Blackmore Richard Doddridge

Cradock Nowell: A Tale of the New Forest. Volume 2 of 3

Richard Blackmore

Cradock Nowell: A Tale of the New Forest. Volume 2 of 3

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=23148347
Cradock Nowell: A Tale of the New Forest. Vol. 2 (of 3):

Содержание

CHAPTER I 4
CHAPTER II 35
CHAPTER III 50
CHAPTER IV 69
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. 73

Richard Doddridge Blackmore
Cradock Nowell: A Tale of the New Forest. Vol. 2 (of 3)

CHAPTER I

It was a Tuesday evening when Cradock Nowell and Amy Rosedew signed and sealed, with the moon's approval, their bond to one another. On the following day, Dr. Hutton and wife were to dine at Kettledrum Hall; and the distance being considerable, and the roads so shockingly bad – "even dangerous, I am told, to gentlemen who have dined *with me*, sir," said Kettledrum, in his proudest manner – they had accepted his offer, and that of Mrs. Kettledrum, which she herself came over to make, that they should not think of returning until after breakfast on Thursday. In consequence of her husband's hints, Rosa felt the keenest interest in "that Mrs. Kettledrum. Leave her to me, dear Rufus. You need not be afraid, indeed. Trust me to get to the bottom of it." And so she exerted her probing skill upon her to the uttermost, more even than ladies usually do, when they first meet one another. Of course, there was no appearance of it, nothing so ill–bred as that; it was all the sweetest refinement, and the kindest neighbourly interest. They even became affectionate in the course of half an

hour, and mutual confidence proved how strangely their tastes were in unison. Nevertheless, each said good–bye with a firm conviction that she had outwitted the other. "Poor thing, she was so stupid. What a bungler, to be sure! And to think I could not see through her!"

But the return–match between these ladies, which was to have come off at Kettledrum Hall – where, by–the–by, there appeared a far greater performer than either of them – this interesting display of skill was deferred for the present; inasmuch as Rosa was taken ill during the mysteries of her toilet. It was nothing more serious, however, than the "flying spasms," as she always called them, to which she had long been subject, and which (as she often told her husband) induced her to marry a doctor.

Rufus administered essence of peppermint, and then a dose of magnesia; but he would not hear of her coming with him, and he wanted to stop at home with her, and see that she sat by the fire. She in turn would have her way, and insisted that Rue should go, "for he had made himself such a very smart boy, that she was really quite proud of him, and they would all be so disappointed, and he was taller than Mr. Kettledrum, she felt quite sure he was." The bearing of that last argument I do not quite perceive, but dare not say that she erred therein, and to Rue it was quite conclusive. So Ralph Mohorn was sent for, the pony–carriage countermanded, and Rufus set forth upon Polly, whose oats were now restricted.

Kettledrum Hall stood forth on a rise, and made the very most

of itself. Expansive, and free, and obtrusively honest, it seemed to strike itself on the breast (as its master did) with both gables. A parochial assessment committee, or a surveyor for the property–tax, would have stuck on something considerable, if they had only seen the outside of it. Look at the balustrade that went (for it was too heavy to run) all along the front of it, over the basement windows. No stucco, either; but stone, genuine stone, that bellied out like a row of Roman amphoræ, or the calves of a first–rate footman. After that, to see the portico, "decempedis metata," which "excipiebat Eurum" – not Arcton in this climate. No wonder – although it was rotten inside, and the whole of it mortgaged ten fathom deep – that Bailey Kettledrum hit his breast, and said, "Our little home, sir!"

"Your great home, you mean," said Rufus; "what a noble situation! You can see all over the county."

They had come to meet him down the hill, in the kindest country fashion, Mr. and Mrs. Kettledrum, like Jack and Jill going for water.

"Not quite that," replied Kettledrum; "but we saw you with my binocular, between two and three miles off, and became so anxious about Mrs. Hutton, that I said to my wife, 'Put your bonnet on;' and she only said, 'Bailey, put your hat on;' nothing more, sir, I assure you; nothing more, sir, upon my honour."

Rufus could not see exactly why there should have been anything more, but he could not help thanking them for their kindness, and saying to himself, "What nice people! Quite an

agricultural life, I see, in spite of that grand mansion."

"Now," said Mr. Kettledrum, when Polly had been committed to one of the stable–boys – but Rufus still wanted to look at her, for he never grew tired of admiring anything that belonged to him, and he knew they wouldn't do her legs right – "now, Dr. Hutton, you have come most kindly, according to your promise, so as to give us an hour or two to spare before the dinner–time. Shall we take a turn with the guns? I can put my hand on a covey; or shall we walk round the garden, and have the benefit of your advice?"

Rufus looked in dismay at his "choice black kerseymeres;" he had taken his "antigropelos" off, and was proud to find not a flake on them. But to think of going out shooting! He ought not to have dressed before he left home, but he hated many skinnings. And he could only guess the distance from the lodge to this place. So he voted very decidedly for a walk in the kitchen–garden.

Into this he was solemnly instituted, and the beauties all pointed out to him. What a scene of weeds and rubbish! How different from Bull Garnet's dainty and trim quarters, or from his own new style of work at Geopharmacy Lodge! Rotten beansticks crackling about, the scum of last summer's cabbages, toad–stools cropping up like warts or arums rubbed with caustic, a fine smell of potato–disease, and a general sense of mildew; the wall–trees curled and frizzled up with aphis, coccus, and honeydew; and the standards scraggy, and full of stubs, canker, and American blight, sprawling, slouching, hump–backed, and

stag–headed, like the sick ward of a workhouse fighting with tattered umbrellas.

"Ah," said Rufus, at his wits' end for anything to praise, "what a perfect paradise – for the songsters of the grove."

"Oh," replied Mr. Kettledrum, "you should hear the Dook admire it. 'Kettledrum, my boy,' he said, when he dined with me last Friday, 'there is one thing I do envy you – no, sir, neither your most lady–like wife, nor yet your clever children, although I admit that neither of them can be paralleled in England – but, Kettledrum, it is – forgive me – it is your kitchen–garden.' 'My kitchen–garden, your grace,' I replied, for I hate to brag of anything, 'it is a poor thing, my lord Dook, compared to your own at Lionshill.' 'May I be d – d,' his grace replied, for I never shall break him of swearing, 'if I ever saw anything like it, dear Kettledrum, and so I told the Duchess.' And after all, you know, Dr. Hutton, a man may think too little of what it has pleased God to give him."

"Well," said Rufus to himself, "I'm blessed if *you* do. But I don't like you any the worse for a bit of brag. I have met great brags in India, and most of them honest fellows. But I must peg him down a bit. I must, I fear; it is my duty as an enlightened gardener."

"But you see, now," said Bailey Kettledrum, smacking his lips, and gazing into profundity, "you see, my dear sir, there is nothing 'ab omni parte beatum;' perhaps you remember the passage in the heroic epistles of – ah, Cicero it was, I believe, who wrote all

those epistles to somebody."

"No doubt of it," said Rufus Hutton, who knew more of Hindustani than of Latin and Greek combined; "and yet St. Paul wrote some."

"Not in Latin, my dear sir; all St. Paul's were Greek. 'Nihil est,' I now remember, 'ab omni parte beatum.' I don't know how it scans, which I suppose it ought to do, but that isn't my look–out. Perhaps, however, you can tell me?"

"I'm blowed if I can," said Rufus Hutton, in the honesty of his mind; "and I am not quite sure that it has any right to scan."

"Well, I can't say; but I *think* it ought," – he was in the mists of memory, where most of the trees have sensitive roots, though the branches are not distinguishable. "However, that can't matter at all; I see you are a classical scholar. And, Hutton, I like a classical scholar, because he can understand me. But you see that these trees are rather – ah, what is the expression for it – ?"

"Cankered, and scabby, and scrubs."

"That is to say – yes, I suppose, they would crop the better, if that be possible, for a little root–pruning."

"You have gathered the fruit for this year, I presume?"

"Well, no, not quite that. The children have had some, of course. But we are very particular not to store too early."

"I really don't think you need be."

"Why, many people say, 'let well alone;' but my gardener talks of making – "

"A jolly good bonfire of them, if he knows anything of his

business. Then drain the ground, trench, and plant new ones."

Mr. Kettledrum looked quite thunderstruck; he caught hold of a tree to help him, and a great cake of rotten bark, bearded with moss, came away like the mask of a mummer. It was slimy on the under side, and two of his fingers went through it.

"Nice state of things," said Rufus, laughing. "I suppose the Dook likes lepers?"

"Why, my dear sir, you don't mean to say – "

"That I would leave only one of them, and I would hang the head–gardener upon it."

That worthy was just coming round the corner, to obtain the applause of a gentleman well known to the *Gardener's Chronicle*; but now he turned round abruptly, and scratched his head, and thought of his family.

When Rufus came down and entered the drawing–room, he was perfectly gorgeous; for although he had been in full dress for the main, he knew better than to ride with his Alumbaggah waistcoat on. There was nothing in all the three presidencies to come up to that waistcoat. It would hold Dr. Hutton and Rosa too, for they had stood back to back and tried it. And Rufus vainly sighed for the day when his front should come out and exhaust it. He stole it, they say, from a petty rajah, who came to a great durbar with it, worn like an Oxford hood. At any rate, there it was, and the back of Cashmere stuff would fit either baby or giant. But the front, the front – oh, bangles and jiminy! it is miles beyond me to describe it.

All simple writers, from Job and Hesiod downwards, convey an impression of some grand marvel, not by direct description of it, which would be feeble and achromatic, but by the rebound, recoil, and redouble, from the judgment of some eye–witness. If that eye–witness be self–possessed, wide–awake, experienced, and undemonstrative, the effect upon the reader's mind is as of a shell which has struck the granite, burst there, and scattered back on him. So will I, mistrusting the value of my own impressions, give a faint idea of Rufus his waistcoat, by the dount of it on that assembly.

The host was away for the moment somewhere, perhaps blowing up the butler, for his wife was telling her sister how nervous and even fidgety her beloved Bailey was growing; but Mr. Corklemore was there, and came forth to salute the great Rufus, when his heavy eyes settled upon the waistcoat, and all his emotions exploded in a "haw" of incredulous wonder. Mrs. Kettledrum rose at the same instant, and introduced her sister.

"My sister, Dr. Hutton, whom I have so earnestly longed to make acquainted with dear Mrs. Hutton, Mrs. Nowell Corklemore; Mr. Corklemore, I know, has had the pleasure of meeting you. Georgie, dear, you will like her so – oh, goodness gracious me!"

"I don't wonder you are surprised at me, Anna," exclaimed Mrs. Corklemore, with wonderful presence of mind. "How stupid I am, to be sure! Oh, Nowell, why didn't you tell me? How shameful of you! But you never look at me now, I think." And

she swept from the room in the cleverest manner, as if something wrong in her own dress had caused her sister's ejaculation.

