he found time to emerge from the seclusion he had maintained for several months, and to look into life again.

One warm, fashionable day, between five and six o'clock, he was walking along Piccadilly, absent-minded and unobservant, when an equipage approached whose appearance thrilled him through. It was the Allenville landau, newly painted up. Egbert felt almost as if he had been going into battle; and whether he should stand forth visibly before her or keep in the background seemed a question of life or death.

He waited in unobserved retirement, which it was not difficult to do, his aspect having much altered since the old times. Coachman, footman, and carriage advanced, in graceful unity of glide, like a swan. Then he beheld her, Geraldine, after two years of silence, five years of waiting, and nearly three years of separation; for although he had seen her two or three times in town after he had taken up his residence there, they had not once met since the year preceding her departure for the Continent.

She came opposite, now passively looking round, then actively glancing at something which interested her. Egbert trembled a little, or perhaps a great deal, at sight of her. But she passed on, and the back of the carriage hid her from his view.

So much of the boy was left in him still that he could scarcely withhold himself from rushing after her, and jumping into the carriage. She had appeared to be well and blooming, and an instinctive vexation that their long separation had produced no perceptible effect upon her, speedily gave way before a more generous sense of gratification at her well-being. Still, had it been possible, he would have been glad to see some sign upon her face that she yet remembered him.

This sudden discovery that they were in town after their years of travel stirred his lassitude into excitement. He went back to his chambers to meditate upon his next step. A trembling on Geraldine's account was disturbing him. She had probably been in London ever since the beginning of the season, but she had not given him a sign to signify that she was so near; and but for this accidental glimpse of her he might have gone on for months without knowing that she had returned from abroad.

Whether she was leading a dull or an exciting life Egbert had no means of knowing. That night after night the arms of interesting young men rested upon her waist and whirled her round the ball-room he could not bear to think. That she frequented gatherings and assemblies of all sorts he calmly owned as very probable, for she was her father's only daughter, and likely to be made much of. That she had not written a line to him since their return was still the grievous point.

“If I had only risen one or two steps further,” he thought, “how boldly would I seek her out! But only to have published one successful book in all these years — such grounds are slight indeed.”

For several succeeding days he did nothing but look about the Park, and the streets, and the neighborhood of Chevron Square, where their town house stood, in the hope of seeing her again; but in vain. There were moments when his distress that she might possibly be indifferent about him and his affairs was unbearable. He fully resolved that he would on some early occasion communicate with her, and know the worst. Years of work remained to be done before he could think of appearing before her father; but he had reached a sort of half-way stage at which some assurance from herself that his track was a hopeful one was positively needed to keep him firm.

Egbert still kept on the look-out for her at every public place; but nearly a month passed, and she did not appear again. One Sunday evening, when he had been wandering near Chevron Square, and looking at her windows from a distance, he returned past her house after dusk. The rooms were lighted, but the windows were still open, and as he strolled along he heard notes from a piano within. They were the accompaniment to an air from the “Messiah,” though no singer’s voice was audible. Egbert readily imagined who the player might be, for the “Messiah” was an oratorio which Geraldine often used to wax eloquent upon in days gone by. He had not walked far when he remembered that there was to be an exceptionally fine performance of that stirring composition during the following week, and it instantly occurred to him that Geraldine’s mind was running on the same event, and that she intended to be one of the audience.

He resolved upon doing something at a venture. The next morning he went to the ticket-office, and boldly asked for a place as near as possible to those taken in the name of Allenville.

“There is no vacant one in any of those rows,” the office-keeper said, “but you can have one very near their number on the other side of the division.”

Egbert was astonished that for once in his life he had made a lucky hit. He booked his place, and returned home.

The evening arrived, and he went early. On taking his seat he found himself at the left-hand end of a series of benches, and close to a red cord, which divided the group of seats he had entered from stalls of a somewhat superior kind. He was passing the time in looking at the extent of orchestra space, and other things, when he saw two ladies and a gentleman enter and sit down in the stalls diagonally before his own, and on the other side of the division. It delighted and agitated him to find that one of the three was Geraldine; her two companions he did not know.

“Policy, don’t desert me now,” he thought; and immediately sat in such a way that unless she turned round to a very unlikely position she would not see him.

There was a certain half-pleasant misery in sitting behind her thus as a possibly despised lover. To-night, at any rate, there would be sights and sounds common to both of them, though they should not communicate to the extent of a word. Even now he could hear the rustle of her garments as she settled down in her seat, and the faint murmur of words that passed between her and her friends.

Never, in the many times that he had listened to that rush of harmonies, had they affected him as they did then; and it was no wonder, considering what an influence upon his own life had been and still was exercised by Geraldine, and that she now sat there before him. The varying strains shook and bent him to themselves as a rippling brook shakes and bends a shadow. The music did not show its power by attracting his

attention to its subject; it rather dropped its own libretto and took up in place of that the poem of his life and love.

There was Geraldine still. They were singing the chorus "Lift up your heads," and he found a new impulse of thought in him. It was towards determination. Should every member of her family be against him he would win her in spite of them. He could now see that Geraldine was moved equally with himself by the tones which entered her ears.

"Why do the nations so furiously rage together" filled him with a gnawing thrill, and so changed him to its spirit that he believed he was capable of suffering in silence for his whole lifetime, and of never appearing before her unless she gave a sign.

The audience stood up, and the "Hallelujah Chorus" began. The deafening harmonies flying from this group and from that seemed to absorb all the love and poetry that his life had produced, to pour it upon that one moment, and upon her who stood so close at hand. "I will force Geraldine to be mine," he thought.. "I will make that heart ache of love for me." The chorus continued, and her form trembled under its influence. Egbert was for seeking her the next morning and knowing what his chances were, without waiting for further results. The chorus and the personality of Geraldine still filled the atmosphere. "I will seek her to-night — as soon as we get out of this place," he said. The storm of sound now reached its climax, and Geraldine's power was proportionately increased. He would give anything for a glance this minute — to look into her eyes, she into his. "If I can but touch her hand, and get one word from her, I will," he murmured.

He shifted his position somewhat and saw her face. Tears were in her eyes, and her lips were slightly parted. Stretching a little nearer he whispered, "My love!"

