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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LOST SIR MASSINGBERD: A ROMANCE OF REAL LIFE. V. 1/2 ***

LOST SIR MASSINGBERD.

A Romance of Real Life.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

SAMPSON LOW, SON, AND MARSTON,

14, LUDGATE HILL.

1864.

The uncommon favour with which the story of "LOST SIR MASSINGBERD" has been received while appearing in the columns of a popular periodical, has induced its author to solicit the suffrages of that more critical Public who "hate to read novels bit by bit."

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LOST SIR MASSINGBERD.

PREFATORY.

In these days, when every man and woman becomes an author upon the least provocation, it is not necessary to make an apology for appearing in print. Perhaps there was always something affected in those prefatorial justifications; although they did disclaim any literary merit, it is probable that the writers would have been indignant enough had the critics taken them at their word; and perhaps the publication was not entirely owing to "the warmly-expressed wishes of numerous friends." But, at all events, we have done with all such excuses now. Not to have written anything for the press, is no small claim to being an Original. Neither sex nor age seems to exempt from the universal passion of authorship. My niece, Jessie (*ætat.* sixteen), writes heart-rending narratives for the "Liliputian Magazine;" her brother, whom I have always looked upon as a violent, healthy hobbledehoy whose highest virtue was Endurance, and whose darkest experience was Skittles, produces the most thrilling romances for the "Home Companion." Even my housekeeper makes no secret of forwarding her most admired recipes to the "Family Intelligencer;" while my stable-boy, it is well known, is a prominent poetical contributor to the "Turf Times," having also the gift of prophecy with reference to the winner of all the racing events of any importance. And yet, I believe, my household is not more addicted to publication than those of my neighbours.

What becomes of authors by profession in such a state of things literary as this, I shudder to think; I feel it almost a sin to add one more to the long list of competitors with whom they have to struggle; but still, if I do not now set down the story which I have in my mind, I am certain that, sooner or later, my nephew will do so for me, and very likely spoil it in the telling. He writes in a snappy, jerky, pyrotechnic way, which they tell me is now popular, but which is not suited to my old-fashioned taste; and although he dare not make, at present, what he calls "copy" of the stories with which I am perhaps too much accustomed to regale his ears, he keeps a note-book, and a new terror is added to Death from that circumstance. When I am gone, he will publish my best things, under some such title as "After-dinner Tales," I feel certain; and they will appear at the railway book-stalls in a yellow cover bordered with red, or with even a frontispiece displaying a counterfeit and libellous presentment of his departed relative in the very act of narration. The gem of that collection would undoubtedly be the story which I am now about to anticipate the young gentleman by relating myself. If I am somewhat old-world in my style, perhaps it may be forgiven me, in consideration of the reality of the circumstances narrated, and the very strong interest which I do not doubt they will arouse.

It is not necessary to state the exact locality where they occurred, nor the number of years which have elapsed since their occurrence; it is enough to premise that what I tell is true, and that some of the principal personages in the—well, the melodrama, if you will—are yet alive, and will peruse these words before they meet the public eye. If nothing therein offends *them*, therefore, it need not, upon the score of indiscreet revelation at least, offend my readers.

CHAPTER I.

GIANT DESPAIR.

In a midland county, not as yet scarred by factories, there stands a village called Fairburn, which, at the time I knew it first—many, many years ago—had for its squire, its lord, its despot, one Sir Massingberd Heath. Its rector, at that date, was the Rev. Matthew Long; and at the Rectory, when my story commences, there was in pupilage to the said rector a youth, one Peter Meredith, who has since grown up to be the present writer. When we are small, all things seem vast to our young minds; good men are saints, and evil ones are demons. I loved Mr. Long, therefore, although he was my tutor; and oh, how I feared and hated Sir Massingberd! It was not, however, my boyhood alone that caused me to hold this man as a monster of iniquity; it was the opinion which the whole county entertained of him, more or less. The people of Fairburn trembled before him, as a ship's company before some cruel captain of fifteen years back—I mean, of fifteen years before the period of which I write. Press-gangs had not very long ceased to do their cruel mission; there were old men in our village who had served their time in His Majesty's ships, very much against their will; there were gaps in poor families still, which might or might not be filled up; empty chairs that had so stood for a score of years perhaps, waiting for still expected occupiers; fathers of families, or the props of families, in sons and brothers, had been spirited away from Fairburn (even a little while ago), and had not come back again yet. They had been poachers, or radicals, or sectaries (as Dissenters were then called), or something else distasteful to Sir Massingberd's father; and they had been carried off to sea at his command. Let not my young readers imagine that I am exaggerating matters; I write of a state of things of which they have not the remotest conception, but which I remember perfectly well. They have reason to thank Heaven that they did not live in those times, if they happen to belong to those unprosperous classes which were then termed collectively, "the mob;" there were no such things as "skilled workmen," or "respectable artisans," in those days. The "people" were "the Great

Unwashed." To build a Crystal Palace for such as they were held to be, would have seemed to be the height of folly; they would have taken no other pleasure in it than to smash every pane with brickbats—for were they not "the dangerous classes"? Such opinions were beginning to die out, indeed, but they were held still by many great people, and Sir Massingberd Heath was one of them. Reared in a clergyman's family, and a clergyman myself, I have been a Conservative in politics all my life, and in that belief I shall die; but rank and power are no excuse with me for evil deeds. In the chamber of my nephew John, who "takes in everything," as the phrase goes, I once discovered a democratic magazine, edited by a gentleman whose surname I forget, but who had a great multitude of initials. All the poor people described in this work were pious and moral, and all the rich people were infidel and profligate; but for the noblemen—and there were a good many persons of high rank in the various stories—were reserved all the choicest invectives and most superlative abuse. Nothing, of course, can be more unfair than this treatment of a class of persons who, considering their temptations, are really more than respectable. As a general rule, the portraits were extravagantly malicious, but they had this attraction for me—they were all exceedingly like Sir Massingberd Heath. He was the very type of that bloated aristocracy that is held up in scarecrow fashion, by republican writers. There were not many living specimens to be met with even at the date of my tale, and the old baronet, perhaps himself perceiving that he was one of the last of them, determined that he should not be the least in infamy. Like the Unjust Judge, he neither feared God nor regarded man, and, worse than he, he would not perform a good action on account of the importunity of any person. She must have been a brave woman who importuned Sir Massingberd Heath, and could scarcely have been brought up in Fairburn.

Whether George IV. was king or not, at the period of which I write, it matters not, for his connection with our squire had terminated years before; but at one time they had been fast, very fast friends. When a king and a baronet run a race of extravagance, the king generally wins, and so it had been in this case; His Majesty, or rather His Royal Highness the Regent, had *distanced* Sir Massingberd, and they were not now upon even speaking terms. Friendships of this sort do not last when one of the parties has spent all his money. What was the use of a poor man at White's who could only look on while his old friends played whist for one hundred pound points, and five hundred pounds upon the rubber? What business—let alone pleasure—could one have in London, when Howard and Gribbs would not lend one fifty pounds even at fifty per cent.? Sir Massingberd had left that gay, wicked world for good, that is to say, for ever, and was obliged to live at his beautiful country-seat in spite of himself. He was irretrievably ruined, so far as his court prospects were concerned, for he had no ready money. He owned all Fairburn, and many hundreds of rich acres about it, beside the Park and the river; he had the great tithes of the place, and manorial rights (which he exercised, too) innumerable. Nobody quite knew—he did not know himself—what privileges he had or had not, what pathways he could close at pleasure, what heriots he could demand, or what precise property he had in Fairburn gravel-pits; but in all cases he gave himself the benefit of the doubt. It was a very foolish thing to leave any disputed point to the sense of justice, or the good feeling of our squire, and yet this was generally done. Where it was not done, where some honest fellow had ventured to oppose his high prerogative, even though he gained his end, he was always, as the village people said, "paid out" for it. I don't mean to say Sir Massingberd murdered him—although he would have done that, I am confident, without the slightest scruple, if it could have been effected with safety to himself—but he took his revenge of him, sooner or later, in a very simple way. He caught his children trespassing—having caused them to be enticed upon his land—and committed them to prison; or he broke down his fences, and spoiled his corn in the night; for he had dependents devoted to his wicked will, and upon whose false witness he could always rely.