"Excuse me one moment," said Mrs. Kettledrum, taking her cue very aptly; and she ran out, as if to aid her sister, but in reality to laugh herself into hysterics.

After all there was nothing absurd, *per se*, in Rufus Hutton's waistcoat, only it is not the fashion, just at present, to wear pictorial raiment; but the worthy doctor could not perceive any reason why it should not be. He was pleased with the prospect of creating a genuine sensation, and possibly leading the mode; and having lost all chance of realizing these modest hopes at Nowelhurst, why, he must content himself with a narrower stage for his triumphs. He had smuggled it from home, however, without his wife's permission: he had often threatened her with its appearance, but she always thought he was joking. And truly it required some strength of mind to present it to modern society, although it was a work of considerable art, and no little value.

The material of it was Indian silk of the very richest quality. It had no buttons, but golden eyelets and tags of golden cowries. The background of the whole was yellow, the foreground of a brilliant green, portraying the plants of the jungle. On the left bosom leaped and roared an enormous royal tiger, with two splendid jewels, called "cat's–eyes," flashing, and a pearl for every fang. Upon the right side a hulking elephant was turning tail ignominiously; while two officers in the howdah poked their guns at the eyes of the tiger. The eyes of the officers in their terror

had turned to brilliant emeralds, and the blood of the tramping elephant was represented by seed rubies. The mahout was cutting away in the distance, looking back with eyes of diamonds.

Beyond a doubt, it required uncommonly fine breeding, especially in a lady, to meet that waistcoat at a dinner–party, and be entirely unconscious of it. And perhaps there are but few women in England who would not contrive to lead up to the subject, quite accidentally, of course, before the evening was over.

The ladies came back as grave as judges; and somehow it was managed (as if by the merest oversight) that Dr. Hutton should lead to dinner, not the lady of the house, whom, of course, he ought to have taken, but Mrs. Nowell Corklemore. He felt, as he crossed the hall with her, that the beauty of his waistcoat had raised some artistic emotion in a bosom as beautiful as its own. Oh, Rufus, think of Rosa!

Let none be alarmed at those ominous words. The tale of Cradock Nowell's life shall be pure as that life itself was. The historian may be rough, and blunt, and sometimes too intense, in the opinion of those who look at life from a different point of view. But be that as it will, his other defects (I trust and pray) will chiefly be deficiencies. We will have no poetical seduction, no fascinating adultery, condemned and yet reprieved by the writer, and infectious from his sympathy. Georgiana Corklemore was an uncommonly clever woman, and was never known to go far enough to involve her reputation. She loved her child, and liked

her husband, and had all the respect for herself which may abide with vanity. Nevertheless she flirted awfully, and all married women hated her. “Bold thing,” they called her, “sly good–for–nothing; and did you see how she ogled? Well, if I only carried on so! Oh, if I were only her husband! But, poor man, he knows no better. Such a poor dear stick, you know. Perhaps that is what makes her do it. And nothing in her at all, when you come to think of it. No taste, no style, no elegance! When *will* she put her back hair up? And her child fit to put into long–clothes! Did you observe her odious way of putting her lips up, as if to be kissed? My dear, I don’t know how *you* felt; but I could scarcely stay in the room with her.”

Nevertheless the ladies did stay, and took good care to watch her, and used to say to her afterwards, “Oh, if I were only like you, dear! Then I need not be afraid of you; but you are – now don’t tell stories —*so* clever, and *so* attractive. As if you did not know it, dear! Well, you *are* so simple–minded. I am always telling my Looey and Maggie to take you for their model, dear!”

On the present occasion, “Georgie Corklemore,” as she called herself, set about flirting with Rufus Hutton, not from her usual love of power, nor even for the sake of his waistcoat, but because she had an especial purpose, and a very important one. The Kettledrum–cum–Corklemore conspiracy was this – to creep in once more at Nowelhurst Hall through the interest of Dr. Hutton. They all felt perfectly certain that Cradock Nowell had murdered his brother, and that the crime had been hushed up

through the influence of the family. They believed that the head of that family, in his passionate sorrow and anger, might be brought to their view of the subject, if he could only be handled properly; and who could manage that more adroitly than his first cousin once removed, the beautiful Mrs. Corklemore? Only let her get once invited, once inducted there, and the main difficulty after that would be to apportion the prey between them. They knew well enough that the old entail expired with the present baronet; and that he (before his marriage) held in fee pure and simple all that noble property. His marriage–settlement, and its effects, they could only inkle of; but their heart was inditing of a good matter, and Mr. Chope would soon pump Brockwood. Not quite so fast, my Amphictyonics; a solicitor thirty years admitted (though his original craft may not be equal) is not to be sucked dry, on the surprise, even by spongy young Chope. However, that was a question for later consideration; and blood being thicker than water, and cleaving more fast to the ground, they felt that it would be a frightful injustice if they were done out of the property.

Only two things need be added: one that Sir Cradock had always disliked, and invited them but for appearance' sake; the other, that they fairly believed in the righteousness of their cause, and that Rufus Hutton could prove it for them, as the principal witness tampered with.

Mrs. Corklemore was now, perhaps, twenty–five years old, possibly turning thirty; for that lustrum of a lady's life is a hard

one to beat the bounds of; at any rate, she had never looked better than she did at the present moment. She was just at the age to spread open, with the memory of shyness upon them (like the dew when the sun is up), the curving petals of beauty. Who understands the magnetic current? Who can analyze ozone? Is there one of us able to formularize the polarity of light? Will there ever be an age when chemists metaphysical will weigh – no more by troy weight, and carat, as now the mode is, but by subtle heart–gas – our liking for a woman? Let us hope there never will be.

That soft Georgiana Corklemore, so lively, lovely, and gushing, focussed all her fascinations upon Rufus Hutton. She knew that she had to deal with a man of much inborn acuteness, and who must have seen a hundred ladies quite as fair as Georgie. But had he seen one with her – well, she knew not what to call it, though she thoroughly knew how to use it? So she magnetized him with all her skill; and Rufus, shrewdly suspecting her object, and confiding in a certain triarian charge, a certain thrust Jarnacian, which he would deliver at the proper moment, allowed her to smile, and to show her white teeth and dimples of volatile velvet (so natural, so inevitable, at his playful, delightful humour), and to loose whole quiverfuls of light shafts from the arch flash under her eyelids. What sweet simplicity she was, what innocent desire to learn, what universal charity. "How dreadful, Dr. Hutton! Oh, please not to tell me of it! How could any ladies do it? I should have fainted at once, and died half an hour

afterwards." She turned up her large mild eyes, deeply beaming with centralized light, in a way that said, "If I died, is there any one who would think it a very, very great pity?"

Rufus had been describing historically, not dramatically, the trials of the ladies, when following their regiment during a sudden movement in the perils of the mutiny. With a man's far stiffer identity, he did not expect or even imagine that his delicate listener would be there, and go through every hour of it. But so it was, and without any sham; although she was misusing her strange sympathetic power. Mrs. Nowell Corklemore would have made a very great actress; she had so much self–abandonment, such warm introjection, and hot indignant sympathy; and yet enough of self–reservation to hoop them all in with judgment. Meanwhile Mrs. Kettledrum, a lady of ordinary sharpness, like a good pudding–apple – Georgie being a peach of the very finest quality – she, I say, at the top of the table was watching them very intently – delighted, amused, indignant; glad that none of her children were there to store up Auntie's doings. As for Mr. Corklemore, he was quite accustomed to it; and looking down complacently upon the little doctor, thought to himself, "How beautifully my Georgie will cold–shoulder him, when we have got all we want out of the conceited chattering jackanapes."

When the ladies were gone, Mr. Bailey Kettledrum, who had no idea of playing dummy even to Mrs. Corklemore, made a trick or two from his own hand.

"Corklemore, my dear fellow, you think we are all tee–

totallers. On with the port, if you please, ‘cessantem Bibuli Consulis amphoram,’ never shall forget that line. The bibulous consul, eh! Capital idea. Corklemore, you can construe that?”

“Haw! Perhaps I can’t. Really don’t know; they beat a heap of stuff into me when I was a very small boy; and it was like whipping – ha, haw, something like whipping – ”

“Eggs,” said Rufus Hutton, “all came to bubbles, eh?”

“Not at all, sir, not at all; you entirely misunderstand me. I mean that it was similar to – to the result produced by the whipping of a top.”

“Only made your head go round,” said Mr. Kettledrum, winking at Rufus; and thenceforth had established a community of interest in the baiting of “long Corklemore.” “Well, at any rate,” he continued, “Hutton is a scholar – excuse my freedom, my dear sir; we are such rustics here, that I seldom come across a man who appreciates my quotations. You are a great acquisition, sir, the very greatest, to this neighbourhood. How can we have let you remain so long without unearthing you?”

“Because,” said Rufus to himself, “you did not happen to want me; when are you going to offer to introduce me to ‘the Dook?’”

“And now, gentlemen,” continued Mr. Kettledrum, rising, swelling his chest out, and thumping it athletically, “it is possible that I may be wrong; I have never been deaf to conviction; but if I am wrong, gentlemen, the fault is in yourselves. Mark me now, I am ready, such is the force of truth, I am ready here at my own board (humble as it is) once for all to admit that the fault is in

yourselves. But the utterance I swell with, the great thought that is within me, is strife – no, I beg your pardon – is – is – rife and strongly inditing of a certain lady, who is an honour to her sex. I rise to the occasion, friends; I say an honour to her sex, and a blessing to the other one. Gentlemen, no peroration of mine is equal in any way to the greatness of the occasion; could I say, with Cicero, 'Veni, vidi, vici,' where would be my self–approval? I mean – you understand me. It is the privilege of a man in this blessed country, the first gem of the ocean – no, I don't mean that; it applies, I believe, to Scotland, and the immortal Burns – but this, sir, I will say, and challenge contradiction, a Briton, sir, a Briton, never, never, never will be free! And now, sir, in conclusion, is there one of you, let me ask, who will not charge his eyes, gentlemen, and let his glass run over – "

"Haw," cried Mr. Corklemore, "charge his glass, come, Kettledrum, and let his eyes run over – haw – I think that is the way we read it, Dr. Hutton."

"Gentlemen, I sit down; finding it impossible to obtain an adequate bearing, I close my poor attempt at cleansing my bosom of the perilous stuff, sir – you know the rest – the health of Mrs. Hutton, that most remarkable children – excuse me, most remarkable woman, whose children, I am quite convinced, will be an honour to their age and sex. Port of '51, gentlemen; a finer vintage than '47."

He had told them that it was '34, but both knew better; and now "in vino veritas."

At last Mr. Bailey Kettledrum had hit the weak point of Rufus, and, what was more, he perceived it. Himself you might butter and soap for a month, and he would take it at all its value; but magnify his Rosa, exalt the name of his Rosa, and you had him at discretion.