Geraldine turned her wet eyes upon him, almost as if she had not been surprised, but had been forewarned by her previous emotion. With the peculiar quickness of grasp that she always showed under sudden circumstances, she had realized the position at a glance.

"Oh, Egbert!" she said; and her countenance flagged as if she would have fainted.

"Give me your hand," he whispered.

She placed her hand in his, under the cord, which it was easy to do without observation; and he held it tight.

"Mine, as before?" he asked.

"Yours now as then," said she.

They were like frail and sorry wrecks upon that sea of symphony, and remained in silent abandonment to the time, till the strains approached their close.

"Can you meet me to-night?" said Egbert.

She was half frightened at the request, and said, "Where?"

"At your own front door, at twelve o'clock." He then was at once obliged to gently withdraw himself, for the chorus was ended, and the people were sitting down.

The remainder was soon over, and it was time to leave. Egbert watched her and her party out of the house, and, turning to the other doorway, went out likewise.

CHAPTER III.



*Bright reason will mock thee,
Like the son from a wintry sky.*

When he reached his chambers he sat down and literally did nothing but watch the hand of the mantel-clock minute by minute, till it marked half past eleven, scarcely removing his eyes. Then going again into the street he called a cab, and was driven down Park Lane and on to the corner of Chevron Square. Here he alighted, and went round to the number occupied by the Allenvilles.

A lamp stood nearly opposite the doorway, and by receding into the gloom to the railing of the square he could see whatever went on in the porch of the house. The lamps over the doorways were nearly all extinguished, and everything about this part was silent and deserted, except at a house on the opposite side of the square, where a ball was going on. But nothing of that concerned Egbert: his eyes had sought out and remained fixed upon Mr. Allenville's front door, in momentary expectation of seeing it gently open.

The dark wood of the door showed a keen and distinct edge upon the pale stone of the porch floor. It must have been about two minutes before the hour he had named when he fancied he saw a slight movement at that point, as of something slipped out from under the door.

"It is but fancy," he said to himself.

He turned his eyes away, and turned them back again. Some object certainly seemed to have been thrust under the door. At this moment the four quarters of midnight began to strike, and then the hour. Egbert could remain still no longer, and he went into the porch. A note had been slipped under the door from inside. He took it to the lamp, turned it over, and saw that it was directed only with initials,— "To E. M." Egbert tore it open and glanced upon the page. With a shiver of disappointment he read these words in her handwriting —

"It was when under the influence of much emotion, kindled in me by the power of the music, that I half assented to a meeting with you to-night; and I believe that you also were excited when you asked for one. After some quiet reflection I have decided that it will be much better for us both if we do not see each other.

"You will, I know, judge me fairly in this. You have by this time learnt what life is; what particular positions, accidental though they may be, ask, nay, imperatively exact from us. If you say 'not imperatively,' you cannot speak from knowledge of the world.

"To be woven and tied in with the world by blood, acquaintance, tradition, and external habit, is to a woman to be utterly at the beck of that world's customs. In youth we do not see this. You and I did not see it. We were but a girl and a boy at the time of our meetings at Tollamore. What was our knowledge? A list of other people's words. What was our wisdom? None at all.

"It is well for you now to remember that I am not the unsophisticated girl I was when you first knew me. For better or for worse I have become complicated,

exclusive, and practised. A woman who can speak, or laugh, or dance, or sing before any number of men with perfect composure may be no sinner, but she is not what I was once. She is what I am now. She is not the girl you loved. That woman is not here.

“I wish to write kindly to you, as to one for whom, in spite of the unavoidable division between our paths, I must always entertain a heartfelt respect. Is it, after this, out of place in me to remind you how contrasting are all our associations, how inharmonious our times and seasons? Could anything ever overpower this incongruity?”

“But I must write plainly, and, though it may grieve you now, it will produce ultimately the truest ease. This is my meaning. If I could accept your addresses without an entire loss of position I would do so; but, since this cannot be, we must forget each other,

“Believe me to be, with wishes and prayers for your happiness,

“Your sincere friend,

“G. A.”

Egbert could neither go home nor stay still; he walked off rapidly in any direction for the sole sake of vehement motion. His first impulse was to get into darkness. He went towards Kensington; thence threaded across to the Uxbridge Road, thence to Kensal Green, where he turned into a lane and followed it to Kilburn, and the hill beyond, at which spot he halted and looked over the vast haze of light extending to the length and breadth of London. Turning back and wandering among some fields by a way he could never afterwards recollect, sometimes sitting down, sometimes leaning on a stile, he lingered on until the sun had risen. He then slowly walked again towards London, and, feeling by this time very weary, he entered the first refreshment-house that he came to, and attempted to eat something. Having sat for some time over this meal without doing much more than taste it, he arose and set out for the street in which he lived. Once in his own rooms he lay down upon the couch and fell asleep.

When he awoke it was four o'clock. Egbert then dressed and went out, partook of a light meal at his club at the dismal hour between luncheon and dinner, and cursorily glanced over the papers and reviews. Among the first things that he saw were eulogistic notices of his own book in three different reviews, each the most prominent and weighty of its class. Two of them, at least, would, he knew, find their way to the drawing-room of the Allenvilles, for they were among the periodicals which the squire regularly patronized.

Next, in a weekly review he read the subjoined note: —

“The authorship of the book ———, about which conjecture has lately been so much exercised, is now ascribed to Mr. Egbert Mayne, whose first attempt in that kind we noticed in these pages some eighteen months ago.”

He took up a daily paper, and presently lighted on the following paragraph: —

“It is announced that a marriage is arranged between Lord Bretton, of Tosthill Park, and Geraldine, only daughter of Foy Allenville, Esq., of Tollamore House, Wessex.”

Egbert arose and went towards home. Arrived there he met the postman at the door, and received from him a small note. The young man mechanically glanced at the direction.

“From her,” he mentally exclaimed.

“What does it—”

This was what the letter contained: —

“Twelve o’clock.