And yet, with all this power, the baronet, as I have said, was a poor man; he had borrowed all the money he could, and was even said to have overreached the London Jews in these transactions; and it was all gone—absolutely all. It was seldom that this great lord of acres had a ten-pound note in his pocket, for his house and land were all entailed upon his nephew Marmaduke, and he had only a life-interest in anything. Poverty perhaps made him bitterer and more savage than he would otherwise have been; but, for my part, I cannot imagine him to have been agreeable under any circumstances. I have heard, however, that at Carlton House he was once the first favourite—after Brummell—and that, of course, made him sought after by many people. He had a wicked wit, which was doubtless acceptable in some circles, and his tongue, it may be, was not quite so coarse in those days of prosperity. He took a delight in his old age in retailing his infamous experiences, before women, if possible, and if not, before clergymen or boys. I remember to have heard of Mr. Long once venturing to reprove his squire upon an occasion of this very kind. The rector had been dining at the Hall—an exceptional occurrence, and under exceptional circumstances—when, after dinner, the host began one of his disgraceful reminiscences, whereupon my tutor rose and said, "Sir Massingberd, you should be ashamed to talk of such matters to me; but before this boy, it is infamous. I thank you for your hospitality; but I shall go home."

"Very well; go, and be hanged!" replied the baronet; "and Marmaduke and I will make a jolly night of it."

Marmaduke Heath was Mr. Long's pupil as well as myself, and he resided with his uncle at the Hall. He would very much rather have retired with his tutor on that occasion, and indeed have resided at the Rectory, for he dreaded his relative beyond measure. All the pretended frankness with which the old man sometimes treated the boy was unable to hide the hate with which Sir Massingberd really regarded him; but for this heir-presumptive to the entail, this milk-and-water lad of seventeen, the baronet might raise money to any extent, nay, sell all Fairburn, if he chose,

and so might once more take his rightful station in the world, rejoin the Four-in-hand Club, and demand his "revenge" from my Lord Thanet at écarté. He could still drink, for the cellars of Fairburn Hall were well-nigh inexhaustible; but if that chit of a lad was but carried off, he might have the best in the land to drink with him. It is true that a ruined man in Sir Massingberd's position can still afford a good table; game is plentiful with him, and fish, and he grows his own mutton and venison, so that neither himself nor his friends need starve; but servants must be maintained to wait upon these, and a great country-house without a carriage is as a lobster without a claw. Consequently, except in the shooting-season, there were no guests at Fairburn Hall; the folks that did come were men of a certain stamp; current indeed, in good society, but only in that of males; a real lady had not set foot in the Park, far less the house, for the last twelve years; the manner in which Sir Massingberd lived forbade such a thing. A few bachelors of the County Hunt, and half-a-dozen roués from town, were all the company that could be enticed to Fairburn in September and October; all the rest of the year, the grass grew in the avenue untouched by wheel or hoof, and even sprang up among the stone steps that led to the front-door. Somehow or other, I never saw it thus without thinking of the parable of the Sower and the Seed, with some distant and uncharitable reference to our squire! I wondered whether it was possible that in any far-back time any good seed of any sort had found its way into the crannies of his stony heart, and if so, what had become of it. I used to try and picture that violent wicked man as a child in his cot, or saying his prayers at his mother's knee. I believe she had died soon after her marriage, and that, short as her wedded life had been, it was a very unhappy one.

Fairburn Hall had never been a house for tender, honest women; the Heaths, who are celebrated like another noble race of the same sort, for their hard hearts and excellent digestions, had never been good husbands. Fortunately, daughters were rare in the family. How Sir Massingberd would have brought up a daughter, I shudder to think. One son had been the sole offspring vouchsafed to the baronets of this line for many generations, except the last; and in the present case, there was no such direct heir. Some said Sir Massingberd had married secretly, but was separated from his wife, and some said he had not; but it seemed somehow certain that with him the immediate succession from father to son would cease. His brother Gilbert had married young in Italy, and had died in that country within the same year. His widow had brought his posthumous child, when a few months old, to the Hall, at the invitation of Sir Massingberd, and had remained there for some time. The villagers still spoke of the dark foreign lady as being the most beautiful creature they had ever beheld; the Park keepers used to come upon her in solitary glades, singing sweetly; but ah! so sorrowfully, to her child in a tongue that they did not understand. The baronet himself was absent, not yet cast out of the court whirlpool, and the lonely vastness of the place was not displeasing to the young widow, wishing, perhaps, to be left undisturbed with her grief; but after Sir Massingberd came down, she remained but a very few days. It was said that she fled with her babe in a winter's night, and that her little footprints were traced in the snow to the cross-roads where the mail went by, by which she had arrived. She was not rich, and had come down in a manner quite different from that of her brother-in-law, who, broken and ruined though he was, had posted with four horses. That was how all gentlefolks of the county travelled in those days; even the very barristers on circuit indulged, and were obliged to do so, in a chaise and a pair. The mother of Marmaduke Heath, however, who was heir-presumptive to the largest landed property in Midshire, was very poor. Whether the late baronet had omitted to make a proper provision for his younger son, or whether Gilbert had made away with it after the usual manner of the Heaths, I do not know; but his widow and child betook themselves into Devonshire —selected, perhaps, from its climate approaching nearer than any other part of England to that of her native land—and, there lived in a very humble fashion. How Marmaduke ever got into his uncle's hands, I never could clearly understand; his mother had died suddenly, whereupon the family lawyer, Mr. Clint of Russell Square, who had the entire management of the Heath property, had in the first instance taken possession of the lad; but Sir Massingberd had claimed his right to be the guardian of his nephew, and it could not be disallowed.

Such were mainly the circumstances, I believe; but all sorts of stories were in circulation concerning "Giant Despair," as the savage old baronet was called, and his nephew; the general opinion agreeing only upon one point—that no sane person would change places with Master Marmaduke Heath at Doubting Castle, notwithstanding the greatness of his expectations.

CHAPTER II.

MY FIRST INTERVIEW.

My own history has little or nothing to do with the present narrative, and therefore I will not allude to it, except where it is absolutely necessary. Suffice it to say, that my parents were in India, and that for many years Fairburn Rectory was my home. I had no vacations, in the sense that the word is generally understood to mean; I had nowhere else to go to, nor did I wish to go anywhere. No father could have been kinder, or have done his duty better by me, than did Mr. Long. How poor Marmaduke used to envy me my wardship to that good man! I well remember the first day I came to Fairburn. It was early summer; its great woods were in all their glory; and to me, fresh from shipboard and the vast waste of sea, the place seemed a bower of bliss. First, the grey old church tower upon the hill; and then the turrets of the Hall, half-hidden in oak; and last, the low-roofed, blossom-entangled cottage where I found so bright a welcome—that was the

order in which Fairburn was introduced to visitors from town. The Church, and the Hall, and the Rectory all lay together; the churchyard, dark with yews, encroached upon the Rectory garden; and that bright spot, so trimly kept, that one was moved to pick up a fallen leaf, if such were on its lawn, sloped down into the heart of the Park. A light iron railing, with wires to prevent the hares and rabbits from entering in and nibbling the flowers, alone divided the great man's land from Mr. Long's trim demesne. The deer came up and pushed their velvet horns against it. In copse and fern, twinkled the innumerable ear and tail. I had never seen such animals before, and they delighted me hugely. After dinner, on the very day that I arrived, I fed them through the rails, and they ate the bread from my open hand.