"Remarkable, sir," he inquired, with a twinkle of fruity port stealing out from his keen little eyes, "you really do injustice; so many ladies are remarkable – "

"Haw, well, I never heard – "

"Confound you, Corklemore," said Kettledrum to him aside, "can you never hold your tongue? Sir," – to Rufus – "I beg your pardon, if I said 'remarkable;' I meant to say, sir, '*most* remarkable!' The most remarkable lady" – this to Corklemore, in confidence – "I have ever been privileged to meet. 'What children,' I said to my wife, but yesterday, 'what children they will be blest with!' Oh, he's a lucky dog. The luckiest dog in the world, my boy."

However, they were not so very far from the sloping shores of sobriety when they rejoined the ladies, and made much of the small Misses Kettledrum, tidy children, rather pretty, and all of the pink ribbon pattern. After some melting melodies from soft Georgie's lips and fingers, Mrs. Kettledrum said,

"Oh, Dr. Hutton, do you ever play chess? We are such players here; all except my poor self; I am a great deal too stupid."

"I used to play a little when I was in India. We are obliged to play all sorts of games in India." Dr. Hutton piqued himself not a

little on his skill in the one true game. At a sign from their mother, the small Kettledrums rushed for the board most zealously, and knocked their soft heads together. Mrs. Corklemore was declared by all to be the only antagonist worthy of an Indian player, and she sat down most gracefully, protesting against her presumption. "Just to take a lesson, you know; only to take a lesson, dear. Oh, please, don't let any one look at me." Rufus, however, soon perceived that he had found his match, if not his superior, in the sweet impulsive artless creature, who threw away the game so neatly when she was quite sure of it.

"Oh, poor me! Now, I do declare – Isn't it most heartbreaking? I am such a foolish thing. Oh, can you be so cruel?"

Thrilling eyes of the richest grey trembled with dewy radiance, as Rufus coolly marched off the queen, and planted his knight instead of her.

"Mrs. Corklemore, can I relent? You are far too good a player." The loveliest eyes, the most snowy surge, in the "mare magnum" of ladies, would never have made that dry Rue Hutton, well content with his Rosa, give away so much as the right to capture a pawn in passing.

Now observe the contrariety, the want of pure reason, the confusion of principle – I am sorry and ashamed, but I can't express these things in English, for the language is rich in emotion, but a pauper in philosophy – the distress upon the premises of the cleverest woman's mind. She had purposely thrown her queen in his way; but she never forgave him for taking

it.

A glance shot from those soft bright eyes, when Rufus could not see them, as if the gentle evening star, Venus herself, all tremulous, rushed, like a meteor, up the heavens, and came hissing down on a poor man's head.

She took good care to win the next game, for policy allowed it; and then, of course, it was too late to try the decisive contest.

"Early hours. Liberty Hall, Liberty Hall at Kettledrum! Gentlemen stay up, and smoke if they like. But early hours, sir, for the ladies. We value their complexions. They don't. That I know. Do you now, my dearest? No, of course you don't." This was Mr. Kettledrum.

"Except for your sake, darling," said Mrs. Kettledrum, curtseying, for the children were all gone to bed ever so long ago.

"Well," said Georgie, coming forward, because she knew her figure would look well with three lamps upon it; such a figure of eight! "my opinion is never worth having, I know, because I feel so much; but I pronounce – " here she stood up like Portia, with a very low–necked dress on – "gentlemen, and ladies, I pronounce that one is quite as bad as the other."

"Haw!" said Nowell Corklemore. And so they went to bed. And Rufus Hutton wondered whether they ever had family prayers.

When all the rest were at breakfast, in came Mrs. Corklemore, looking as fresh as daybreak.

"Oh, I am so ashamed of myself. What a sluggard you will

think me! What is it in the divine song of that great divine, Dr. Watts? Nowell, dear, you must not scold me. I cannot bear being scolded, because I never have tit for tat. Good morning, dearest Anna; how is your headache, darling? Oh, Dr. Hutton, I forgot! No wonder I overlooked you. I shall never think much of you again, because I beat you at chess so."

"Game and game," said Rufus, solemnly, "and I ought to have won that last one, Mrs. Corklemore; you know I ought."

"To be sure, to be sure. Oh, of course I do. But – a little thing perwented him – his antagonist was too good, sir. Ah, we'll play the conqueror some day; and then the tug of war comes. Oh, Anna, I am so conceited! To think of my beating Dr. Hutton, the best player in all India."

"Well, darling, we know all that. And we must not blame you therefore for lying in bed till ten o'clock."

"Oh," said Rufus, with a groan, "do look at ladies' logic! Mrs. Corklemore gained one game out of two – only because I was – ah–hem, I mean by her very fine play – and now she claims absolute victory; and Mrs. Kettledrum accepts it as a premise for a negative conclusion, which has nothing on earth to do with it."

But Rufus got the worst of that protest. He tilted too hard at the quintain. All came down upon him at once, till he longed for a cigar. Then Mrs. Corklemore sympathized with him, arose, their breakfast being over, and made him a pretty curtsey. She was very proud of her curtseys; she contrived to show her figure so.

"Confound that woman," thought Rufus, "I can never tell

when she is acting. I never met her like in India. And thank God for that same."

She saw that her most bewitching curtsey was entirely thrown away upon him; for he was thinking of his Rosa, and looking out for the good mare, Polly.

"Dr. Hutton, I thank you for your condescension, in giving me that lesson. You let me win that last game out of pure good nature. I shall always appreciate it. Meanwhile I shall say to every one – 'Oh, do you know, Dr. Hutton and I play even?' taking very good care meanwhile never to play again with you. Shocking morality! Yes, very shocking. But then I know no better, do I, Nowell, dear?"

"Haw! Well, Georgie, I am not so sure of that. My wife is absolute nature, sir, simple, absolute – haw – unartificial nature. But unartificial nature is, in my opinion – haw – yes, a very wise nature, sometimes."

"Haw!" said his wife, exactly like him, while everybody laughed. Then she stood upon tiptoe to kiss him, she was so unartificial, even before the company. All the pretty airs and graces of a fair Parisian, combined with all the domestic snugness of an English wife! What a fine thing it is to have a yoke–mate with a playful, charming manner!

"Good–bye, Dr. Hutton. We are on the wing, as you are. I fear you will never forgive me for tarnishing your laurels so."

Tarnishing laurels! What wonderful fellow so ingeniously mixed metaphors?

“Now or never,” thought Rufus Hutton; “she has beaten me at chess, she thinks. Now, I’ll have the change out of her. Only let her lead up to it.”

“Mrs. Corklemore, we will fight it out, upon some future occasion. I never played with a lady so very hard to beat.”

“Ah, you mean at Nowelhurst. But we never go there now. There is – I ought to say, very likely, there are mistakes on both sides – still there seems to exist some *prejudice* against us. – Anna, dear, you put a lump of sugar too much in my tea. I am already too saccharine.”

“Well, dear, I put exactly what you always tell me. And you sent your cup for more afterwards.”

“Matter of fact animal – how can she be my sister?” Georgie only muttered this. Rufus Hutton did not catch it. Mr. Garnet would have done so.

“Now is the time,” thought Rufus again, as she came up to shake hands with him, not a bit afraid of the morning sun upon her smooth rich cheeks, where the colour was not laid on in spots, but seemed to breathe up from below, like a lamp under water. Outside he saw pet Polly scraping great holes in the gravel, and the groom throwing all his weight on the curb to prevent her from bolting homewards. “Hang it, she won’t stand that,” he cried; “her mouth is like a sea–anemone. Take her by the snaffle–rein. Can’t you see, you fool, that she hasn’t seven coats to her mouth, like you? Excuse my opening the window,” he apologized to Mrs. Corklemore, “and excuse my speaking harshly, for if I had not

stopped him, he would have thrown my horse down, and I value my Polly enormously."

"Especially after her behaviour the other night in the forest. It is the same with all you gentlemen; the worse you are treated, the more grateful you are. Oh yes, we heard of it; but we won't tell Mrs. Hutton."

"No, indeed, I hope you won't. I should be very sorry for her to get even a hint of it."

"To be sure," laughed Georgie, "to be sure we will keep the secret, for ever so many reasons; one of them being that Dr. Hutton would be obliged to part with Miss Polly, if her mistress knew of her conduct. But I must not be so rude. I see you want to be off quite as much as fair Polly does. Ah, what a thing it is to have a happy home!"

Here Mrs. Corklemore sighed very deeply. If a woman who always has her own way, and a woman who is always scheming, can be happy, she, Georgie, must be so; but she wanted to stir compassion.

"Come," she said, after turning away, for she had such a jacket on – the most bewitching thing; it was drawn in tight at her round little waist, and seemed made like a horse's body–clothes, on purpose for her to trot out in, – "come, Dr. Hutton, say good–bye, and forgive me for beating you." Simple creature, of course she knew not the "sacra fames" of chess–players.

"We must have our return–match. I won't say 'good–bye' until you have promised me that. Shall it be at my house?"

"No. There is only one place in the world where I would dare to attack you again, and that is Nowelhurst Hall."

"And why there, more than anywhere else?"

"Because there is a set of men there, with which I can beat anybody. I believe I could beat Morphy, with those men at Nowelhurst. Ah! you think me, I see, grossly and stupidly superstitious. Well, perhaps I am. I do sympathise so with everything."

"I hope we may meet at Nowelhurst," replied Rufus, preparing his blow of Jarnac, "when they have recovered a little from their sad distress."

"Ah, poor Sir Cradock!" exclaimed the lady, with her expressive eyes tear–laden, "how I have longed to comfort him! It does seem so hard that he should renounce the sympathy of his relatives at such a time as this. And all through some little wretched dissensions in the days when he misunderstood us! Of course we know that you cannot do it; that you, a comparative stranger, cannot have sufficient influence where the dearest friends have failed. My husband, too, in his honest pride, is very, very obstinate, and my sister quite as bad. They fear, I suppose, – well, it does seem ridiculous, but you know what vulgar people say in a case of that sort – they actually fear the imputation of being fortune–hunters!" Georgie looked so arrogant in her stern consciousness of right, that Rufus said, and for the moment meant it, "How absurd, to be sure!"

"Yes," said Georgie, confidentially, and in the sweetest of all

sweet voices, "between you and me, Dr. Hutton, for I speak to you quite as to an old friend of the family, whom you have known so long" – ("Holloa," thought Rufus, "in the last breath I was a 'comparative stranger!'") – "I think it below our dignity to care for such an absurdity; and that now, as good Christians, we are bound to sink all petty enmities, and comfort the poor bereaved one. If you can contribute in any way to this act of Christian charity, may I rely upon your good word? But for the world, don't tell my husband; he would be so angry at the mere idea."

"I will do my best, Mrs. Corklemore; you may rely upon that."

"Oh, thank you, thank you! I felt quite sure that you had a generous heart. I should have been so disappointed – perhaps, after all, we shall play our next game of chess at Christmas with the men I am so lucky with. And then, look to yourself, Dr. Hutton."