“I have just learnt that the anonymous author of the book in which the world has been so interested during the past two months, and which I have read, is none other than yourself. Accept my congratulations. It seems almost madness in me to address you now. But I could not do otherwise on receipt of this news, and after writing my last letter. Let your knowledge of my nature prevent your misconstruing my motives in writing thus on the spur of the moment. I need scarcely add, please keep it a secret forever. I am not morally afraid, but other lives, hopes, and objects than mine have to be considered.

“The announcement of the marriage is premature, to say the least. I would tell you more, but dare not.

“G. A.”

The conjunction of all this intelligence produced in Egbert’s heart a stillness which was some time in getting aroused to excitement. His emotion was formless. He knew not what point to take hold of and survey his position from; and, though his faculties grew clearer with the passage of time, he failed in resolving on a course with any deliberateness. No sooner had he thought, “I will never see her again for my pride’s sake,” than he said, “Why not see her? she is a woman; she may love me yet.”

He went down-stairs and out of the house, and walked by way of the Park towards Chevron Square.

Probably nobody will rightly appreciate Mayne’s wild behavior at this juncture, unless, which is very unlikely, he has been in a somewhat similar position himself. It may always appear to cool critics, even if they are generous enough to make allowances for his feelings, as visionary and weak in the extreme. Yet it was scarcely to be expected, after the mental and emotional strain that he had undergone during the preceding five years, that he should have acted much otherwise.

He rang the bell and asked to see Mr. Allenville. He, perhaps fortunately, was not at home. “Miss Allenville, then,” said Mayne.

“She is just driving out,” said the footman dubiously.

Egbert then noticed for the first time that the carriage was at the door, and almost as soon as the words were spoken Geraldine came down-stairs.

“The madness of hoping to call that finished creature wife!” he thought.

Geraldine recognized him, and looked perplexed.

“One word, Miss Allenville,” he murmured.

She assented, and he followed her into the adjoining room.

“I have come,” said Egbert. “I know it is hasty of me; but I must hear my doom from your own lips. Five years ago you spurred me on to ambition. I have followed but too closely the plan I then marked out, for I have hoped all along for a reward. What am I to think? Have you indeed left off feeling what you once felt for me?”

“I cannot speak of it now,” she said hurriedly. “I told you in my letter as much as I dared. Believe me I cannot speak — in the way you wish. I will always be your friend.”

“And is this the end? Oh, my God!”

“And we shall hope to see you to dinner some day, now you are famous,” she continued, pale as ashes. “But I — cannot be with you as we once were. I was such a child at that time, you know.”

“Geraldine, is this all I get after this lapse of time and heat of labor?”

“I am not my own mistress — I have my father to please,” she faintly murmured. “I must please him. There is no help for this. Go from me — do go!”

Egbert turned and went, for he felt that he had no longer a place beside her.

CHAPTER IV.



*THEN I SAID in my heart, "As it happeneth to the fool,
so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then
more wise?"*

Mayne was in rather an ailing state for several days after the above-mentioned event. Yet the lethean stagnation which usually comes with the realization that all is over allowed him to take some deep sleeps, to which he had latterly been a stranger.

The hours went by, and he did the best he could to dismiss his regrets for Geraldine. He was assisted to the very little success that he attained in this by reflecting how different a woman she must have become from her old sweet self of five or six years ago.

"But how paltry is my success now she has vanished!" he said. "What is it worth? What object have I in following it up after this?" It rather startled him to see that the root of his desire for celebrity having been Geraldine, he now was a man who had no further motive in moving on. Town life had for some time been depressing to him. He began to doubt whether he could ever be happy in the course of existence that he had followed through these later years. The perpetual strain, the lack of that quiet to which he had been accustomed in early life, the absence of all personal interest in things around him, was telling upon his health of body and of mind.

Then revived the wish which had for some time been smouldering in his secret heart — to leave off, for the present, at least, his efforts for distinction; to retire for a few months to his old country nook, and there to meditate on his next course.

To set about this was curiously awkward to him. He had planned methods of retrogression in case of defeat through want of ability, want of means, or lack of opportunity but to retreat because his appetite for advance had gone off was what he had never before thought of.

His reflections turned upon the old home of his mother's family. He knew exactly how Tollamore appeared at that time of the year. The trees with their half-ripe apples, the bees and butterflies lazy from the heat; the haymaking over, the harvest not begun, the people lively and always out of doors. He would visit the spot, and call upon some old and half-forgotten friends of his grandfather in an adjoining parish.

Two days later he left town. The fine weather, his escape from that intricate web of effort in which he had been bound these five years, the sensation that nobody in the world had any claims upon him, imparted some buoyancy to his mind; and it was in a serene if sad spirit that he entered Tollamore Vale, and smelt his native air.

He did not at once proceed to the village, but stopped at Fairland, the parish next adjoining. It was now evening, and he called upon some of the old cottagers whom he knew. Time had set a mark upon them all since he had last been there. Middle-aged men were a little more round-shouldered, their wives had taken to spectacles, young people had grown up out of recognition, and old men had passed into second childhood.

Egbert found here, as he had expected, precisely such a lodging as a hermit would desire. It was in an ivy-covered detached house which had been partly furnished for a tenant who had never come, and it was kept clean by an old woman living in a cottage near. She offered to wait upon Egbert whilst he remained there, coming in the morning and leaving in the afternoon, thus giving him the house to himself during the latter part of the day.

When it grew dusk he went out, wishing to ramble for a little time. The gibbous moon rose on his right, the stars showed themselves sleepily one by one, and the far distance turned to a mysterious ocean of grey. He instinctively directed his steps towards Tollamore, and when there towards the school. It looked very little changed since the year in which he had had the memorable meetings with her there, excepting that the creepers had grown higher.

He went on towards the park. Here was the place whereon he had used to await her coming — he could be sure of the spot to a foot. There was the turn of the hill around which she had appeared. The sentimental effect of the scenes upon him was far greater than he had expected, so great that he wished he had never been so reckless as to come here. “But this is folly,” he thought. “The betrothed of Lord Bretton is a woman of the world in whose thoughts, hopes, and habits I have no further interest or share.”

In the lane he heard the church-bells ringing out their five notes, and meeting a shepherd Egbert asked him what was going on.