"They take you for Marmaduke," said Mr. Long, smiling; "for otherwise, they would be shy of a stranger."

"And who is Marmaduke, sir?"

"He is your fellow pupil, and I make no doubt will be your friend. I wish that he was resident with me, like yourself; but his uncle, who lives at the Hall yonder, will not part with him. He reads with me morning and afternoon, however."

"Does he like reading, sir?" inquired I with hesitation, for I for my part did not. My education, such as it was, had been fitful incomplete, and in a word, Indian; and I had come back much older than most European boys have to come home, a sad dunce.

"Yes, Marmaduke is very fond of reading," pursued my tutor; "that is, reading of a certain sort. He always does his work well with me, so I must not be hard on him; but he is certainly too fond of novels. And yonder he comes, see, with a book in his hand, even as he walks." My tutor pointed to the Park; and there, coming slowly down a long, broad "ride," with his eyes fixed upon a volume he held in his hand, was a youth of seventeen years old or so, which was about my own age. As he came nearer, I began to see why the deer had mistaken me for him; not, indeed, because he was very handsome (which was not at all the case with me), but inasmuch as his complexion was as olive as my own.

"Why, he has been to India too!" whispered I to my tutor, rather disappointed than otherwise, for I had had enough of Indian playmates, and to spare.

"No," returned he in the same low voice; "his mother was an Italian."

Then he introduced us; and I began to hang my head, and play with the buttons of my waistcoat, as is the graceful manner of hobbledehoys upon such a ceremony; but Marmaduke, completely self-possessed, asked about my journey, and particularly what I had seen at sea. He knew so much about sharks and porpoises, that I thought he must have made some long voyage himself; but he told me that such was not the case.

"Though I should like to go to sea of all things," said he; "and I would cruise about that cape—what's its name?—until I met with the "Flying Dutchman:" that is the vessel which I wish to see."

"I have never heard of her," said I, proud of that nautical use of the feminine. "Is she one of the Company's ships?"

At this my tutor began to rub his hands, and chuckle inwardly, as was his wont when vastly amused; but perceiving that the colour came into my cheeks, he laid his hand upon my shoulder kindly, and said that he was glad to find *my* head, at least, was not stuck full of foolish stories, as some people's heads were; while Marmaduke, without triumphing in the least over my ignorance, explained to me all about that Phantom Ship, which glides full sail upon the astonished voyager, and passes through his vessel without shock or noise. He told the tale exactly as if he had heard it straight from the lips of an eye-witness, and believed it himself; he never laughed, and if he smiled, he seemed to be sorry that he had done so directly afterwards. Some melancholy thought appeared to occupy his mind at all times; and if a bright fancy crossed it, it was but for an instant, like lightning through the cloud. I am not describing an "interesting" youth, after the manner of romance-writers; no "secret sorrow" obscured the young existence of Marmaduke Heath, but simply, as I subsequently discovered, vulgar, abject terror. His whole being was oppressed by reason of one man. The shadow of Sir Massingberd cast itself over him alike when he went out from his hated presence and when he was about to return to it. He was never free from its nightmare influence—never. His passion for reading was not so much a love of books, as a desire to escape in them from the circumstances of his actual life. If he ever forgot him in earnest talk—and he was the most earnest talker, as a boy, I ever knew—the mention of his uncle's name was a Medusa's Head to turn him into stony silence on the instant. If Marmaduke Heath could only have got away from Fairburn Hall when I first knew him, his mind might have regained its natural vigour and elasticity; but as it was, it grew more sombre and morbid every day. His hungry intellect was nourished upon what associations happened to be at hand, and they were very unhealthy food. The wickedness of Sir Massingberd was, of course, sufficiently present to him, like some hateful picture hung at a bed's foot, which the eyes of a sleepless man cannot avoid; while every tongue about the Hall was ready to tell him of the evil deeds of his forefathers. At first, I thought my young friend's constant allusion to his family was the result of aristocratic pride, although, indeed, there was nothing to be proud of in what he told me, but very much the reverse; but I soon found that this was not the case. The history of the Heaths was what interested him most of all histories, and he favoured me with extracts from it solely upon that account. As for the fact of their noble blood running in his own veins, he would, I am confident, have far rather been the son of Mrs. Myrtle, the kind old housekeeper at the Rectory.

"We are a doomed race, Peter," he once said to me, not long after we had made friendship with one another. "Generation after generation of us have sinned and sinned. The Corsicans have their family feuds transmitted to them, but they are hostile only to their fellow men; the Heaths have ever fought against Heaven itself. Each successor to the title seems to have said, like the descendants of Tubal Cain—

'We will not hear, we will not know,
The God that was our father's foe.'

There is the Church," said he, pointing to that glorious pile, which, at Fairburn, was almost a cathedral in magnitude and beauty, "and there is the Hall. They are antagonistic; they are devoted to opposite purposes. I tell you, yes; our family residence is consecrated to the devil."

I am afraid I could not help laughing at this singular notion.

"Nay," cried he, looking round him furtively, "but you shall see that it is so." We were in the Rectory garden, which communicated with the churchyard by a wicket. He led the way into it; and in a distant corner, upon the north side of the chancel, he showed me a sombre burying-ground, separated from the rest of the God's acre, and imprisoned in dark purgatorial rails. "Do you know why we are all put there," asked he, "instead of with the other—Christian—folks?"

"You are too proud to lie with the poor, perhaps," returned I, who had still that idea in my mind with regard to Marmaduke himself.

"No," said he; "it is not that—it is because the Heaths will not be buried in consecrated ground."

"But you have a family vault underneath the chancel, have you not?"

"Yes; but it is not 'snug lying.' None of us have been put there since old Sir Hugh, in Queen Anne's time. When they opened the vault for him, they found his father's coffin with its plate to the ground. It had turned over. The witty parson would have it that it was only natural that it should have done so, since its tenant, during life, had fought alternately for Parliament and King, and was addicted to changing sides. Bat when Sir Hugh's successor demanded lodging in the place in his turn, they found Sir Hugh's coffin had turned over likewise. The circumstance so terrified the dead man's heir—who had not been on the best terms with him during life, and perhaps thought he owed him some amends—that he swore his father should not lie in such restless company; and as the late baronet had been at feud with the then rector, he determined to dispense with any assistance from the church at all, and buried him in an adjoining field, which was subsequently made the last resting-place of all our race, as you perceive. The burial service is dispensed with, of course. It would be mere mockery to address such words as Hope and Faith to the corpse of a Heath of Fairburn."

"My dear Marmaduke," said I, "you make my very blood run cold. But surely you exaggerate these things. Some of your people have been Catholics, and been buried in their own chapel at the Hall, have they not?"

"Only one of them," replied the boy with bitterness. "My great-grandfather, Sir Nicholas, abjured his infidelity, and became a papist, in order to secure his bride. He turned the chapel into a banqueting-hall, however, and used the sacramental plate in his unholy revels; but after death, the priests got hold of him at last, and 'Nick the Younger,' as he was called, now lies under the altar which he so often profaned. The beginning of his funeral ceremonies was not conducted so decently as the last rites. He had got outlawed, I believe, or, at all events, was driven abroad in his latter days, and died there. Nobody at Fairburn had heard of him for many months, when one October night, as Oliver Bradford, who is now the head-keeper, but was then a very young man, was watching in the home-preserves, he heard a terrible noise in the high-road, and making his way out, came upon this spectacle: two men in black, and upon black horses, rode by him at full speed, and close behind them came a hearse-and-four, likewise at the gallop. The plumes upon it waved backwards, he says, like corn, and all the black trappings of the thing fluttered and flapped as it went by. Another man on horseback, singing to himself a drunken song, closed this horrid procession. It moved up towards the village, and Oliver listened to it until the noise seemed to cease about opposite to the Park gates. The solitary witness, frightened enough before, was now doubly terrified, for he made sure that what he had seen was the news of Sir Nicholas's decease, brought over in this ghastly and characteristic fashion. He did not for a single moment imagine that it was a palpable vision; and yet he had seen a veritable funeral pass by. The old baronet had died in France, leaving directions, and the money to carry them out, that his corpse should be taken at night, and at full gallop, through every town that lay between Dover and Fairburn.—Alive or dead," added Marmaduke grimly, "the Heaths are a charming family."