"I trust you will find a player there who can give me a pawn and two moves. If you beat him, you may boast indeed."

"What player do you mean?" asked Georgie, feeling rather less triumphant. "Any Indian friend of yours?"

"Yes, one for whom I have the very greatest regard. For whose sake, indeed, I first renewed my acquaintance with Sir Cradock, because I bore a message to him; for the Colonel is a bad correspondent."

"The Colonel! I don't understand you." As she said these words, how those eyes of hers, those expressive eyes, were changing! And her lovely jacket, so smart and well cut, began to

"draw" over the chest.

"Did you not know," asked Rufus, watching her in a way that made her hate him worse than when he took her queen, "is it possible that you have not heard, that Colonel Nowell, Clayton Nowell, Sir Cradock's only brother, is coming home this month, and brings his darling child with him?" Now for your acting, Georgie; now for your self–command. We shall admire, henceforth, or laugh at you, according to your present conduct.

She was equal to the emergency. She commanded her eyes, and her lips, and bosom, after that one expansion, even her nerves, to the utmost fibre – everything but her colour. The greatest actor ever seen, when called on to act in real life, can never command colour if the skin has proper spiracles. The springs of our heart will come up and go down, as God orders the human weather. But she turned away, with that lily–whiteness, because she knew she had it, and rushed up enthusiastically to her sister at the end of the room.

"Dear Anna, darling Anna, oh, I am so delighted! We have been so wretched about poor Sir Cradock. And now his brother is coming to mind him, with such delightful children! We thought he was dead, oh, so many years! What a gracious providence!"

"Haw!" said Nowell Corklemore.

"The devil!" said Bailey Kettledrum, and Rufus caught the re–echo, but hoped it might be a mistake.

Then they all came forward, gushing, rushing, rapturous to embrace him.

"Oh, Dr. Hutton, surely this is too good news to be true!"

"I think not," said Rufus Hutton, mystical and projecting, "I really trust it is not. But I thought you must have heard it, from your close affinity, otherwise I should have told you the moment I came in; but now I hope this new arrival will heal over all – make good, I mean, all family misunderstandings."

"Colonel Clayton Nowell," said Mr. Nowell Corklemore, conclusively, and with emphasis, "Colonel Clayton Nowell was shot dead outside the barracks at Mhow, on the 25th day of June, sir, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fifty–six. Correct me, sir, if I am wrong."

"Then," said Rufus, "I venture to correct you at once."

"Shot, sir," continued Corklemore, "as I am, I may say – haw, – in a position to prove, by a man called Abdoollah Manjee, believed to be a Mussulman. Colonel Clayton Nowell, sir, commanding officer in command of Her Majesty's Company's native regiment, No· One hundred and sixty–three, who was called, – excuse me, sir, designated, the 'father of his regiment,' because he had so many illegitimate – haw, I beg your pardon, ladies – because of his – ha, yes, – patriarchal manners, sir, and kindly disposition, – he – haw, where was I?"

"I am sure I can't say," said Rufus.

"No, sir, my memory is more tenacious than that of any man I meet with. He, Colonel Clayton Nowell, sir, upon that fatal morning, was remonstrated with by the two – ah, yes, the two executors of his will – upon his rashness in riding forth to face

those carnal, I mean to say, those incarnate devils, sir. 'Are you fools enough,' he replied, 'to think that *my* fellows would hurt *me*? Give me a riding–whip, and be ready with plasters, for I shall thrash them before I let them come back.' Now isn't every word of that true?"

"Yes, almost every word of it," replied Rufus, now growing excited.

"Well, sir, he took his favourite half–bred – for he understood cross–breeding thoroughly – and he rode out at the side–gate, where the heap of sand was; 'Coming back,' he cried to the English sentry, 'coming back in half an hour, with all my scamps along of me. Keep the coppers ready.' And with that he spurred his brown and black mare; and no man saw him alive thereafter, except the fellows who shot him. Haw!"

"Yes," said Rufus Hutton, "one man saw him alive, after they shot him in the throat, and one man saved his life; and he is the man before you."

"What you, Dr. Hutton! What you! Oh, how grateful we ought to be to you."

"Thank you. Well, I don't quite see that," Rufus replied, most dryly. Then he corrected himself: "You know I only did my duty."

"And his son?" inquired Georgie, timidly, and with sympathy, but the greatest presence of mind. She had stood with her hands clasped, and every emotion (except the impossible one of selfishness) quivering on her sweet countenance; and now she

was so glad, oh, so glad, she could never tell you. "His poor illegitimate son, Dr. Hutton? Will he bring the poor child home with him? How glad we shall be to receive him!"

"The child he brings with him is Eoa, dear natural odd Eoa, his legitimate daughter."

"Then you know her, Dr. Hutton; you could depose to her identity?"

A very odd question; but some women have almost the gift of prophecy.

"Oh, yes! I should rather think so. I have known her since she was ten years old."

"And now they are coming home. How pleasant! How sweet to receive them, as it were from the dead! By the overland route, I suppose, and with a lac of rupees?"

"No," said the badgered Rufus, "you are wrong in both conjectures. They come round the Cape, by the clipper–ship *Aliwal*; and with very few rupees. Colonel Nowell has always been extravagant, a wonderfully fine–hearted man, but a hand that could never hold anything – except, indeed, a friend's."

By the moisture in Rue Hutton's eyes, Georgie saw that her interests would fare ill with him, if brought into competition with those of Colonel Nowell. Meanwhile Polly was raving wild, and it took two grooms to hold her, and the white froth dribbling down her curb was to Rufus Hutton as the foam of the sea to a sailor. He did love a tearing gallop, only not through the thick of the forest.

"Good–bye, good–bye! I shall see you soon. Thank you, I will take a cheroot. But I only smoke my own. Good–bye! I am so much obliged to you. You have been so very kind. Mrs. Hutton will be miserable until you come over to us. Good–bye; once more, good–bye!"

Rufus Hutton, you see, was a man of the world, and could be false "on occasion." John Rosedew could never have made that speech on the back of detected falsehood. Away went Polly, like a gale of wind; and Rufus (who was no rogue by nature, only by the force of circumstances, and then could never keep to it), he going along twenty miles an hour, set his teeth to the breeze, which came down the funnel of his cigar as down a steamer's chimney, stuck his calves well into Polly's sides, and felt himself a happy man, going at a rocket's speed, to a home of happiness. All of us who have a home (and unless we leave our heart there, whenever we go away, we have no home at all), all of us who have a hole in this shifting sandy world – the sand as of an hour–glass – but whence we have spun such a rope as the devil can neither make nor break – I mean to say, we, all who love, without any hems, and haws, and rubbish, those who are only our future tense (formed from the present by adding "so") – all of us who are lucky enough, I believe we may say good enough, to want no temporal augment from the prefix of society, only to cling upon the tree to the second aorist of our children, wherein the root of the man lurks, the grand indefinite so anomalous; all these fellows, if they can anyhow understand this sentence, will be glad

to hear that Rufus Hutton had a jolly ride.

Rosa waited at the gate; why do his mare's shoes linger? Rosa ran in, and ran out again, and was sure that she heard something pelting down the hill much too fast, for her sake! but who could blame him when he knew he was coming home at last? Then Rosa snapped poor Jonah's head off, for being too thick to hear it.

Meanwhile, a mighty senate was held at Kettledrum Hall, Mrs. Corklemore herself taking the curule chair. After a glimpse of natural life, and the love of man and woman, we want no love of money; so we lift our laps (like the Roman envoy) and shake out war with the whole of them.

Fools who think that life needs gilding – life, whose flowing blood contains every metal but gold and silver – because they clog and poison it! Blessed is he who earns his money, and spends it all on a Saturday. He looks forward to it throughout the week; and the beacon of life is hope, even as God is its pole–star.

CHAPTER II

Mr. Garnet's house, well away to the west, was embraced more closely and lovingly by the gnarled arms of the Forest than the Hall, or even the Rectory. Just in the scoop of a sunny valley, high enough to despise the water, and low enough to defy the wind, there was nothing to concern it much, but the sighing of the branches. Over the brown thatch hung two oak–trees, whispering leaves of history, offering the acorn cup upon the parlour hearth, chafing their rheumatic knuckles against the stone of the chimneys, wondering when the great storm should come that would give them an inside view of it. For though the cottage lay so snugly, scarcely lifting its thatched eyebrows at the draught which stole up the valley, nevertheless those guardian oaks had wrestled a bout or two with the tempests. In the cyclone on the morning of November 29th, 1836, and again on the 7th of January, 1842, they had gripped the ground, and set hard their knees, and groaned at the thought of salt water. Since then the wind had been less of a lunatic (although there had been some ruffianly work in 1854), and they hoped there was a good time coming, and so spread their branches further and further, and thought less of the price of timber. There was only one wind that frightened them much, and that was two points north of west, the very direction whence, if they fell, crash they must come on the cottage. For they stood above it, the root–head some ten feet

above the back–floor of the basement, and the branches towering high enough for a wood–pigeon not to be nervous there.

Now we only get heavy pressure of squalls from the west–north–west after a thorough–going tempest which has begun in the southward, and means to box half the compass. So the two great oaks were regarded by their brethren up the hill as jolly fellows, happy dogs, born with a silver spoon in their mouths, good for another thousand years, although they might be five hundred old; unless, indeed – and here all the trees shuddered – there came such another hurricane as in 1703. But which of us knows his own brother's condition? Those two oaks stood, and each knew it, upon a steep bank, where no room was for casting out stay–roots to east–south–east.

Bull Garnet hated those two trees, with terror added to hatred. Even if they never crushed him, which depended much on the weather, they *would* come in at his bedroom window when the moon was high. Wandering shapes of wavering shadow, with the flickering light between them, walking slowly as a ghost does, and then very likely a rustle and tap, a shivering, a shuddering; it made the ground–floor of his heart shake in the nightmare hours.

Never before had he feared them so much, one quarter so much, as this October; and, during the full and the waning moon after Clayton Nowell's death, he got very little sleep for them. By day he worked harder than ever, did more than three men ought to do, was everywhere on the estates, but never swore at any one – though the men scratched their ears for the want of it

– laboured hard, and early, and late, if so he might come home at night (only not in the dark), come home at night thoroughly weary. His energy was amazing. No man anywhere felling wood – Mr. Garnet's especial luxury – no man hedging and ditching, or frithing, or stubbing up fern and brambles, but had better look out what he had in his bag, or "the governor would be there, and no mistake." A workman could scarcely stand and look round, and wonder how his sick wife was, or why he had got to work so hard, could scarcely slap himself on the breast, or wet his hard hands for a better grip, but there was Bull Garnet before him, with sad, fierce, dogged eyes, worse than his strongest oaths had been.