“Practising,” he said, in an uninterested voice. “’Tis against young miss’s wedding, that their hands may be thoroughly in by the day for’t.”

He presently came to where his grandfather’s old house had stood. It was pulled down, the ground it covered having become a shabby, irregular spot, half grown over with trailing plants. The garden had been grassed down, but the old apple-trees still remained, their trunks and stems being now sheeted on one side with moonlight. He entertained himself by guessing where the front door of the house had been, at which Geraldine had entered on the memorable evening when she came to him full of grief and pity, and a tacit avowal of love was made on each side. Where they had sat together was now but a heap of broken rubbish half covered with grass. Near this melancholy spot was the cottage once inhabited by Nathan Brown. But Nathan was dead now, and his wife and family had gone elsewhere.

Finding the effect of memory to be otherwise than cheerful, Mayne hastened from the familiar spot, and went on to the parish of Fairland in which he had taken his lodging.

It soon became whispered in the neighborhood that Miss Allenville’s wedding was to take place on the 17th of October. Egbert heard few particulars of the matter beyond the date, though it is possible that he might have known more if he had tried. He preferred to fortify himself by dipping deeply into the few books he had brought with him; but the most obvious plan of escaping his thoughts, that of a rapid change of scene by travel, he was unaccountably loth to adopt. He felt that he could not stay long in this district; yet an indescribable fascination held him on day after day, till the date of the marriage was close at hand.

CHAPTER V.



*How all the other passions fleet to air,
As doubtful thoughts, and rash-embraced despair
And shudd'ring fear, and green-eyed jealousy!*

On the eve of the wedding the people told Mayne that arches and festoons of late summer flowers and evergreens had been put up across the path between the church porch at Tollamore and the private gate to the squire's lawn for the procession of bride and bridesmaids. Before it got dark several villagers went on foot to the church to look at and admire these decorations. Egbert had determined to see the ceremony over. It would do him good, he thought, to be witness of the sacrifice.

Hence he, too, went along the path to Tollamore to inspect the preparations. It was dusk by the time that he reached the churchyard, and he entered it boldly, letting the gate fall together with a loud slam, as if he were a man whom nothing troubled. He looked at the half-completed bowers of green, and passed on into the church, never having entered it since he first left Tollamore.

He was standing by the chancel-arch, and observing the quantity of flowers which had been placed around the spot, when he heard the creaking of a gate on its hinges. Two figures entered the church, and Egbert stepped behind a canopied tomb.

The persons were females, and they appeared to be servants from the neighboring mansion. They brought more flowers and festoons, and were talking of the event of the morrow. Coming into the chancel they threw down their burdens with a remark that it was too dark to arrange more flowers that night.

"This is where she is to kneel," said one, standing with her arms akimbo before the altar-railing. "And I wish 'twas I instead, Lord send if I don't."

The two girls went on gossiping till other footsteps caused them to turn.

"I won't say 't isn't she. She has been here two or three times to-day. Let's go round this way."

And the servants went towards the door by a circuitous path round the aisle, to avoid meeting with the new-comer.

Egbert, too, thought he would leave the place now that he had heard and seen thus much; but from carelessness or design he went straight down the nave. An instant afterwards he was standing face to face with Geraldine. The servants had vanished.

"Good evening," she said serenely, not knowing him, and supposing him to be a parishioner.

Egbert returned the words hastily, and, in standing aside to let her pass, looked clearly into her eyes and pale face, as if there never had been a time at which he would have done anything on earth for her sake.

She knew him, and started, uttering a weak exclamation. When he reached the door he turned his head, and saw that she was irresolutely holding up her hand, as if to beckon to him to come back.

“One word, since I have met you,” she said in unequal, half-whispered tones. “I have felt that I was one-sided in my haste on the day you called to see me in London. I misunderstood you.”

Egbert could at least out-do her in self-control, and, astonished that she should have spoken, he answered in a yet colder tone, —

“I am sorry for that; very sorry, madam.”

“And you excuse it?”

“Of course I do, readily. And I hope you, too, will pardon my intrusion on that day, and understand the — circumstances.”

“Yes, yes. Especially as I am most to blame for those indiscreet proceedings in our early lives which led to it.”

Certainly you were not most to blame.”

“How can you say that?” she answered with a slight laugh, “when you know nothing of what my motives and feelings were?”

“I know well enough to judge, for I was the elder. Let me just recall some points in your own history at that time.”

“No.”

“Will you not hear a word?”

“I cannot. . . Are you writing another book?”

“I am doing nothing. I am idling at Monk’s Hut.”

“Indeed!” she said, slightly surprised. “Well, you will always have my good wishes, whatever you may do. If any of my relatives can ever help you—”

“Thank you, madam, very much. I think, however, that I can help myself.”

She was silent, looking upon the floor; and Egbert spoke again, successfully hiding the feelings of his heart under a light and untrue tone. “Miss Allenville, you know that I loved you devotedly for many years, and that that love was the starting-point of all my ambition. My sense of it makes this meeting rather awkward. But men survive almost anything. I have proved it. Their love is strong while it lasts, but it soon withers at sight of a new face. I congratulate you on your coming marriage. Perhaps I may marry some day, too.”

“I hope you will find some one worth your love. I am sorry I ever — inconvenienced you as I did. But one hardly knows at that age—”

“Don’t think of it for a moment — I really entreat you not to think of that.” What prompted the cruelty of his succeeding words he never could afterwards understand. “It was a hard matter at first for me to forget you, certainly; but perhaps I was helped in my wish by the strong prejudice I originally had against your class and family. I have fixed my mind firmly upon the differences between us, and my youthful fancy is pretty fairly overcome. Those old silly days of devotion were pretty enough, but the devotion was entirely unpractical, as you have seen, of course.”

“Yes, I have seen it,” she faltered.

“It was scartely of a sort which survives accident and division, and is strengthened by disaster.”

“Well, perhaps not, perhaps not. You can scarcely care much now whether it was or not; or, indeed, care anything about me or my happiness.”

“I do care.”

“How much? As you do for that of any other wretched human being?”

“Wretched? No!”