"At all events, my dear fellow," said I, laying my hand upon his arm, "you will have nothing to fear from comparison with your forefathers. You may make a good reputation at a cheap price.[1] A very little virtue will go a great way with the next tenant of Fairburn Hall, if half the tales we hear be true."

"And what tales are those?" inquired a deep, low voice at my very elbow.

I believe I jumped a foot or two in the air myself, so great was my alarm. But as far my companion, if those grass-grown tombs which we were contemplating had given up their wicked skeletons before his eyes, he could not have exhibited a greater excess of terror.

Beside me stood a man of Herculean proportions, who by his dress might have been taken for an

under-gamekeeper, but for a very massive gold chain which hung from the top button-hole of his waistcoat down to its deep-flapped pocket. What is now, I believe, called an "Albert guard," resembles it on a smaller scale; but at the time I speak of, such an ornament was altogether unique. His face, too, evidently belonged to one who was used to command. On the forehead was a curious indented curve like the letter U, while his lip curled contemptuously upwards also, in somewhat the same shape. The two together gave him a weird and indeed a demoniacal look, which his white beard, although long and flowing, had not enough of dignity to do away with. I had never heard Sir Massingberd's personal appearance described; but even if I had not had before me his shrinking nephew, I should have recognized at once the features of Giant Despair.

"And what tales are those which are told against the present tenant of Fairburn Hall?" reiterated the baronet, scanning me from head to foot with his cold glittering eyes. "And who is this young gentleman who comes to listen to them from the lips of my loving ward?"

"Sir," said I, "your nephew was saying nothing whatever against you, I do assure you. I was merely referring to the gossip of the village, which, indeed, does not make you out to be entirely a saint." I was angry at having been frightened by this man, who, after all, could not hurt *me*. I had been accustomed, too, to Indian life; which, without making one bolder than other people, indisposes one to submit to dictation, which is only the duty of the natives.

Sir Massingberd reached forth one iron finger, and rocked me with it to and fro, though I stood as firm as I could. "Take care, young gentleman, take care," said he; "that spirit of yours will not do down at Fairburn. Mr. Long does not seem to have taught you humility, I think. Marmaduke, go home." He spoke these last words exactly as a man speaks to his dog who has injudiciously followed him to church on Sunday, in the hope that he was bent on partridge shooting.

The boy instantly obeyed. He shrank away, passing as closely to the churchyard railing as he could, as though he almost feared a blow from his uncle.

"There is humility, there is docility!" sneered the baronet, looking after him. "And if I had *you* up at the Hall, my young bantam, for four and twenty hours or so, I'd make you docile too." He strode away with a laugh like the creaking of an iron hinge, for he saw that I did not dare to answer him. He strode away over the humble graves, setting his foot deep into their daisied mounds as though in scorn; and his laugh echoed again and again from the sepulchral walls, for it was joy to Sir Massingberd Heath to know that he was feared.

[1] I am told by an able friend, who is good enough to revise for me this manuscript, that it is not likely that a mere boy, as I then was, would have made such an observation as the above. I do not doubt that this remark is altogether just; but I am afraid it will apply to so much else in this narrative, that it is scarcely worth while to make an alteration. I am not used to literary composition; I cannot weigh whether this or that is characteristic of a speaker. I am merely a garrulous person, who has, however, such a striking story to tell, that I trust the matter will atone for the manner.

CHAPTER III.

THE DREAM BY THE BROOK.

Although my story must needs be sombre wherever it has to do with that person whose name it bears, yet I hope there will be found some sunny spots in it. During the first few months after my arrival at Fairburn, there was nothing to sadden life there that I knew of. I passed my days under green leaves, and not only in a metaphorical sense; for every fine afternoon, immediately after study was over, I betook myself to the Park. The whole place was watched as zealously, even in summer, as the gardens of the Hesperides, but Mr. Long had obtained permission for me to roam at large therein. To me, vexed from childhood by Indian suns, Fairburn Chase—as that part of the demesne most remote from the Hall was called—was far more delightful than it could have been to any mere English boy. Its stately avenues of oaks, tapering into infinite distance, with their checker work of beam and shade, was the realization of my dreams of forest beauty. Nor was its delicious coolness marred by the broad strips of sunlight, at long but equal distances, like the golden stairs of the Angels' Ladder; for those, I knew, marked the interlacing of "the Rides", themselves as fair, and leading, not as the avenue did, to the outer world, but into secret bowers known only to the deer and me.

When Marmaduke was not with me, which often enough happened, poor fellow, and particularly after that unfortunate meeting with his uncle in the churchyard—the whole Chase seemed abandoned to myself. I dare say it was not really so, and that if I had not been a privileged person I should soon have found out my mistake, but for days and days I never saw any human being there. Now and then the figure of a gamekeeper, dwarfed by distance, would make its appearance for a moment, to be lost the next in some leafy glade. But the sense of solitude was thereby rather increased than otherwise, just as the poet tells us in a case where the ear and not the eye was concerned, "the busy woodpecker *made stiller* by his sound the inviolable quietness." Lying couched in fern, in that lordly pleasure-place, I have myself entertained some poetic thoughts, although they never found expression. Even now, as I shut my eyes, I make an inward picture of some such resting-place; nothing to be seen but the long green feathery stems which the summer air just stirs about my brow, and the broad branches of the oak that stretch

themselves motionless between me and the sun; nothing to be heard but the coo of the ring-dove, and the swift stealthy bite of the dappled deer. Nor did Fairburn Chase lack water to complete its beauty. In front of the Hall itself moved a broad slow stream, which presently slid rather than fell down ledges of mossy stone into a wilderness of trees and shrubs, through which it wandered on like one who has lost his way, but singing blithely nevertheless. Another stream, which was my favourite, burst spring-like from the very heart of the Chase, having been artificially conveyed beneath the avenue, and ran quite a little river, and at a great rate, to form the island where the herons lived; after which, as though it had done its work, it went its way tranquilly enough: If it had nothing to boast of but the heronry it might have been a proud little brook, for never did colony of those solemn birds take their sad pleasure in a more lovely spot; but besides it had a certain bend in it—essential to the beauty of a brook as straightness is to that of a tree—which I have never seen rivalled elsewhere. Its right bank rose there, though not abruptly, and left half its bed of brown sand and loose tinkling shingle bare to the sunlight, save so much of it as the shade of a cluster of lime trees could cover. Here the bee and the bird brought their songs, and the dragon-flies the glory of their turquoise armour and glittering wings throughout the summer noons. The cool fragrant smell of the limes, and the drowsy music of the insects that haunted them, were inexpressibly pleasant to me, who, I am afraid, had not a little of the Asiatic indolence in my nature. Sometimes a group of swans sailed by on the unruffled stream, themselves a slumbrous pageant fit enough to herald sleep; but at all events, swans or no swans, I often did sleep there. One July afternoon, in particular, when the heat was almost as intense as at Calcutta, and no punkahs to cool one, I went to this place with malice prepense to lie there and do nothing, which, from my youth up, has always been synonymous with a *siesta*. I cannot do absolutely nothing, and yet keep awake. I very much admire the people whom I often meet in railway carriages, who endure, without books or newspapers, hundreds of miles of weary travel, and who do it with their eyes open. I wonder they do not break out into a melody, or at least a whistle. They cannot possibly be thinking all that time, and indeed they have no appearance of employing themselves in that way, but "stare right on with calm eternal eyes," with no more speculation in them than those of the sphinx herself. I envy, but I cannot imitate those happy persons. There is no such state of coma with me; I either wake or sleep.