Everybody said it was (and everybody believed it; for the gossip had spread from the household in spite of the maidens' fear of him) the cause of it was, beyond all doubt, the illness of his daughter. Pearl Garnet, that very eccentric girl, as Rufus Hutton concluded, who had startled poor Polly so dreadfully, was prostrate now with a nervous fever, and would not see even the doctor. Our Amy, who pleaded hard to see her, because she was sure she could do her good, received a stern sharp negative, and would have gone away offended, only she was so sorry for her. Not that any fervid friendship, such as young ladies exult in for almost a fortnight incessant, not that any rapturous love exclusive of all *man*kind had ever arisen between them, for they had nothing whatever in common, save beauty and tenacity, which girls do not love in each other: only that she was always

sorry for any one deep in trouble. And believing that Pearl had loved Clayton Nowell, and was grieving for him bitterly, how could Amy help contrasting that misery with her own happiness?

For Amy was nice and happy now, in spite of Cradock's departure, and the trouble he had departed in. He loved her almost half as much, she believed, as she loved him; and was not that enough for anybody? His troubles would flow by in time; who on earth could doubt it, unless they doubted God? He was gone to make his way in the world, and her only fear was lest he should make it too grand for Amy to share in. She liked the school–children so, and the pony, and to run out now and then to the kitchen, and dip a bit of crust in the dripping–pan; and she liked to fill her dear father's pipe, and spread a thin handkerchief over his head. Would all these pleasures be out of her sphere, when Cradock came back, with all London crowning him the greatest and best man of the age? Innocent Amy, never fear. "Nemo, nisi ob homicidium, repente fuit clarissimus."

Mr. Garnet would have felled those oaks, in spite of Sir Cradock's most positive orders, if there had not been another who could not command, but could plead for them. Every morning as the steward came out, frowned and shook his fist at them, the being whom he loved most on earth – far beyond himself, his daughter, and the memory of their mother, all multiplied into each other, – that boy Bob came up to him, and said, "Father, don't, *for my sake.*"

We have not heard much of Bob Garnet yet; we have scarcely

shaped him feebly; by no means was he a negative character, yet described most briefly by negatives. In every main point, except two, he was his father's cardinal opposite. Those two were generosity (which combines the love of truth with a certain warmth of impulse) and persevering energy. Even those two were displayed in ways entirely different, but the staple was very similar.

Bob Garnet was a naturalist. Gentle almost as any girl, and more so than his sister, he took small pleasure in the ways of men, intense delight in those of every other creature. Bob loved all things God had made, even as fair Amy did. All his day, and all his life, he would have spent, if he had the chance, among the ferns and mosses, the desmidiæ of the forest pools, the sun–dew and the fungi, the buff–tips and red underwings, privet–hawks, and emperors. He knew all the children of the spring and handmaids of the summer, all of autumn's laden train and the comforters of winter. The happiest of mankind is he whose stores of life are endless, whose pure delights can never cloy, who sees and feels in every birth, in every growth or motion, his own Almighty Father; and loving Him is loved again, as a child who spreads his arms out.

Mr. Garnet's affection for this boy surpassed the love of women. He petted, and patted, and coaxed him, and talked nonsense to him by the hour; he was jealous even of Bob's attachment to his sister Pearl; in short, all the energy of his goodness, which, like the rest of his energies, transcended the

force of other men's, centred and spent itself mainly there. But of late Bob had passed all his time with his mother – I mean, of course, with Nature; for his mother in the flesh was dead many a year ago. He had now concluded, with perfect contentment, that his education was finished; and to have the run of the forest at this unwonted season more than consoled him for the disgrace of his recent expulsion from school.

Scarcely any one would believe that Bob Garnet, the best and gentlest boy that ever cried over Euripides – not from the pathos of the poet certainly, but from his own – Bob Garnet, who sang to snails to come out, and they felt that he could not beat them, should have been expelled disgracefully from a private school, whose master must needs expel his own guineas with every banished pupil. However, so it was, and the crime was characteristic. He *would* sit at night in the lime–trees. Those lime–trees overhung the grey stone wall of the playground near Southampton; and some wanton boys had been caught up there, holding amoibæans with little nursemaids and girls of all work, come out to get lung–and–tongue food. Thereupon a stern ukase was issued that the next boy caught up there would be expelled without trial, as the corrupter of that pure flock. The other boys laughed, I am sorry to say, when "Bob, the natural," as they called him, meaning thereby the naturalist, was the first to be discovered there, crawling upon a branch as cleverly as a looper caterpillar. Even then the capital sentence was commuted that time, for every master knew, as well as every boy, that Bob could

never "say bo" to anything of the feminine gender capable of articulating. So Bob had to learn the fourth Georgic by heart, and did most of it (with extreme enjoyment) up in that very same tree. For he kept all his caterpillars there, his beetle–traps, his moth–nets, even some glorious pupæ, which were due at the end of August; and he nursed a snug little fernery, and had sown some mistletoe seeds, and a dozen other delicious things, and the lime–hawks wanted to burrow soon; in a word, it was Bob's hearth and heart–place, for no other boy could scale it. But just when Bob had got to the beginning of Aristæus, and the late bees were buzzing around him, although the linden had berried, an officious usher spied him out – a dirty little fellow, known and despised by all the more respectable *σιωπητέαι* of Southampton. With hottest indignation, that mean low beggar cried out —

"Boy in the tree there! I see you! Your name this moment, you rascal!"

"Garnet, sir, Bob Garnet. And if you please, sir, I am not a rascal."

"Come down, sir, this very instant; or else I'll come up after you."

"I don't think you can, sir," replied Bob, looking down complacently; for, as we shall see by–and–by, he was no coward in an emergency. "If you please, sir, no boy in the school can climb this tree except me, sir, since Brown senior left."

"I can tell you one thing, Garnet: it's the last time you'll ever climb it."

"Oh, then I must collect my things; I am sorry to keep you waiting, sir. But they are such beauties, and I can't see well to pack them."

Bob packed up his treasures deliberately in his red pocket–handkerchief, and descended very cleverly, holding it with his teeth. The next morning he had to pack his box, and became in the school a mere legend.

His father flew into a violent passion, not with the son, but the schoolmaster: however, he was so transported with joy at getting his own Bob home again, that he soon forgave the cause of it. So the boy got the run of the potato–fields, pollard–trees, and rushy pools, and hunted and grubbed and dabbled, and came home sometimes with three handkerchiefs, not to mention his hat, full. One lovely day this October, before the frost set in – a frost of a length and severity most rare at that time of year – Bob Garnet took his basket and trowel, nets, lens, &c., and set out for a sandy patch, not far from the stream by the Rectory, where in his July holidays he had found some Gladiolus Illyricus, a bloom of which he had carried home, and now he wanted some roots of it. He could not think why his father left him so very much to himself now, and had ceased from those little caresses and fondlings, which used to make Bob look quite ashamed sometimes in the presence of strangers. He felt that his father loved him quite as much as ever, and he had found those strong eyes set upon him with an expression, as it appeared to him, of sorrow and compassion. He had a great mind to ask what the matter was;

but his love for his father was a strange feeling, mixed with some dread and uncertainty. He would make Pearl tell him all about it, that would be the best way; for she as well had been carrying on very oddly of late. She sat in her own room all day long, and would never come down to dinner, and would never come out for a stroll with him, but slipped out by herself sometimes in the evening; that, at least, he was sure of. And to tell him indeed, him going on now for seventeen years of age, that he was too young to ask questions! He would let her know, he was quite resolved, that because she happened to be two years older – a pretty reason that was for treating him like a baby! She who didn't know a wire–worm from a ring–worm, nor an elater from a tipula, and thought that the tippet–moth was a moth that fed upon tippets! Recalling fifty other instances of poor Pearl's deep ignorance, Bob grew more and more indignant, as he thought of the way she treated him. He would stand it no longer. If she was in trouble, that was only the greater reason – Holloa!

Helter–skelter, off dashed Bob after a Queen of Spain fritillary, the first he had ever seen on the wing, and a grand prize for any collector, even of ten times his standing. It was one of the second brood, invited by the sun to sport awhile. And rare sport it afforded Bob, who knew it at once from the other fritillaries, for the shape of the wings is quite different, and he had seen it in grand collections. An active little chap it was, greatly preferring life to death, and thoroughly aware that man is the latter's chief agent. Once Bob made quite sure of it, for it had settled on a

blackberry–spray, and smack the net came down upon it, but a smack too hard, for the thorns came grinning out at the bottom, and away went the butterfly laughing. Bob made good the net in a moment with some very fine pins that he carried, and off again in still hotter pursuit, having kept his eyes on dear Lathonia. But the prey was now grown wondrous skeary since that narrow shave, and the huntsman saw that his only chance was a clever swoop in mid air. So he raised his net high, and zig–zagged recklessly round the trees, through the bushes, up the banks and down them. At last he got quite close to her, but she flipped round a great beech–trunk; Bob made a cast at hazard, and caught not the Queen, but Amy.

Amy was not frightened much, neither was she hurt, though her pretty round head came out through the net – for she had taken her hat off – and the ring lay upon her shoulders, which the rich hair had shielded from bruises. She would have been frightened terribly, only she knew what was going on, and had stepped behind the tree to avoid the appearance of interfering. For she did not wish – she knew not why – but, by some instinct, she did not wish to have much to do with the Garnets. She regarded poor Bob as a schoolboy, who was very fond of insects, and showed his love by killing them.

But if Amy was not frightened much, Bob, the captor, was. He dropped the handle of his net, and fell back against the beech–tree. Then Amy laughed, and took off the net, or the relics of the gauze at least, and kindly held out her hand to him, and said,

"Oh, how you are grown!"

"And so are you. Oh dear me, have you seen her? Have you seen her?"

"Seen whom?" asked Amy, "my Aunt Eudoxia? She is on there, by the ash–tree."

"The Queen of Spain, Miss Rosedew, the Queen of Spain fritillary! Oh, tell me which way she went! If I lose her, I am done for!"

"Then, I fear, Master Garnet" – ["Confound it," thought Bob, "how all the girls do patronize me!"] – "I am very much afraid you must make up your mind to annihilation, if by the 'Queen of Spain' you mean that common brown little butterfly you wanted just now to kill so much."

"Is she gone across the river, then? That is nothing, I assure you. I would go through fire after her. Oh, tell me, only tell me."

Amy could not help laughing; poor Bob looked so ridiculous, fitting a new net all the time upon the ring of the old one, the crown of his hat come to look for his head, his trousers kicked well up over his boots, and his coat an undoubted ventilator.

"I really don't know," said Amy; "how could you expect me to see through your shrimp–net, Master Garnet?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon – how stupid I am, to be sure – I beg your pardon a thousand times; really I might have hurt you. I would not do that for – "

"Even the Queen of Spain. To tell you the truth, Master Garnet, if I knew where she was gone I would not tell you,

because I can't bear to have things killed. In my opinion, it is so cruel."