“I will tell you — I must tell you!” she said with rapid utterance. “This is my secret, this. I don’t love the man I am going to marry; but I have agreed to be his wife

to satisfy my friends. Say you don't hate me for what I have told. I could not bear that you should not know!"

"Hate you? Oh, Geraldine!"

A hair's breadth further, and they would both have broken down.

"Not a word more. Now you know my unhappy state, and I shall die content."

"But, darling — my Geraldine!"

"It is too late. Good-night — goodbye!" She spoke in a hurried voice, almost like a low cry, and rushed away.

Here was a revelation. Egbert moved along to the door, and up the path, in a condition in which his mind caused his very body to ache. He gazed vacantly through the railings of the lawn, which came close to the churchyard; but she was gone. He still moved mechanically on. A little further and he was overtaken by the parish clerk, who, addressing a few words to him, soon recognized his voice.

The clerk's talk, too, was about the wedding. "Is the marriage likely to be a happy one?" asked Egbert, aroused by the subject.

"Well, between you and me, Mr. Mayne, 'tis a made-up affair. Some says she can't bear the man."

"Lord Bretton?"

"Yes. I could say more if I dared; but what's the good of it now!"

"I suppose none," said Egbert wearily.

He was glad to be again alone, and went on towards Fairland slowly and heavily. Had Geraldine forgotten him, and loved elsewhere with a light heart, he could have borne it; but this sacrifice at a time when, left to herself, she might have listened to him, was an intolerable misery. Her inconsistent manner, her appearance of being swayed by two feelings, her half-reservations, were all explained. "Against her wishes," he said; "at heart she may still be mine. Oh, Geraldine, my poor Geraldine, is it come to this!"

He bitterly regretted his first manner towards her, and turned round to consider whether he could not go back, endeavor to find her, and ask if he could be of any possible use. But all this was plainly absurd. He again proceeded homeward as before.

Reaching Fairland he sat a while in his empty house without a light, and then went to bed. Owing to the distraction of his mind he lay for three or four hours meditating, and listening to the autumn wind, turning restlessly from side to side, the blood throbbing in his temples and singing in his ears, and the ticking of his watch waxing apparently loud enough to stun him. He conjured up the image of Geraldine in her various stages of preparation on the following day. He saw her coming in at the well-known door, walking down the aisle in a floating cloud of white, and receiving the eyes of the assembled crowd without a flush, or a sign of consciousness; uttering the words, "I take thee to my wedded husband," as quietly as if she were dreaming them. And the husband? Egbert shuddered. How could she have consented, even if her memories stood their ground only half so obstinately as his own? As for himself, he perceived more clearly than ever how intricately she had mingled with every motive in his past career. Some portion of the thought, "marriage with Geraldine," had been marked on every day of his manhood.

Ultimately he fell into a fitful sleep, when he dreamed of fighting, wading, diving, boring, through innumerable multitudes, in the midst of which Geraldine's form appeared flitting about, in the usual confused manner of dreams — sometimes coming towards him, sometimes receding, and getting thinner and thinner till she was a mere film tossed about upon a seething mass.

He jumped up in the bed, damp with a cold perspiration, and in an agony of disquiet. It was a minute or two before he could collect his senses. He went to the window and looked out. It was quite dark, and the wind moaned and whistled round the corners of the house in the heavy intonations which seem to express that ruthlessness has all the world to itself.

“Egbert, do, do come to me!” reached his ears in a faint voice from the darkness.

There was no mistaking it: it was assuredly the tongue of Geraldine.

He half dressed himself, ran downstairs, and opened the front door, holding the candle above his head. Nobody was visible.

He set down the light, hastened round the back of the house, and saw a dusky figure turning the corner to get to the gate. He then ran diagonally across the plot, and intercepted the form in the path. “Geraldine!” he said, “can it indeed be you?”

“Yes, it is, it is!” she cried wildly, and fell upon his shoulder.

The hot turmoil of excitement pervading her hindered her from fainting, and Egbert placed his arm round her, and led her into the house, without asking a question, or meeting with any resistance. He assisted her into a chair as soon as they reached the front room.

“I have run away from home, Egbert, and to you!” she sobbed. “I am not insane: they and you may think so, but I am not. I came to find you. Such shocking things have happened since I met you just now. Can Lord Bretton come and claim me?”

“Nobody on earth can claim you, darling, against your will. Now tell it all to me.”

She spoke on between her tears. “I have loved you ever since, Egbert; but such influences have been brought to bear upon me that at last I have hardly known what I was doing. At last, I thought that perhaps, after all, it would be better to become a lady of title, with a large park and houses of my own, than the wife of any man of genius who was poor. I loved you all the time, but I was half ashamed that I loved you. I went out continually, that gaiety might obscure the past. And then dark circles came round my eyes — I grew worn and tired. I am not nearly so nice to look at as at that time when we used to meet in the school, nor so healthy either . . . I think I was handsome then.” At this she smiled faintly, and raised her eyes to his, with a sparkle of their old mischief in them.

“And now and ever,” he whispered..

“How innocent we were then! Fancy, Egbert, our unreserve would have been almost wrong if we had known the canons of behavior we learnt afterwards. Ah! who at that time would have thought I was to yield to what I did? I wish now that I had met you at the door in Chevron Square, as I promised. But I feared to — I had promised Lord Bretton — and I that evening received a lecturing from my father, who saw you at the concert — he was in a seat further behind. And then, when I heard of your great success, how I wished I had held out a little longer! for I knew your hard labor had been on my account. When we met again last night it seemed awful, horrible — what I had done. Yet how could I tell you plainly? When I got indoors I felt I should die of misery, and I went to my father, and said I could not be married to-morrow. Oh, how angry he was, and what a dreadful scene occurred!” She covered her face with her hands.

“My poor Geraldine!” said Egbert, supporting her with his arm.

“When I was in my room this came into my mind, ‘Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay.’ I could bear it no longer. I was determined not to marry him, and to see you again, whatever came of it. I dressed, and came down-stairs noiselessly, and slipped out. I knew where your house was, and I hastened here.”

“You will never marry him now?”

“Never. Yet what can I do? Oh! what can I do? If I go back to my father — no, I cannot go back now — it is too late. But if they should find me, and drag me back, and compel me to perform my promise!”