I lay, then, beneath the limes by the brook in Fairburn Chase, half-buried in the soft brown sand; and even while I looked upon the glancing stream, with the grand old willow opposite, that bent its hoary honours half-way o'er, the scene dissolved and changed; the brook became a river, and the willow a palm-tree, and the Chase a sandy tract, and the fir-clump on the distant hill the snow-capped Himalaya. I saw, too—and, alas! I was never more to see them, except, as then, in dreams—my father and my mother; but they passed by me with pitiful, loving looks, and went their way. Then the ayah, the black nurse who was watching over me—for I was once more a child—stole down to the river-brink, and drew a fluted dagger from her bosom, and dipped it in the sacred flood, and I felt that I was to die. I knew her well; we two had loved one another as nurse and child do love, where the nurse perforce takes half the mother's part; as the child grows up, his affection, at the best, congeals to gratitude; but not so with the breast that suckled him—God forgive us men; and the pain of my dream was sharpest because it was my own dear ayah who was about to slay me. I had offended Vishnu, or else she would not have done it; her gods demanded my life of her; but she was sorry; I felt her cold lips upon my brow, and then a large round tear fell upon my cheek like icy hail, and I awoke. There was a tumult of sounds in the air; the birds, and the bees, and the bubbling wave, silent while I had slept, seemed to have burst out together in chorus at my waking. I was bewildered, and knew not where I was. My dream was more distinct at first than the realities about me. If I had but closed my eyes again, I knew that it would be continued at the spot where it had left off, that the fluted dagger would have drunk my life-blood; and therefore I made an effort to rouse myself. Wondrous are dreams, and wondrous the borderland 'twixt life and sleep! If my existence had depended upon it, I could not, for some seconds, have told for certain whether I was in England or in India. Then reason began to reassume her sway, and the vague mysterious powers, of whom we shall one day perhaps have a more certain knowledge, withdrew reluctant from their usurped dominion over me. I remembered, however, most distinctly every incident that they had brought about, and I placed my hand mechanically upon my left cheek—I had been lying upon my right—upon which the tear had seemed to fall. Great Heaven, *it was still wet*! I was really startled. The cloudless sky forbade the idea of a drop of rain having fallen; I had shed no tear myself while dreaming, for my eyes were dry, and even if I had, it could scarcely have dropped as it did, making a cool round spot in the centre of the cheek—it would have slid down and left a little frigid line: there were no stones for the stream to splash against and thus besprinkle me.

It was very odd. Still, I did not imagine for a moment that my poor black nurse had really come across the seas to drop the tributary tear upon her sleeping boy; moreover, she could scarcely have got away so suddenly without leaving some trace of her departure, some...—My heart all of a sudden ceased to beat; a shiver ran through me, as runs from stem to stern through a doomed ship that comes end on at speed upon a sunken rock; my eyes had fallen—while I thus reasoned with myself—upon a sight to terrify an older man than I, after such a dream; *the print of a woman's bare feet in the sand*. Had there been any footprints—those of a keeper or watcher, for instance—I should have been startled to know that some one had passed by while I slumbered, for most certainly the sand had been untrodden up to the moment I had lost consciousness; but that a woman with naked feet had been really present while I dreamed that horrible dream, was something more than startling. In Scotland such a circumstance would have been less remarkable, but in Fairburn I had not yet seen any person without shoes. There were a considerable number of footprints, but only of one individual: she had stood beside me for some

time, for they were deeper close to the place where I had lain, and there was also one impression there which looked as though the mysterious visitor had knelt. They had come and returned the same way, which was not the one that I had come myself, and they began and ended at the stream-side a few yards beyond, and out of sight of the bend which was my favourite haunt. The woman had doubtless crossed and recrossed by means of some natural stepping-stones that showed their heads above water; there was no path on the other side, but only a tangled thicket, through which it would have been impossible to track her, even had I been so disposed, which I was not. To say truth, I was terribly discomposed. For a minute or two I clung to the notion that the footprints were my own, made, perhaps, under the influence of somnambulism. I took off my shoes, and measured the tracks with my own feet, but I found, boy as I was, that mine effaced them. They were certainly the marks of a woman; smaller than those of a grown male, yet firmer set than those of a child. Never since the days of Robinson Crusoe was ever man so panic-struck by footprints in the sand as I. Although it was broad daylight, and the air was alive with sounds, I fairly trembled. The many evil stories which, during my short stay at Fairburn, I had already heard of the old Hall, a corner of which I could discern from where I stood, crowded in upon my brain; the whole demesne seemed under a malign influence—enchanted ground. I turned from the spot, whose lonely beauty had once so won my soul, with fear and loathing; and as I turned, there rang out—it may have been from the thicket across the stream, but the echoes took it up so suddenly, that it seemed to ring all around me—a laugh so terrible, so demoniacally mocking, that I could scarcely believe it came from mortal throat. Again and again it rose, and circled about, as though it would have headed my fleeing steps, and driven me back upon some dreadful Thing, while I fled through the fern towards home at my topmost speed, and the white-tailed rabbits scampered to left and right, less frightened than I.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DUMB WITNESS.

A sentiment of shame prevented my mentioning the affair of the footprints to my tutor; and as for Marmaduke, although we were by this time very intimate, I would not have furnished him with a new occasion for detesting Fairburn Chase upon any account. Not only, however, was my favourite haunt by the brook become an object of aversion to me, but I confess I took much less delight in any part of the Heath demesne. I kept my eyes about me, even in the great avenue, and upon the whole preferred the rector's little garden, if at any time I had a mind for sleeping out of doors.

"Meredith," observed Mr. Long to me one morning—he called me "Peter" generally, but when he had anything serious to say it was "Meredith"—"it appears to me that you don't take nearly so much exercise as you used to do. Your appetite is failing. I am really concerned about you."

"Thank you, sir, I am pretty well."

"Nonsense, Peter, no boy should be 'pretty well;' he should be in the rudest, vulgarest health, or else he is in a bad way. Your good father advised me that if you seemed the least to need it, I should get you a nag. It is Crittenden Fair next week. What say you to my buying you a horse?"

"Thank you, sir, that is just what I should like," cried I. "I am certainly getting tired of walking about alone." And then I began to blush a little, for of late rather than go into the Chase I had been accompanying my tutor in his favourite diversion of fishing, which I cared nothing about, or else in his parochial expeditions.

"Don't be afraid to speak out, my boy," said Mr. Long, with a kind smile, "you will not hurt my feelings. You and I are very good friends, but you want somebody of your own age to be your companion. Isn't that it? And very natural too. No young gentleman, except in story-books, enjoys the society of his tutors. Even Sandford and Merton got a little tired of good Mr. Barlow, I fancy, he was so desperately full of information. You want a fellow who can shy stones and climb trees."

"No, sir, indeed I don't," said I, a little indignantly; for I was getting too old, I flattered myself, for any boyish escapades of that sort, "But I do wish that Marmaduke was allowed to come out with me a little more. Would not Sir Massingberd let him have a horse also?"

Mr. Long shook his head, and was silent for a little; then, as if in continuation of his thought, he added, "And yet, I don't know, we'll go over to the Hall and see about it this very morning."