"Oh!" cried Bob, a very long "oh," drawn out into half an ell; and he looked at Amy all the time he was saying it, which was a wonderful thing for him to do. Then it occurred to his mind, for the first time possibly, what a beautiful creature she was, more softly shaded than a Chalk–hill blue, and richer than a cream–spotted tiger–moth! The moment he felt this Bob was done for; Amy had caught her captor.

Flushed as he was with the long hot chase, his cheeks grew hotter and redder, as he got a dim consciousness of a few of the things which he was feeling. He was like a chrysalis, touched in the winter, when it goes on one side from the crust of the thorax, and sometimes can never get right again. After having said "oh," with emphasis and so much diæresis, Bob did not feel called upon for any further utterance till Amy was gone to her Aunt Eudoxia; and then he contrived to say, "Ah!" He was more put out than he had been even when his pet poplar–hawk caterpillar was devoured alive by ichneumon grubs. He went round the tree ever so many times, and wondered what was the matter with him, how he came there, and what he was doing.

Alas, poor Bob! Nature, who overlooks nothing, was well aware of the difficulties when she cried, "Jump up on my lap, Bob, and never be weaned from me." She knew that things of all sorts would come between herself and her child, some of them drawn from her own mother–milk, but most of them from man's

muzzling. Of the latter she had not much fear with Bob; but the former, she knew, were beyond her, and she had none but herself to thank for them. She knew that the lad, so strongly imbued with her own pleasant affluences, was almost sure to be touched with that one which comes from her breast the warmest. And then what would become of zoology, phytology, entomology, and all the other yard–long names which her children spin out of her apron–strings?

While Bob was still fiddling with his fingers, and forgetting all about butterflies, Miss Eudoxia, fetched by Amy, came to hold discourse with him.

"Why, Master Robert, I do declare, Robert, my butterfly boy! I have not seen you for such a time, Robert." And she held out her hand, which Bob took with very little sense of gratitude. To be called a "butterfly boy" before Amy, and Amy to acquiesce in it!

"Ah, you think I have nothing for you, Robert. You school–boys live upon suction. But just wait a moment, my dear."

She drew forth an old horn comfit–box, which had belonged to her grandmother, and was polished up like amber from the chafing of many a lining. This she opened with much ado, poured three crinkled sugar–plums on her gloved palm, and a smooth one as large as a hazel–nut, and offered them all to Robert, with a smile of the finest patronage.

"No, thank you, Miss Rosedew; no, thank you. I am very much obliged to you."

Miss Eudoxia had been wondering at her own generosity, and

thought that he was overcome with it. So her smile became one of encouragement and assurance against self–sacrifice.

"Oh, you need not be afraid, Robert. And you can put some under your pillow, and wake up in the night and suck them. How nice that will be, to be sure! You see I know what boys are. And I have plenty left for the infant–school. And they don't deserve them as you do, Robin."

"Miss Rosedew," said Bob, in his loftiest manner, though he was longing for them, only that Amy was there; "you will believe me when I assure you that I never touch sweets of any sort; not even at a late dinner–party."

Miss Eudoxia turned her eyes up, and almost dropped the sugar–plums. But Amy, instead of being impressed, merrily laughed, and said,

"Give them to me, then, auntie, please. Some of the men at the night–school eat sweets after early suppers."

Bob said "good–bye" disconsolately, for he knew that he had affronted Miss Doxy, without rising in Amy's opinion. He forgot all about the gladiolus, and let many great prizes escape him; for the day was the last of the soft and sunny, which tempt forth the forest denizens ere the frosty seal is set on them. In the glimpses of every brown arcade, in the jumbled gleam of the underwood, in the alleys between the upstanding trees, even in the strong light where the golden patches shone, and the wood fell back to look at them, in all of these he seemed to see and then to lose his angel. Her face he could not see clearly yet, hard as he strove to do it;

affection is, but love is not, a photographic power. Still he could see her shadowly; her attitude, the fall of her hair, the manner of her gestures; even the ring of her voice would seem to dwell about the image. But he never got them all together; one each time was the leading thing; vague; and yet it went through him.

He made one attempt – for he feared from the first, although he never could feel it so, that his love was a thorough wild–goose chase – the poor boy made one last attempt to catch at some other pursuit.

"Father," he said that very same night, after sitting for hours of wandering, "will you give me a gun and let me take to shooting?"

"A gun!" cried Bull Garnet, starting; "a gun, Bob! What do you mean by it?"

"I meant nothing at all, father. Only I know the way to stuff birds, and there are some rare ones here sometimes, and I want to make a collection."

"Bob Garnet, as long as I am alive, you never shall have a gun."

"Then, will you lend me yours, father? I know very well how to use it. I mean your patent – "

"Never, Bob. My son, if you love me, never speak of it again."

CHAPTER III

When Miss Rosedew and her niece came in to get ready for dinner, Amy cried out suddenly, “Oh, only look at the roses, aunt; how they have opened to–day! What delicious Louise Odier, and just look at General Jacqueminot! and I do declare Jules Margottin is finer than he was at Midsummer. I must cut a few, for I know quite well there will come a great frost if I don’t, and then where will all my loves be?”

Amy’s prediction about the weather was as random a guess as we may find in great authorities, who are never right, although they give the winds sixteen points of the thirty–two to shuffle in. But it so turned out that the girl was right – a point of the compass never hit till a day too late by our weather–clerks.

That very same night such a frost set in as had not been known in October for very nearly a century. It lasted nine nights and eight days; twice the mercury fell more than half way from the freezing point to zero, and the grass was crisp in the shade all day, though the high sun wiped off the whiteness at noon wherever he found the way to it. Boys rejoiced, and went mitching, to slide on the pools of the open furzery: no boys since the time of their great–grandfathers had done the heel–tap in October. But the birds did not appreciate it. What in the world did it mean? Why, there were the hips not ripe yet, and the hollyberries come to no colour, and half the blackberries still too acid, and,

lo! it was freezing hard enough to make a worm cold for the stomach, even if you could get him! Surely there was some stupid mistake of two months in the piper's almanac. All they could say was that, if it were so, those impudent free–and–easy birds who came sponging on them in the winter – and too stuck up, forsooth! to live with them after sucking all the fat of the land, and winning their daughters' affections – those outlandish beggars – be hanged to them – had got the wrong almanac too.

Why, they had not even heard the chatter, the everlasting high–fashion clack, of those jerk–tail fieldfares yet; nor had a missel–thrush come swaggering to bully a decent throstle that had sung hard all the summer, just because his breast and his coarse–shaped spots were bigger. Why, they had not even seen a clumsy short–eared owl flopping out of the dry fern yet – much good might it do him, the fern that belonged to themselves! – nor a single wedge of grey–lag geese, nor a woodcock that knew his business. And those nasty dissolute quacking mallards that floated in bed all day, the sluggards, and then wouldn't let a respectable bird have a chance of a good night's roost – there they were still on the barley–stubble; please God they might only get frozen!

And yet, confound it all, what was the weather coming to? You might dig, and tap, and jump with both feet, and put your head on one side in the most knowing manner possible, and get behind a tuft of grass, and wait there ever so long, and devil a worm would come up! And, as for the slugs, oh, don't let me

hear of them! Though the thieves had not all got home yet, they were ten degrees too cold for even an oyster–catcher's stomach: feathers and pip, my dear fellow! it gives me the colic to think of one. Put your head under my wing, Jenny Wren; oh, my darling, how cold your beak is!

Such, so far as I could gather them, were the sentiments of the birds, and their confabulation, when they went to roost, half an hour earlier than usual – for bed is the warmest place after all; besides, what was there to do? – on the 24th of October, 1859. And they felt the cold rime settling down on grey twig, and good brown leaf. Yet some of the older birds, cocks of long experience, buffers beyond all chaff, perked one eye at the eastern heavens, before tucking it under the scapular down – the eastern heavens all barred with murky red. Then they gave a little self–satisfied tweedle, which meant to the ear of Melampus,

"Ah ha! an old bird like me knows something about the weather! Bless my drumsticks and merrythought, I shan't be so cold and hungry, please God, this time to–morrow night."

Oh you little wiseacres, much you know what impendeth! A worse row than all the mallards you grumble at could make in a thousand years will spoil your roost to–morrow night. Think it a mercy if you do not get your very feathers blown off of you – ay, and the tree of your ancestors snapped beneath your feet – before this time to morrow night.

John Rosedew met the prettiest bird that ever had nest in the New Forest, his own little duck of an Amy, in the passage by

the parlour–door, at eight o'clock in the morning of that 25th of October. He kissed her white forehead lovingly, according to early usage; then he glanced at the weather–glass, and went nearer, supposing that his short sight had cheated him.

"Why, Amy dear, you must have forgotten to set the glass last night."

"No, indeed, papa. I set it very carefully. You know I can do it as well as you can, since you showed me the way. It was just a little hollow last night, and I moved the Verrier scale just a hundredth part of an inch downwards, and then it was ten o'clock."

"Then may the Lord have mercy on all seafaring men, especially our poor boatmen, and the dredging people off Rushford!"

Mr. Rosedew, as has been said before, was parson of Rushford as well as of Nowelhurst. At the former place he kept a curate, but looked after the poor people none the less, for the distance was only six miles; and now, as his legs were getting stiff, he had bought Coræbus to help him. Rushford lies towards the eastern end of the great Hurst shingle bank, the most dangerous part of Christchurch Bay, being fully exposed to the south–west gales, and just in the run of the double tide; in the eddy of the Needles.

"Why, what is the matter, papa? Even if it rains, it won't hurt them much. And it's as lovely a morning as ever was seen, and the white frost sparkling beautifully. What a magnificent sunrise! Or, at least, a very strange one."

"'Sibi temperat unda carinis.' All is smooth for the present. But I heard the lash of the ground–sea last night, when I lay awake. Fetch my telescope, darling, and come with me to the green room. We can see thence to St. Alban's Head; but the danger is for those beyond it. All the ships on this side of it will have time to work up the Solent. Never before have I known the mercury fall as it has done now. An inch and a tenth in only ten hours!"

When they went to bed on the previous night, the quicksilver stood at 30° 10´. Now it was at 29°, and cupped like the bottom of a champagne bottle, which showed that it still fell rapidly. But as yet the silver of the frost was sparkling on the lawn, and the morning sun looked up the heavens, as if he felt all right. Nevertheless, it was but show: he is bound to make the best of it, and, like all other warm–hearted beings, sometimes has sorry work there.

When they saw that no large craft had rounded St. Alban's Head, only that the poor cement–dredgers were working away at septaria, John and his daughter went to breakfast, hoping that no harm would be, while Miss Eudoxia lay in bed, and reflected on her own good qualities.