“There is one simple way to prevent that, if, beloved Geraldine, you will agree to adopt it.”

“Yes.”

“By becoming *my* wife, at once. We would return to London as soon as the ceremony was over; and there you may defy them all.”

“Oh, Egbert! I have thought of this—”

“You will have no reason to regret it. Perhaps I can introduce you to as intellectual, if odd-mannered and less aristocratic, society than that you have been accustomed to.”

“Yes, I know it, — I reflected on it before I came . . . I will be your wife,” she replied tenderly. “I have come to you, and to you I will cling.”

Egbert kissed her lips then for the first time in his life. He reflected for some time, if that process could be called reflection which was accompanied with so much excitement.

“The parson of your parish would perhaps refuse to marry us, even if we could get to the church secretly,” he said, with a cloud on his brow. “That’s a difficulty.”

“Oh, don’t take me there!” I cannot go to Tollamore. I shall be seen, or we shall be parted. Don’t take me there.”

“No, no; I will not, love. I was only thinking. Are you known in this parish?”

“Well, yes; not, however, to the clergyman. He is a young man — old Mr. Keene is dead, you know.”

“Then I can manage it.” Egbert clasped her in his arms in the delight of his heart. “Now this is our course. I am first going to the surrogate’s, and then further; and while I am gone you must stay in this house absolutely alone, and lock yourself in for safety. There is food in the house, and wine in that cupboard; you must stay here in hiding till I come back. It is now five o’clock. I will be here again at latest by eleven. If anybody knocks, remain silent, and the house will be supposed empty, as it lately has been so for a long time. My old servant and waitress must not come here to-day — I will manage that. I will light a fire, which will have burnt down by daylight, so that the room will be warmed for you. Sit there while I set about it.”

He lit the fire, placed on the table all the food the house afforded, and went away.

CHAPTER VI.



*Hence will I to my ghostly father's cell
His help to crave, and my dear hap to tell.*

In half an hour Egbert returned, leading a horse.

"I have borrowed this from an old neighbor," he said, "and I have told the woman who waits upon me that I am doing on a journey, and shall lock up the house to-day, so that she will not be wanted. And now, dearest, I want you to lend me something."

"Whatever it may be, you know it is yours."

"It is that," he answered, lightly touching with the tip of his finger a sparkling ring she wore on hers — the same she had used to wear at their youthful meetings in past years. "I want it as a pattern for the size."

She drew it off and handed it to him, at the same time raising her eyelids and glancing under his with a little laugh of confusion. His heart responded, and he kissed her; but he could not help feeling that she was by far too fair a prize for him.

She accompanied him to the door, and Mayne mounted the horse. They parted, and, waiting to hear her lock herself in, he cantered off by a bridle-path towards a town about five miles off.

It was so early that the surrogate on whom he called had not yet breakfasted, but he was very willing to see Mayne, and took him at once to the study. Egbert briefly told him what he wanted; that the lady he wished to marry was at that very moment in his house, and could go nowhere else for shelter — hence the earliness and urgency of his errand.

The surrogate seemed to see rather less interest in the circumstances than Mayne did himself; but he at once prepared the application for a license. When it was done, he made it up into a letter, directed it, and placed it on the mantelpiece. "It shall go by this evening's post," he said.

"But," said Egbert, "considering the awkward position this lady is in, cannot a special messenger be sent for the license? It is only seven or eight miles to — , and yet otherwise I must wait for two days' posts."

"Undoubtedly; if anybody likes to pay for it, a special messenger may be sent."

"There will be no paying; I am willing to go myself. Do you object?"

"No; if the case is really serious, and the lady is dangerously compromised by every delay."

Mayne left the vicarage of the surrogate and again rode off; this time it was towards a well-known cathedral town. He felt bewildering sensations during this stroke for happiness, and went on his journey in that state of mind which takes cognizance of little things, without at the time being conscious of them, though they return vividly upon the memory long after.

He reached the city after a ride of seven additional miles, and soon obtained the precious document, and all else that he required. Returning to the inn where the horse had been rested, rubbed down, and fed, he again crossed the saddle, and at ten

minutes past eleven he was back at Fairland. Before going to Monk's Hut, where Geraldine was immured, he hastened straight to the parsonage.

The young clergyman looked curiously at him, and at the bespattered and jaded horse outside. "Surely you are too rash in the matter," he said.

"No," said Egbert; "there are weighty reasons why I should be in such haste. The lady has at present no home to go to. She has taken shelter with me. I am doing what I consider best in so awkward a case."

The parson took down his hat, and said, "Very well; I will go to the church at once. You must be quick if it is to be done to-day."

Mayne left the horse for the present in the parson's yard, ran round to the clerk, thence to Monk's Hut, and called Geraldine.

It was, indeed, a hasty preparation for a wedding ceremony that these two made that morning. She was standing at the window, quite ready, and feverish with waiting. Kissing her gaily and breathlessly he directed her by a slightly circuitous path to the church; and, when she had been gone about two minutes, proceeded thither himself by the direct road, so that they met in the porch. Within, the clergyman, clerk, and clerk's wife had already gathered; and Geraldine and Egbert advanced to the communion railing.

Thus they became man and wife.

"Now he cannot claim me anyhow," she murmured when the service was ended, as she sank almost fainting upon the arm of Mayne.

"Mr. Mayne," said the clergyman, aside to him in the vestry, "what is the name of the family at Tollamore House?"

"Strangely enough, Allenville — the same as hers," said he coolly.

The parson looked keenly and dubiously at Mayne, and Egbert returned the look, whereupon the other turned aside and said nothing.

Egbert and Geraldine returned to their hermitage on foot, as they had left it; and, by rigorously excluding all thoughts of the future, they felt happy with the same old unreasoning happiness as of six years before, now resumed for the first time since that date.

But it was quite impossible that the hastily married pair should remain at Monk's Hut unseen and unknown, as they fain would have done. Almost as soon as they had sat down in the house they came to the conclusion that there was no alternative for them but to start at once for Melport, if not for London. The difficulty was to get a conveyance. The only horse obtainable here, though a strong one, had already been tired down by Egbert in the morning, and the nearest village at which another could be had was about two miles off.