"*I*, Sir?" inquired I in astonishment; for I had never set foot in Doubting Castle, or seen it from any nearer spot than the Heronry.

"Did I say 'we'?" said Mr. Long, reflectively. "I didn't mean to do so, but I really see no reason why you shouldn't come. You would wait a considerable time if you waited for an invitation from Sir Massingberd, but—Tush, if poor Marmaduke lives there, and yet remains a good boy, half an hour's visit will not be the ruin of the lad." The latter part of this remark was uttered aloud, although intended to be strictly private, which was not an uncommon occurrence with my worthy tutor, and I have noticed the same peculiarity in other persons of studious habits. He led the way into the road at once, pursuing which, under the park wall, we presently came upon a little door, which my tutor opened with a private key. This admitted us into the wall-garden, or, as it was

sometimes called, from the quantities of that fruit which it contained, the peach-garden. An enormous area was here entirely given up to the cultivation of fruits; in the centre were strawberry-beds, gooseberries, melon-beds, the glasses of which dazzled you to behold; and raspberries upon trellis-work, on so extensive a scale that it looked like a maze. The northern end was occupied by an enormous green-house, which, in those days was rather a rare adjunct, even to a rich man's garden. But the most surprising sight was that of the walls covered with spread-eagled fruit trees, or as schoolboys then called them, "Lawk-a-daisies," laden with the most exquisite dainties—peaches, nectarines, apricots, and bloomy plums. A number of men were busily employed about this teeming scene.

"Why do they say Sir Massingberd is poor?" inquired I. "Is not all this his?"

"Yes; it is all his."

"Well, but what valuable fruit, and what enormous quantities of it! Why, he would make a large income, even if he was to sell it."

"He does sell it," replied my tutor, smiling. "Nineteen out of twenty of all these peaches will find their way to Covent Garden. Why, how could he eat them, you foolish boy? Even if he gave them away to all Fairburn, he would introduce the cholera."

"A baronet and a market gardener!" exclaimed I. "Well, that seems very odd."

Mr. Long did not choose to inform me at that time that almost all the income Sir Massingberd had was drawn from this source, and from the selling of game, with which his great preserves were overflowing. The staff of gardeners and of keepers was retained mainly upon this account. In the interest of Marmaduke, Mr. Clint, the family lawyer, did, I believe, contribute a certain annual sum for keeping up the gardens and the Chase; but this was by private arrangement, and at his own risk and responsibility. Thus it was that while some parts of the Fairburn demesne were as admirably maintained as possible, others were suffered to fall into decay. Just as we emerged from the wall-garden, for instance, there was a small artificial hollow planted with trees, and within it, peering above ground, a thatched roof covered moss and mildew, and with great gaps and holes in it. This was the ice-house—in these Wenham Lake and Refrigerator days an almost obsolete building, but in the time I write of considered a necessary appendage to every country seat. Next we entered an arcade of immense length, which the noonday rays would have striven in vain to penetrate, but for the spaces where the trellis-work had given way through age and neglect, and the ivy trailed down from rusted nails, and obstructed the way. Seats were placed in niches at unequal intervals upon one side of this arcade; but they looked very unattractive, damp, wormeaten, cracked, and here and there with a slug upon them, making slimy paths. Yet from one of these alcoves there started up, while we were still a long way off, a female figure, and stood for a moment looking at us in great surprise. Above her happened to be one of those broken portions of the leafy roof, and through it the sunlight poured right down in a golden flood, as a glory sometimes does in ancient pictures. A tall dark woman, who must have been exquisitely beautiful in her youth, and even now retained considerable attractions; her eyes were large and lustrous, and her hair—never even in India had I seen hair more dark, or so luxuriant. It was not rolled tight at the back in a great pillow, as was then the fashion, or, indeed, confined in any way, but streamed down over her shoulders, and far below that place where it was the pleasure of our ancestresses to consider that their waists occurred. She cast upon us at first a glance haughty and almost defiant, but upon recognizing my companion, quenched her fiery looks.

"Stop here, my lad," whispered Mr. Long, laying his hand firmly upon my shoulder; "wait till she has gone away."

The woman saw the gesture, although she could not have heard the words. "I shall not bite the boy, Mr. Long," cried she with a shrill laugh; "however, I will make myself scarce." She took a few rapid steps to an opening on the right of the arcade, which led to the lawn and flower-garden, and was lost to us in a moment.

"I did not know there were any ladies at the Hall," said I.

My tutor did not answer, but walked on muttering to himself as if annoyed. I did not repeat the remark, for I was wondering within myself whether it could be this woman who had watched my sleep and knelt by me dagger in hand, according to my dream. She looked just the sort of female to drive such an instrument home, if she entertained that fancy—a Judith, equal to the slaying of any Holofernes, and far more of a slight built, overgrown Indian lad like me. There was certainly something uncanny about her, and I thought it very strange that Marmaduke had never spoken to me of her existence.

The arcade brought us out into a sunk garden, which was a rosary, on to which opened the tall windows of a noble-looking room. The walls, I could see, were lined with books, and on the numerous tables lay portfolios and volumes that gave promise of great store of plates. This was the library where Marmaduke had told me he passed his only happy hours at Fairburn. His uncle rarely so much as entered it, although he was not without some reputation for learning. In particular it was said that he was well acquainted with divinity, and could quote chapter and verse of the Bible against the parson. I have since had reason to believe that his talents in this way were greatly exaggerated. What he had ever read he doubtless recollected, if his memory served him as well in literary matters as when he had a grudge to pay; but I cannot think that he ever studied divinity. If he had any knowledge of the Bible at all it doubtless astonished all who

knew him, and they made the most of it.

A few steps further brought us to the north face of the mansion, in which was the principal entrance. Notwithstanding the broad sweep in front of the steps, and the avenue branching right and left, there did not seem space enough as contrasted with the vast mass of trees. The scene was like a clearing in a forest, where the openings are artificial, and the wood comes by nature rather than the converse, and even in that September day the air struck chill. The griffins that guarded the great stone steps had lost, the one an ear, and the other a wing, and the steps themselves were chipped and cracked. The grass which grew there unchecked at other seasons, had however been scraped out, because Sir Massingberd's guests were expected immediately for the shooting. None of them, however, had as yet arrived. The great bell which answered our summons clanged through the place as though there had been neither furniture nor people within it. The vast door was opened long before its echoes ceased, and indeed with marvellous quickness. When the man saw who we were, he looked vexed at having put himself in a flurry without necessity. He thought doubtless it was his master who demanded admittance, and had come post haste from the pantry, it being very dangerous to keep the baronet waiting. We were ushered into the great hall, and left there while the man went to seek Sir Massingberd. This huge apartment was evidently used as a sitting-room. There were couches and comfortable chairs in profusion, and a fine aroma of tobacco pervaded everything. The walls were ornamented with antlers and the heads of foxes; a number of fishing rods stood in one corner; in another lay some of those clubs that are used for exercising the muscles. On the table was an open pocket-book, stuck full of gorgeous artificial flies. Presently the man reappeared. Sir Massingberd would see us in his private sitting-room. We walked over polished oak, on which I could with difficulty keep my footing, down a long passage hung with grim portraits of the Heath family—"all dead and judged," as Marmaduke subsequently informed me—until we came to a short flight of steps on the left hand; these we descended, and following the footsteps of our conductor, in almost perfect darkness, came upon double doors, the inner of which, a baize one, admitted us into the presence of the proprietor. The baronet was in his shirt-sleeves, cleaning a double-barrelled gun.

"This is my pupil, Peter Meredith," said Mr. Long.

"*I* know the young gentleman," replied Sir Massingberd, curtly, and the horse-shoe upon his brow contracted as he spoke. "What makes you bring him here?"