Amy came out after breakfast, without any bonnet or hat on, to make her own observations. That girl so loved the open air, the ever glorious concave, the frank palm of the hand of God – for in cities we get His knuckles – that she felt as if she had not bowed before her Friend and Maker, the all–giving, the all–

loving One, until she had paid her orisons and sung her morning hymn with His own ceiling over her. So now she walked beneath the branches laden with His jewellery, and over the ground hard–trodden by ministers doing His will, and beside the spear and the flat–grass, chilled with the awe of His breath, and among the wailing flowers, wailing and black and shrivelled up, because His face was cold to them.

For these poor Amy grieved sadly, for she was just beginning to care again for the things whose roots were outside of her. Lo the bright chrysanthemums, plumed, reflex, and fimbriate; lo the gorgeous dahlias, bosses quilled and plaited tight, and wrought with depth of colour; and then the elegant asters, cushioned, cochleate, praying only to have their eyes looked into; most of all, her own sweet roses, chosen flowers of the chosen land – they hung their heads, and stuck together, as brown as a quartered apple. Who could look at them, who could think of them, and not feel as if some of herself were dead?

Now, walking there, this youthful maiden, fairest of all His works and purest, began to observe, as He has taught us, the delicacies, the pores, and glints of the grand universal footprint. Not that the girl perceived one–tenth of the things being done around her, any more than I can tell them; for observation grows from as well as begets experience; and the girlish mind (and the boyish too, at any rate for the most part) has very lax and indefinite communion with nature. How seldom do we meet a lady who knows what way the wind is! They all believe that it

must freeze harder when the sky is cloudy; not one in fifty but trembles more at the thunder than at the lightning.

Yet Amy, with true woman's instinct, being alarmed for the lives of others, after her father's prediction, looked around her narrowly. And first her eyes went upwards, and they were right in doing so. Of the sky she knew less than nothing – although herself well known there; but the trees – come now, she was perfectly sure she knew something about the trees. So you do, you darling; and yet a very wee little; though more than half the ladies do. You know an elm from a wych–elm, and a hornbeam from a beech; and what more can we expect of you?

The rime upon the dark tree–boles and the forward push of the branches, the rime of white fur, newly breathen but an hour ago, when a flaw from the east came cat–like, and went through without moving anything; this delicate down from the lips of morning, silk work upon the night–fleece, was, as all most beautiful is, the first to fleet and vanish. Changing into a doubtful glister, which you must touch to be sure of it, then trickling away into beaded drops, like a tear which will have no denial, it came down the older and harder rime, and perhaps would bring that into its humour, and perhaps would get colder and freeze again into little lumps, like a tap leaking. Then the white face of the rough pillared trunks, pearled with glistening purity, was bighted into with scoops and dark bays, like the sweep of a scythe in the morning. On the bars of the gate, the silver harvest, spiked and cropping infinitely, began to sheave itself away, and then the

sheaves were full ripe tears, and the tears ran down if you thought of them.

But the notable sight of all, at least to a loitering mind the most striking, was to see how the hoar–frost gradually was lifting its light wing from the grass. In little tufts and random patches – random to us who know not why – the spangles, the spears, and the crusted flakes, the fairy tinsel, the ermine of dew, the very down of moonlight, the kiss of the sky too pure for snow, and the glittering glance of stars reflected – all this loveliness, caught and fastened, by the night's halourgic, in one broad sheet of virgin white, was hovering off in tufts and patches, as if a blind angel had breathed on it, with his flight only guided by pity.

But through, and in, and between it all, the boles of the trees, and the bars of the gate, the ridge of the ruts, and dapples of lawn, one thing Amy observed which puzzled her, for even she knew that it was a thing against all usage. The thaw was not on the south side or the south–east side of anything, though the sickly sun was gazing there; but the melting came from the north, and took the frost aback. She wondered vainly about it, but the matter was simple enough, like most of the things which we wonder at, instead of at our own ignorance. A flaw of warm air from the north had set in; a lower warp which shot through and threaded the cold south–eastern woof. This is not a common occurrence. Since my vague, unguided, and weak observations began, I have only seen it thrice. And on each of those three times it has been followed by a fearful tempest. Usually, a frost breaks up with a

shift of the wind to the south–east, a gradual relaxing, a fusion of warmer air, and a great effusion of damp, a blanket of clouds for the earth, and a doubt in the sky how to use them. Then the doubt ends – as many other doubts end – in precipitation. The wind chops round to the west of south; the moisture condenses outside our windows, instead of starring the inside; and then come a few spits of rain. But the rain is not often heavy at first, although it is stinging and biting, – a rain which is half ashamed of itself, as if it ought to be hail.

But, after all, these things depend on things we cannot depend upon, – moods of the air to be multiplied into humours of the earth and sea, and the product traversed, indorsed, divided, touched, and sliced at every angle by solar, lunar, and astral influences.

"Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas."

Lucky the man who knows when to take out his umbrella.

That morning, the north wind crept along, sponging the rime from the grass, and hustling it rudely from the tree–sprays, on many of which the black leaves draggled, frozen while yet in verdure. Then the sky began to be slurred across with white clouds breathing out from it, as a child breathes on the blade of a knife, or on a carriage window. These blots of cloud threw feelers out, and strung themselves together, until a broad serried and serrate bar went boldly across the heavens, from south–east

to north–west. It marked the point whence the gale would begin, and the quarter where it would end. From this great bar, on either side, dappled and mottled, like the wash of sepia on a drawing, little offsets straggled away, and began to wisp with a spiral motion, slow and yet perceptible.

This went on for an hour or two, darkening and deepening continually, amassing more and more of the sky, gathering vapours to it, and embodying as it got hold of them; but still there was some white wan sunshine through the mustering cloud–blots and the spattering mud of the heavens; and still the good folks who had suffered from chilblains, and found it so much milder, exclaimed, "What a beautiful day!"

Then about noon a mock sun appeared, feeble, wild, and haggard, whose mates on the crown and the east of the arc could scarcely keep him in countenance. Over all this, and over the true sun and the cirrhous outrunners, heavily drove at one o'clock the laden and leaden cumulus, blurred on the outskirts with cumulostrate, and daubed with lumps of vapour which mariners call "Noah's arks."

Then came the first sough of the wind, a long, prolonged, deep–drawn, dry sob, a hollow and mysterious sound, that shivered through the brown leaves, and moaned among the tree–boles. Away went every beast and bird that knew the fearful signal: the deer lanced away to the holm–frith; the cattle in huffs came belloking to the lew of the boughy trees; the hogs ran together, and tossed their snouts, and skittered home from the

ovest; the squirrel hied to his hollow dray, the weasel slunk to his tuffet lair, and every rabbit skipped home from grass. The crows and the magpies were all in a churm; the heavy–winged heron flapped off from the brook–side; the jar–bird flicked out from the ivy–drum; the yaffingale darted across the ride with his strange discordant laugh; even the creepers that ply the trees crept into lichened fastnesses, lay flat to the bark, and listened.

Nor less the solid, heavy powers that have to stay and break the storm, no less did they, the beechen clump, the funnelled glens, the heathery breastwork, even the depths of forest night – whence common winds shrink back affrighted – even the bastions of Norman oak, scarred by many a tempest–siege, and buckled by the mighty gale of 1703, – one and all they whispered of the stress of heaven impending.

First came fitful scuds of rain, "flisky" rain they call it, loose outriders of the storm, spurning the soft ice, as they dashed by, and lashing the woodman's windows. Then a short dark pause ensued, in which the sky swirled up with clouds, and the earth lay mute with terror. Only now and then a murmur went along the uplands.

Suddenly, ere a man might say, "Good God!" or "Where are my children?" every tree was taken aback, every peat–stack reeled and staggered, every cot was stripped of its thatch, on the opposite side to that on which the blow was expected.

The first squall of that great tempest broke from the dark south–east. It burst through the sleet, and dashed it upwards like

an army of archers shooting; ere a man could stay himself one way, it had caught him up from another. The leaves from the ground flew up again through the branches which had dropped them; and then a cloud of all manner of foliage, whirling, flustering, capering, flitting, soared high over the highest tree–tops, and drove through the sky like dead shooting–stars.

All that afternoon, the squalls flew faster, screaming onward to one another, furious maniacs dashing headlong, smiting themselves and everything. Then there came a lull. So sudden that the silence was more stunning than the turmoil. A pause for sunset; for brave men countless to see their last of sunlight. That evening, the sundown gun from Calshot was heard over all the forest. I remember to have expected fully that the next flaw of air would come, like a heavy sigh, from the south–west. The expectation showed how much I underrated the magnitude of that broad storm's area. If the wind had chopped then, it would have been only a hard gale, not a hurricane.

Like a wave of the sea, it came on solidly, and from the old direction; no squall, no blast, any more; but one bodily rush of phalanxed air through a chasm in the firmament. Black, and tossing stone and metal as a girl jerks up her hat–plume, it swept the breadth of land and sea, as bisons horded sweep the snow–drifts, as Niagara sweeps the weeds away.

Where the full force of that storm broke, any man must have been mad drunk who attempted to go to bed. Houses unroofed, great trees snapped off and flung into another tree, men caught

like chaff from the winnowing and dropped somewhere in pond or gravel–pit, the carrier's van overthrown on the road, and three oaks come down to lie upon it, – some blown–away people brought news of these things, and fetched their breath up to tell them.

Our own staunch hearths rocked under us, and we looked for the walls to fall in upon us, as every mad rush came plunging.

Miss Eudoxia sat with Amy, near the kitchen fire; at least where the fire should have been, but the wind had quenched it long ago. Near them cowered Jemima and Jenny, begging not to be sent to bed. They had crawled up–stairs to see about it, and the floor came up to them – so they said – like the shifting plate of the oven. The parlour chimney–stack had fallen; but, in God's mercy, clear and harmless from the roof of the house. No fear of the thatch taking fire: that wind would have blown out the fire of London.

Now as they sat, or crouched and sidled, watching the cracks of the ceiling above, jumping every now and then, as big lumps of mortar fell down the chimney, and shrinking into themselves, every time the great stack groaned and laboured so, Miss Eudoxia, full of pluck, was reading aloud – to little purpose, for she scarcely could hear her own voice – the prayers which are meant to be used at sea, and the 107th Psalm. And who shall say that she was wrong, especially as the devil is supposed to be so busy in a gale of wind?

Jemima and Amy were doing their best to catch her voice at

intervals. As for Jenny, she did not care much what became of her now. She knew at the last full moon that her sweetheart was thoroughly up for jilting her; and now when she had ventured out – purely of her own self–will – the wind had taken her up anyhow, and whisked her like a snow–flake against the wash–house door. She was sure to have a black eye in the morning, and then it would be all up with her; and Jemima might go sweethearting, and she could not keep her company.