"I can walk as far as that," said Geraldine.

"Then walk we will," said Egbert. "It will remove all our difficulty." And, first packing up a small valise, he locked the door and went off with her upon his arm, just as the church clock struck one.

That walk through the woods was as romantic an experience as any they had ever known in their lives, though Geraldine was far from being quite happy. On reaching the village, which was larger than Fairland, they were fortunate enough to secure a carriage without any trouble. The village stood on the turnpike road, and a fly, about to return to Melport, where it had come from, was halting before the inn. Egbert hired it at once, and in little less than an hour and a half bridegroom and bride were comfortably housed in a quiet hotel of the seaport town above mentioned.

CHAPTER VII.



*How small a part of time they share
That are so wondrous sweet and fair!*

They remained three days at Melpot without having come to any decision on their future movements.

On the third day, at breakfast, Egbert took up the local newspaper which had been published that morning, and his eye presently glanced upon a paragraph headed "The Tollamore Elopement."

Before reading it he considered for a moment whether he should lay the journal aside, and for the present hide its contents from the tremulous creature opposite. But deeming this unadvisable, he gently prepared her for the news, and read the paragraph aloud.

It was to the effect that the village of Tollamore and its neighborhood had been thrown into an unwonted state of excitement by the disappearance of Miss Allenville on the eve of the preparations for her marriage with Lord Bretton, which had been alluded to in their last number. Simultaneously there had disappeared from a neighboring village, whither he had come for a few months' retirement, a gentleman named Mayne, of considerable literary reputation in the metropolis, and apparently an old acquaintance of Miss Allenville's. Efforts had been made to trace the fugitives by the young lady's father and the distracted bridegroom, Lord Bretton, but hitherto all their exertions had been unavailing.

Subjoined was another paragraph, entitled "Latest particulars."

"It has just been discovered that Mr. Mayne and Miss Allenville are already man and wife. They were boldly married at the parish church of Fairland, before any person in the village had the least suspicion who or what they were. It appears that the lady joined her intended husband early that morning at the cottage he had taken for the season, that they went to the church by different paths, and after the ceremony walked out of the parish by a route as yet unknown. In consequence of this intelligence Lord Bretton has returned to London, and her father is left alone to mourn the young lady's rashness."

Egbert lifted, his eyes and watched Geraldine as he finished reading. On perceiving his look she tried to smile. The smile thinned away, for there was not cheerfulness enough to support it long, and she said faintly, "Egbert, what must be done?"

"We must, I suppose, leave this place, darling; charming as our life is here."

"Yes; I fear we must."

"London seems to be the spot for us at once, before we attract the attention of the people here."

"How well everything might end," she said, "if my father were induced to welcome you, and make the most of your reputation! I wonder, wonder if he would! In that case there would be little amiss."

Mayne, after some reflection, said, "I think that I will go to your father before we leave for town. We are certain to be discovered by somebody or other, either here or

in London, and that would bring your father, and there would possibly result a public meeting between him and myself at which words might be uttered which could not be forgotten on either side; so that a private meeting and explanation is safest, before anything of that sort can happen.”

“I think,” she said, looking to see if he approved of her words as they fell, “I think that a still better course would be for me to go to him — alone.”

Mayne did not care much about this plan at first; but further discussion gave it a more feasible aspect, since Allenville, though stern and proud, was fond of his daughter, and had never crossed her, except when her whims interfered, as he considered, with her interests. Nothing could unmarry them; and Geraldine’s mind would be much more at ease after begging her father’s forgiveness. The journey was therefore decided on. They waited till nearly evening, and then, ordering round a brougham, Egbert told the man to drive to Tollamore.

The journey to Geraldine was tedious and oppressive to a degree. When, after two hours’ driving, they drew near the park precincts, she said shivering,— “I don’t like to drive up to the house, Egbert.”

“I will do just as you like. What do you propose?”

“To let him wait in the road, under the three oak-trees, while you and I walk to the house.”

Egbert humored her in everything; and when they reached the designated spot the driver was stopped, and they alighted. Carefully wrapping her up he gave her his arm, and they started for Tollamore House at an easy pace through the moonlit park, avoiding the direct road as much as possible.

Geraldine spoke but little during the walk, especially when they neared the house, and passed across the smooth broad glade which surrounded it. At sight of the door she seemed to droop, and leant heavily upon him. Egbert more than ever wished to confront Mr. Allenville himself; morally and socially it appeared to him the right thing to do. But Geraldine trembled when he again proposed it; and he yielded to her entreaty thus far, that he would wait a few minutes till she had entered and seen her father privately, and prepared the way for Egbert to follow, which he would then do in due course.

The spot in which she desired him to wait was a summer-house under a tree about fifty yards from the lawn front of the house, and commanding a view of the door on this side. She was to enter unobserved by the servants, and go straight to her father, when, should he listen to her with the least show of mildness, she would send out for Egbert to follow. If the worst were to happen, and he were to be enraged with her, refusing to listen to entreaties or explanations, she would hasten out, rejoin Egbert, and depart.

In this little summer-house he embraced her, and bade her adieu, after their honeymoon of three short days. She trembled so much that she could scarcely walk when he let go her hand.

“Don’t go alone — you are not well,” said Egbert.

“Yes, yes, dearest, I am — and I will soon return, so soon!” she answered; and he watched her crossing the grass and advancing, a mere dot, towards the mansion. In a short time the appearance of an oblong of light in the shadowy expanse of wall denoted to him that the door was open her outline appeared on it; then the door shut her in, and all was shadow as before. Even though they were husband and wife the line of demarcation seemed to be drawn again as rigidly as when he lived at the school.

Egbert waited in the solitude of this place minute by minute, restlessly swinging his foot when seated, at other times walking up and down, and anxiously watching for the arrival of some messenger. Nearly half an hour passed, but no messenger came.

The first sign of life in the neighborhood of the house was in the shape of a man on horseback, galloping from the stable entrance. Egbert saw this by looking over the wall at the back of the summer-house; and the man passed along the open drive, vanishing in the direction of the lodge. Mayne, not without some presentiment of ill, wondered what it could mean, but thought it just possible that the horseman was a special messenger sent to catch the late post at the nearest town, as was sometimes done by Squire Allenville. So he curbed his impatience for Geraldine's sake.