"Well, Sir Massingberd," observed my tutor, forcing a laugh, "that is scarcely a hospitable observation. I bring this friend of your nephew's because what I have to propose concerns them both. It is good for these boys to be together, not to live solitary lives; and to keep them mewed up at home, as they are now, is a positive cruelty. Marmaduke is getting thinner and paler every day; and Meredith—"

"Do *you really* think so, parson?" asked the baronet eagerly, omitting for a moment to use the dirty-looking piece of oiled flannel which had previously monopolized his attention.

"I do, indeed, Sir Massingberd. I believe that if a doctor was to give his opinion about that boy—"

"The Heaths never send for doctors, or for clergymen," interrupted the baronet, with a sneer.

"And yet they have often needed advice, both spiritual and temporal," quoth my tutor, stoutly. "I say you should get a horse for your nephew's riding; it need be no trouble to you whatever. I am going over to Crittenden Fair next week myself to purchase one for my pupil; now, let me get one for your nephew also."

At first Sir Massingberd's countenance expressed nothing but angry impatience, but presently he began to rub the gun-barrel less and less violently. "And who is to find the money?" inquired he.

"I think that can be managed, Sir Massingberd. Mr. Clint will doubtless listen to such an application on behalf of Marmaduke; he will risk advancing a few pounds—"

"For thirty-five guineas one can get a very good pony," observed the baronet, reflectively.

"Or even for less," returned Mr. Long, drily; and then, to my excessive terror, he added in quite as loud a key, "He wants to keep the difference; that's his plan."

"And he means to do it, too," observed Sir Massingberd grimly. "No, you needn't apologize, parson, for your thinking aloud; you don't suppose I am going to do anything without being paid for it, do you? Then there's the keep of the animal. Now, what will Mr. Clint allow me for that, do you suppose? Oats and beans are very expensive, and you wouldn't have me feed my dear nephew's pony upon hay!"

Sir Massingberd was a formidable object at all times, but I really think he inspired more fear when he was pleased—when some wicked notion tickled him—than even when he was in wrath.

"I think, Sir Massingberd, the question of expense can be managed to your satisfaction," said my tutor, not a little overwhelmed by having thus involuntarily expressed his suspicion of the baronet; "and, as I have said, I will save you all trouble by selecting the horse myself."

"Certainly not, sir," exclaimed Sir Massingberd savagely; "I suffer no man to choose my horses for me."

"Very good," replied Mr. Long, biting his lip. "I have only to stipulate, then, that if your nephew gets the horse, he is to ride it. I shall have to make myself answerable for that much to Mr. Clint."

"Oh, he shall ride it," quoth the baronet, with a horrid imprecation; "you may take your oath of that. And by the by, since you are here, parson, I want to have some talk with you about that same fellow Clint, who has been behaving devilish ill to me, I think. You may go away, young gentleman, *you* may. You'll find your future riding companion—he has about as much notion of riding as old Grimjaw yonder—sulking in his own room, I dare say. Grimjaw, show the young gentleman up to Marmaduke's room."

At these words a dog of horrible aspect came out from under the very sofa on which I sat, and trotted off towards the door. He was the oldest and ugliest dog I ever beheld. He had only one eye, which was green; he had no teeth, and was therefore not to be feared as a combatant; but his aspect was loathsome and repulsive to the last degree. The people of Fairburn imagined this animal to be Sir Massingberd's familiar demon, and, until of late years, when the creature had become incapacitated by age from accompanying him much, the two were scarcely ever seen apart. Old as he was, however, the hideous Grimjaw had some instinct left, which, after the word "Marmaduke" had been once more shrieked at him, caused him painfully to precede me up the oak staircase, and along another gallery to a chamber door, at which he sat and whined. This was immediately opened by his young master, who, with a "Come in, Grim," was only giving sufficient space for the entrance of the dog, when I cried out, laughing: "What, have you no welcome for your friend? Like uncle, like nephew! What a pair of curmudgeons inhabit Fairburn Hall!"

The astonishment of Marmaduke at hearing my voice was excessive. Notwithstanding his pleasure, his first thought, as usual, was: "Did Sir Massingberd know?"

"Yes," said I coolly; "of course he knows. He received me down-stairs with his usual politeness. Mr. Long and he are conversing upon some private matters, so I came up here to see you. It is arranged that each of us is to have a horse, and that we are to go out riding together."

"A horse! Oh, impossible!" exclaimed Marmaduke, clapping his hands. "How did the good parson ever persuade my uncle? What *did* he give him?"

I could not help laughing at this naïve inquiry, which my friend had made in perfect seriousness. I told him all that had occurred, including our tutor's *vivâ-voce* soliloquy, at which Marmaduke cried "Heavens!" in terror.

"It is marvellous, notwithstanding, that my uncle should have consented," observed my companion, musing. "He told me, indeed, that I should be a great nuisance in the house this month, while his friends were down here shooting; but that he should have entered into an arrangement which gives me pleasure as well as gets rid of me, that seems so very strange."

"He has doubtless some base motive," returned I smiling: "let us console ourselves with that reflection. But what have we here? Water-colour paintings! Why have you never told me you were an artist?"

"I merely amuse myself with the paint-brush. I have had no lessons, of course, so that my perspective is quite Chinese."

"Nay, but I recognize almost all these scenes!"

"Well, you know, I have been nowhere else but at Fairburn, so that it is from thence I must take my subjects. The one you have there is taken from the bend in the stream beyond the Heronry."

"It is admirable," said I; and indeed it was so like the scene of my dream, that it gave me a shudder.

"Would you like to have it," replied Marmaduke carelessly. "You may take any that the portfolio contains. I only wish they were more worth your acceptance."

"Thank you," said I nervously. "I will certainly take this one, then;" and I rolled the sketch tightly up, and placed it in my pocket. "But here is a pretty face! Why, Master Marmaduke, you have your secrets, I see; you have never mentioned to me this young lady. What beautiful hair! The eyes, too, how glorious, and yet how tender! It is surely not the lady whom we just met in the ar —"

"Silence, sir!" cried Marmaduke, in a voice of thunder. His face was lurid with rage, and for the first time I remarked upon his forehead a faint reflection of the horse-shoe that made so terrible the brow of his uncle. "Do not speak of that wretched woman in the same breath with, with—" He did not complete the sentence, but added in his usual soft musical tones: "Pardon me, my friend; I am sorry to have been so hasty; but that picture is the portrait of my mother."

"It was stupid in me not to have known that at once," said I. "The likeness is most remarkable."

"But not the expression," returned he sadly. "I know that just now I looked like one of my own race. She was always an angel, even when she was upon earth." And the boy looked up with his hands clasped, as though he beheld her, through his tears, in heaven.

"Did you paint that from a picture, Marmaduke?"

"No, from memory. Sleeping or waking, I often see her sweet face."

I had evidently raised by my thoughtlessness a long train of melancholy thoughts in my companion. The situation was embarrassing, and I did not know how to escape from it. As often happens with well-intentioned but blundering persons, I made the most inopportune remark that

could be framed. Forgetting what I had heard of the infamous treatment which Mrs. Heath had received while under her brother-in-law's roof, I observed: "Your mother was once at Fairburn, was she not? That should at least make the Hall more endurable to you."

Again Marmaduke's handsome face was disfigured with concentrated passion. "Yes, she was here," returned he, speaking through his teeth. "For what she suffered alone, the place would be cursed. Coward, scoundrel! Why does God suffer such men to live?" It was terrible to see how like this young lad grew to the man he was execrating. He went on using such language as I could not have conceived him capable of employing.

"Marmaduke," said I, soothingly, "for Heaven's sake, be calm. Providence will one day reward this man; it is not for you to Curse him. Come, now that I pay you a visit for the first time, you should play the host, and show me over the mansion. Why, that queer old dog seems to understand what one says; he rises as though he were the châtelain, and kept the keys of Doubting Castle. He brought me here as true as a blind man's cur. I cannot say, however, that he is beautiful; he is hideous, weird."