The roar through the wood, the yells at the corners, the bellowing round the chimneys, the thunder of the implacable hurricane; any mortal voice was less than a whisper into a steam–whistle. Who could tell what trees were falling? A monster might be hurled on the roof, and not one of them would know it until it came sheer through the ceiling. Amy was pale as the cinders before her, but firm as the bars of iron, and even trying to smile sometimes at the shrieks and queer turns of the tempest. No candle could be kept alight, and the flame of the parlour lamp quivered like a shirt badly pinned on a washing–line. But Amy was thinking dearly of the father of the household, the father of the parish, out in the blinding wind and rain, and where the wild waves were lashing. And now and then Amy wondered whether it blew so hard in London, and hoped they had no big chimneys there.

John Rosedew had taken his little bundle, in a waterproof case, and set out on foot for Rushford, when the storm became unmistakeable. He would not ride Coræbus; first because he

would have found it impossible to wipe him dry, secondly because the wind has such purchase upon a man when he is up there on the pommel. So the rector strode off in his stoutest manner, an hour or so before nightfall, and the rain went into him, neck and shoes, before he got to the peat–rick. To a resolute man, who feels sometimes that the human hide wants tanning, there are few greater pleasures than getting basted and cracklined by the wet wind; only it must not come too often, neither last too long.

So John was in excellent spirits, quelching along and going pop like a ball of India–rubber, when he came on a weaker fellow–mortal, stuck fast in a chair of beech–roots.

"Why, Robert!" said Mr. Rosedew, and nine–tenths of his voice went to leeward; "Robert, my boy; – oh dear!"

That last exclamation followed in vain John's favourite old hat, which every one in the parish loved, especially the children. The hat went over the crest of the hill, and leaped into an oak–tree, and was seen no more but of turtle–doves, who built therein next summer, and for three or four generations; and all the doves were blessed, for the sake of the man who sought peace and ensued it.

"Let me go after it," cried Bob, with his knees and teeth knocking together.

"To be sure I will," replied John Rosedew – the nearest approach to irony that the worst wind ever took him – "now, Robert, come with me."

He hooked the light stripling, hard and firm, to his own

staunch powerful frame, and, like a steamer lashed alongside, forced him across the wind–brunt. And so, by keeping the covered ways, by running the grooves of the hurricane, they both got safe to Rushford; to which achievement Bob's loving knowledge of every inch of the forest contributed at least as much as the stern strength of the parson.

Pretty Bob had no right, of course, to be out there at that time; but he had heard of a glorious company of the death's–head caterpillar, in a snug potato–field, scooped from out the woodlands. He knew that they must have burrowed now, and so he set out to dig for them with his little handfork, directly the thaw allowed him. Anything to divert his mind, or rather revert it into the natural channel. He had dreamed about sugar–plums, and Amy, and butterfly–nets, and Queens of Spain, and his father scowling over all, until his brain, at that sensitive time, was like a sirex, trying to get out but stuck fast by the antennæ. Now, Bob, though awake to the little tricks and pleasant ways of Nature, as observed in cricks and crannies, knew nothing as yet of her broader moods, her purging sweeps, her clearances, – in a word, he was a stranger to the law of storms. Therefore he got a bitter lesson, and one which set him a thinking. John Rosedew, with his grand bare head bent forward to the wind–blow, and the grey locks sweeping backward – how Amy would have cried! – towed Bob Garnet down the combe which spreads out to the sea at Rushford. The fall of the waves was short and hard – no long ocean rollers yet, only an angry beating surf, sputtering under the

gravel–cliff.

They found some shelter in the hollow, which opens to the south–south–west; for, though it was blowing as hard as ever, the wind had not canted round yet; and the little village of Rushford, upon which the sea is gaining so, was happy enough in its "bunney," and could keep its candles burning.

"I'll go home with the boy at sundown, when the gale breaks, as I hope it will. His father will be in a dreadful way, and I know what that man is. But I could not leave the boy there, neither could I go back again."

So said John Rosedew, lulled by the shelter, feeling as if he had frightened himself and all his household for nothing; almost ashamed to show himself at Octavius Pell's sea–cottage, the very last dwelling of the village. But Octave Pell knew better. He had not lived upon that coast, fagging out as a cricketer of the Church of England, with his feet and his hands ready always, and his spiked shoes holding the ground, – he had not been on the outside of all things, hoping for innings some day, without looking up at the skies sometimes, and guessing about promotion. So he knew that his rector, whom he revered beyond all the fathers of men or women – for he too was soft upon Amy – he saw that his rector was right in coming, except for his own dear sake.

John came in, with his shapely legs stuck all tight in the shrunk kerseymere (shrunk, and varnished, and puckered like plaiting, from the pelt of the rain), and by one hand still he drew the quenched and welyy Bob. The wind was sucking round the cliff,

and the door flew open hard enough for a weak man's legs to go with it. But "Octave" Pell – as he was called, because he would sing, though he could not – the Reverend Octavius was of a sturdy order, well–balanced and steady–going. He drew in his reeking visitors, and dried, and fed, and warmed them; Bob being lodged in a suit of clothes which he could only inhabit sparsely. Then Pell laid aside his rose–root pipe out of deference to his rector, and made Bob drink hot brandy–and–water till he chattered more than his teeth had done.

That curate was a fine young fellow, a B.A. of John Rosedew's college, to whom John had given a title for orders – not sold it, as some rectors do, for a twelvemonth's stipend. A tall, strong, gentlemanly parson, stuck up in no wise, nor stuck down; neither of the High nor Low Church rut, although an improvement on the old type which cared for none of these things. He did his duty by his parish; and, as follows almost of necessity, his parish loved and admired him. He never lifted a poor man's pot–lid to know what he had for dinner; he never made much of sectarian squabbles, nor tried to exorcise dissent. In a word, he kept his place, because he felt and loved it.

Only two rooms had Pell to boast of, but he was wonderfully happy in them. He could find all his property in the dark, and had only one silver spoon. And the man who can be happy with one, was born with it in his mouth. Those two rooms he rented from old Jacob Thwarthawse, or rather from Mrs. Jacob, for the old man was a pilot on the Southampton Water, and scarcely home

twice in a twelvemonth. The little cot looked like a boat–house at the bottom of the bunney; so close it was to the high–water mark, that the froth of the waves and the drifting skates' eggs came almost up to the threshold when the tide ran big, and the wind blew fresh.

And in the gentle summer night – pray what is it in Theocritus? John Rosedew could tell, but not I – at least, I mean without looking —

> "Along the pinched caboose, on every side,
> With mincing murmur swam the ocean tide."
>
> *Id. xxi. 17.*

CHAPTER IV

By the time Octavius Pell had clothed, and fed, and warmed his drenched and buffeted guests, the sun was slipping out of sight, and glad to be quit of the mischief. For a minute or two, the cloud–curtain lifted over St. Alban's Head, and a narrow bar of lively green striped the lurid heavens. This was the critical period, and John Rosedew was aware of it, as well as Octave Pell. Either the wind would shift to south–west quicker than vanes could keep time with it, and then there would be a lively storm, with no very wide area; or else it would come on again with one impetuous leap and roar, and no change of direction, and work to the south–west gradually, blowing harder until it got there. The sea was not very heavy yet, when they went out to look at it; the rain had ceased altogether; there was not air enough to move the fur of a lady's boa; but, out beyond the Atlantic offing, ridges like edges of knives were jumping, as if to look over the sky–line.

"Nulla in prospectu navis," said John Rosedew, who always talked Latin, as a matter of course, when he met an Oxford man; "at least, so far as I can see with the aid of my long–rangers."

"No," replied Pell, "and I'm heartily glad that there is no ship in sight; for, unless I'm much mistaken – run, sir, run like lightning. *I've got no more dry clothes.*"

They ran for it, and were just in time before the fury came down again. Bob Garnet was ready to slip away, for he knew that

his father would be wild about him; he had taken his drenched hat from the firetongs, and was tugging at the latch of the door. But now there was no help for it.

"We are in for it now," cried Mr. Rosedew; "I have not come down for nothing. It is, what I feared this morning, the heaviest storm that has broken upon us for at least a generation. And we are not yet in the worst of it. God grant there be no unfortunate ship making for the Needles. All our boats, you say, Pell, are in the Solent long ago. Bob, my boy, you must not expect to see your father to–night. I hope he will guess what has happened."

The beach, or pebble bank of Hurst, is a long and narrow spit of land, growing narrower every year, which forms a natural breakwater to the frith of the Solent. It curves away to the south of east from the straighter and more lofty coast of Barton, Hordle, and Rushford. Hurst Castle, in which it terminates, is the eastern horn of Christchurch Bay, as Hengistbury Head is the western. The Isle of Wight and the Needle Rocks protect this bay from the east wind's power, but a due south wind brings in the sea, and a south–west the Atlantic. Off this coast we see at times those strange floating or rising islands known by the name of the "Shingles;" which sometimes stay above water so long, that their surface is clad with the tender green of bladderwort and samphire; but more often they disappear after taking the air for a few short hours. For several years now they have taken no air; and a boatman told me the other day, that, from the rapid strides of the sea, he thought it impossible for the "Shingles" ever to top

the waves again.

Up and down the Solent channel the tide pours at a furious speed; and the rush of the strong ebb down the narrows, flushed with the cross–tide from St. Helen's, combs and pants out into Christchurch Bay, above the floodmark of two hours since. This great eddy, or reflux, is called the "double–tide;" and an awkward power it has for any poor vessel to fall into.

All that night it blew and blew, harder and harder yet; the fishermen's boats on the beach were caught up, and flung against the gravel–cliff; the stout men, if they ventured out, were snatched up as a mother snatches a child from the wheels of a carriage; the oaks of the wood, after wailing and howling, as they had done to a thousand tempests, found that outcry go for nothing, and with it went themselves. Seven hundred towers of Nature's building showed their roots to the morning. The old moon expired at O·32; and many a gap the new moon found, where its mother threw playful shadows. The sons of Ytene are not swift–witted, nor deeply read in the calendar; yet they are apt to mark and heed the great convulsions of nature. The old men used to date their weddings from the terrible winter of 1787; the landmark of the young men's annals is the storm of 1859.

All that night, young Robert Garnet was strung by some strange tension. Of course he could not sleep, amid that fearful uproar, although he was plunged and lost from sight in Octavius Pell's great chair. The only luxury Pell possessed – and that somehow by accident – was a deep, and soft, and mighty chair,

big enough for three people. After one of the windows came in, which it did, with a crash, about ten o'clock, scattering Pell's tobacco–jars, and after they had made it good with books and boxes and a rug, so that the wind was filtered through it, John Rosedew and his curate sat on a couple of hard old Windsors, watching the castle of Hurst. Thence would come the signal flash, if any hapless bark should be seen driving over the waters. There they sat, John Rosedew talking, as he could talk to a younger man, when his great heart was moved to its depth, and the multitude of his mind in march, and his soul anticipating it: talking so that Octave Pell, following his silver tones, even through that turmoil, utterly forgot the tempest, and the lapse of hours, and let fall on his lap the pipe, which John had made him smoke.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, купив полную легальную версию на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.