Next he observed lights moving in the upper windows of the building. "It has been made known to them all that she is come, and they are preparing a room," he thought hopefully.

But nobody came from the door to welcome him; his existence was apparently forgotten by the whole world. In another ten minutes he saw the Melpot brougham that had brought them, creeping slowly up to the house. Egbert went round to the man, and told him to drive to the stables and wait for orders.

From the length of Geraldine's absence, Mayne could not help concluding that the impression produced on her father was of a doubtful kind, not quite favorable enough to warrant her in telling him at once that her husband was in waiting. Still, a sense of his dignity as her husband might have constrained her to introduce him as soon as possible, and he had only agreed to wait a few minutes. Something unexpected must, after all, have occurred. And this supposition was confirmed a moment later by the noise of a horse and carriage coming up the drive. Egbert again looked over into the open park, and saw the vehicle reach the carriage entrance, where somebody alighted and went in.

"Her father away from home perhaps, and now just returned," he said.

He lingered yet another ten minutes, and then could endure no longer. Before he could reach the lawn door through which Geraldine had disappeared it opened. A person came out and, without shutting the door, hastened across to where Egbert stood. The man was a servant without a hat on, and the moment that he saw Mayne he ran up to him.

"Mr. Mayne?" he said.

"It is," said Egbert.

"Mr. Allenville desires that you will come with me. There is something serious the matter. Miss Allenville is taken dangerously ill, and she wishes to see you."

"What has happened to her?" gasped Egbert breathlessly.

"Miss Allenville came unexpectedly home just now, and directly she saw her father it gave her such a turn that she fainted, and ruptured a blood-vessel internally, and fell upon the floor. They have put her to bed, and the doctor has come, but we are afraid she won't live over it. She has suffered from it before."

Egbert did not speak, but walked hastily beside the man-servant. The only recollection that he ever had in after years of entering that house was a vague idea of stags' antlers in a long row on the wall, and a sense of great breadth in the stone staircase as he ascended it. Everything else was in a mist.

Mr. Allenville, on being informed of his arrival, came out and met him in the corridor.

Egbert's mind was so entirely given up to the one thought that the life of his Geraldine was in danger, that he quite forgot the peculiar circumstances under which

he met Allenville, and the peculiar behavior necessary on that account. He seized her father's hand, and said abruptly,

"Where is she? Is the danger great?"

Allenville withdrew his hand, turned, and led the way into his daughter's room, merely saying in a low, hard tone, "Your wife is in great danger, sir."

Egbert rushed to the bedside and bent over her in agony not to be described. Allenville sent the attendants from the room, and closed the door.

"Father," she whispered feebly, "I cannot help loving him. Would you leave us alone? We are very dear to each other, and perhaps I shall soon die."

"Anything you wish, child," he said with stern anguish; "and anything can hardly include more." Seeing that she looked hurt at this, he spoke more pleasantly. "I am glad to please you — you know I am, Geraldine — to the utmost." He then went out.

"They would not have let you know if Dr. Williams had not insisted," she said. "I could not speak to explain at first — that's how it is you have been left there so long."

"Geraldine, dear, dear Geraldine, why should all this have come upon us?" he said in broken accents.

"Perhaps it is best," she murmured. "I hardly knew what I was doing when I entered the door, or how I could explain to my father, or what could be done to reconcile him to us. He kept me waiting a little time before he would see me, but at last he came into the room. I felt a fulness on my chest, I could not speak, and then this happened to me. Papa has asked no questions."

A silence followed, interrupted only by her fitful breathing: —

A silence which doth follow talk, that causes

The baffled heart to speak with sighs and tears.

"Do you love me very much now, Egbert?" she said. "After all my vacillation, do you?"

"Yes — how can you doubt?"

"I do not doubt. I know you love me. But will you stay here till I get better? You must stay. Papa is sure to be friendly with you now."

"Don't agitate yourself, dearest, about me. All is right with me here. Your health is the one thing to be anxious about now."

"I have only been taken ill like this once before in my life, and I thought it would never be again."

As she was not allowed to speak much, he remained holding her hand; and after some time she sank into a light sleep. Egbert then went from the chamber for a moment, and asked the physician who was in the next room, if there was good hope for her life.

"It is a dangerous attack, and she is very weak," he replied, concealing, though scarcely able to conceal, the curiosity with which he regarded Egbert; for the marriage had now become generally known.

The evening and night wore on. Great events in which he could not participate seemed to be passing over Egbert's head; a stir was in progress, of whose results he grasped but small and fragmentary notions. And, on the other hand, it was mournfully strange to notice her father's behavior during these hours of doubt. It was only when he despaired that he looked upon Egbert with tolerance. When he hoped, the young man's presence was hateful to him.

Not knowing what to do when out of her chamber, having nobody near him to whom he could speak on intimate terms, Egbert passed a wretched time of three long days. After watching by her for several hours on the third day, he went downstairs, and into the open air. There intelligence was brought him that another effusion, more

violent than any which preceded it, had taken place. Egbert rushed back to her room. Powerful remedies were applied, but none availed. A fainting-fit followed, and in two or three hours it became plain to those who understood that there was no Geraldine for the morrow.

Sometimes she was lethargic, and as if her spirit had already flown; then her mind wandered; but towards the end she was sensible of all that was going on, though unable to speak, her strength being barely enough to enable her to receive an idea.

It was a gentle death. She was as acquiescent as if she had been a saint, which was not the least striking and uncommon feature in the life of this fair and unfortunate lady. Her husband held one tiny hand, remaining all the time on the right side of the bed in a nook beside the curtains, while her father and the rest remained on the left side, never raising their eyes to him, and scarcely ever addressing him.

Everything was so still that her weak act of trying to live seemed a silent wrestling with all the powers of the universe. Pale and hopelessly anxious they all waited and watched the heavy shadows close over her. It might have been thought that death felt for her and took her tenderly. She sighed twice or three times; then her heart stood still; and this strange family alliance was at an end forever.

THE END

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