"It would be strange, indeed, if he were like other dogs," returned Marmaduke gravely. "He is the sole living repository of a most frightful secret. If he could but speak, he could perhaps send a man to the gallows."

"What man?" exclaimed I. "Pray explain to me this mystery."

"I do not know what man," returned my companion solemnly; "I only conjecture. I will relate to you what is known of the matter, and you shall judge for yourself."

Marmaduke opened the door, to see that no one was in the passage without, and then seating himself close beside me, commenced as follows:—"My grandfather and the present baronet lived on bad terms with one another. For the last ten years of his life, Sir Wentworth and his eldest son never met—but once—if they met at all. He had been very profligate and extravagant in his young days; but in his old age he grew miserly. When my father saw him last, it was in a small house in Bedford Place, in London, where he lived in a couple of ill-furnished rooms, and without a servant. Grimjaw and he slept there alone, but a charwoman came in every morning for a few hours. Sir Wentworth then gave it as his reason for this kind of life, that he was retrenching, in order to leave some suitable provision for his second son. 'Look here, Gilbert,' said he upon one occasion to my father; 'I have begun to lay by for you already; and he showed him a quantity of bank-notes, amounting to several thousand pounds. He had never been an affectionate parent, or exhibited any self-denial for the benefit of his sons; and my father did not believe him. He thanked him, of course; but he came away without any idea that he would be really better off at Sir Wentworth's death. This was fortunate for him, for he never received a farthing; but I am not so certain as he was that the baronet did not intend to do what he promised. While the old man was living in this sordid fashion, his son Massingberd was passing his time very gaily at court. He played high, and there were few who could beat him with the cards—but there were some. It is no use being a good player, you see, unless you are the best; you only win from those whom you can beat, to lose it in your turn to the man who can beat you. Thus it was with my uncle, who played, as I say, high with everybody, but highest, as is often the case, with his superiors in skill. However, he paid his debts of honour with money raised at an enormous sacrifice. He lived well, but it was upon his future prospects. At last, being harder pressed than usual, he wrote to his father—the first letter he had penned to him for years—and demanded pecuniary help.

"Sir Wentworth wrote back a cynical, harsh reply, a copy of which I have seen—for all these details came out in the course of the inquest. He bade his son come to call upon him, and judge from his style of living whether he was in a condition to comply with his request. He appointed a day and an hour—about five o'clock. It was in December, and quite dark of course by that time. At six o'clock on the appointed day, Sir Massingberd—for he had got his title by that time, whether he knew it or not—called at the police-station near Bedford Place, and gave information that the house which his father occupied was shut up, and that he could not obtain admittance, although he had arrived there by appointment. The house was always shut up they told him, although not untenanted; they could not explain why his summons had not been answered. A couple of policemen accompanied him to break open the door. While they were thus engaged, a dog howled at them from inside. My uncle had made no mention of having heard this before. There was only one lock to force, the door being neither bolted nor chained, and they soon got in. The only two furnished rooms in the house opened upon the hall. In the sleeping room they found my grandfather dressed, but lying on the bed quite dead—suffocated, as the surgeons subsequently averred. In the sitting-room, with which it communicated, they found this dog here, crouching on the top of the mantel-piece, which was very lofty. How he got there, nobody could tell; if he leaped thither, even from a chair, it must have been in an agony of terror. He was whining pitifully when they entered; but upon seeing my uncle, he ceased to whimper, and absolutely seemed to shrink into himself with fear. Poor Grimjaw could give no witness at the inquest, however; so the jury returned an open verdict. It was probable that Sir Wentworth had had a fit of apoplexy, which carried him off."

"Well," said I, "and is not that probable enough?"

"Yes; but it could not have carried off the bank-notes—which were all gone—-likewise. Could it Grimjaw?"

Thus appealed to, the ancient dog set up a quavering howl, which might easily have been

mistaken for the cry of an accusing spirit.

"Good Heavens! this is too horrible," cried I. "Be careful, Marmaduke, that you do not mention this to others. It is a frightful slander."

"Slander!" returned my companion calmly. "It is you who slander, if you suspect anybody. I have only told you what everybody knew at the time the mur...—well, then, when Sir Wentworth had his fit. The thing strikes you as it does me, that is all."

"But is it not inconceivable," urged I, "if the crime was committed by the person we are thinking of, that he should retain this dumb witness of his atrocity, that he should let it live, far less should keep it in his private sitting-room—"

"No!" interrupted Marmaduke firmly. "On the contrary, it strengthens my suspicions. You do not know the man as I do. It gives him gratification to subdue even a dog. This creature has no love for my uncle; but its excessive terror of him, which endured for months, nay, years, has gradually worn off. He obeys him now; whereas, as I have been told, it was long before it could do anything but shiver at the sound of his voice. After dinner, when I have been sitting with Sir Massingberd alone, he will sometimes give the dog a biscuit, saying with an awful smile: "Here, Grimjaw; you and I know something that nobody else knows; don't we?"

"Great Heavens!" cried I in horror; "and what does he do that for?"

"Because," replied Marmaduke bitterly, "he loves to see me tremble."

CHAPTER V.

THE STATE BEDROOM.

Marmaduke had scarcely concluded his narration, when steps were heard in the passage. I daresay I turned pale at the thought of seeing the man of whom I had just heard such frightful things, for my companion observed, as if to reassure me, "It is only Mr. Long."

"Are you quite sure?" said I.

Marmaduke smiled sadly.

"Do you think that I do not know my uncle's step? I should recognize it amongst a score of others. If he overtook me in a crowded street, I should feel that he was coming and shudder as he passed beside me...—Pray, come in, sir."

"Well," cried my tutor, entering, radiant with, his good news, "no more moping at home, my lads; you are to be henceforth cavaliers—you are to scour the country. Boot and saddle! boot and saddle! Your uncle will not trust me to get you a steed, Marmaduke; there are none good enough for you, it seems, at Crittenden; he is going to send to London for an animal worthy of you. But never mind, Peter; you shall have the best mount that can be got in Midshire, and we will pit the country nag against the town."

My tutor's voice revived me like a cordial: after the morbid horrors I had been listening to, his cheery talk was inexpressibly grateful, as the dawn and ordinary sounds of waking life are welcome to one who has suffered from a nightmare.

"I was just about to show Meredith the Hall," said Marmaduke.

"Well it is time that we should be at our work, like good boys," observed Mr. Long, consulting his watch; "but still, for one morning, it does not matter, if you would like to stay, Peter."

"I would rather go home, sir," cried I, with involuntary eagerness. I was sorry the next moment, even before I saw the pained expression of my young companion.

"He has had enough of Fairburn Hall already," said he, bitterly. Then his face softened sadly, as though he would have said: "Am I not, therefore, to be pitied, who pass every day and night under this accursed roof?"

"Come," exclaimed Mr. Long, gaily, "I do not believe, Master Meredith, in this new-born devotion to your books. Let us go over the house first. I will accompany you as cicerone, for I once knew every hole and corner of it—a great deal better, I will venture to affirm, than the heir himself here." With these words he led the way into the passage.

"Every chamber on this floor is the facsimile of its neighbour," said Marmaduke: "since you have seen mine, you have seen all—an immense bed, a piece of carpet islanded amid a black sea of oak, a cupboard or two large enough to live in, and shepherdesses, with swains in ruffles, occupying the walls." There was, indeed, no appreciable difference in any of the rooms, except with regard to their aspect.

"When I first came to Fairburn, I slept here," continued Marmaduke, as we entered an apartment looking to the north, "and had that long illness, which you doubtless remember, sir. Heavens, what dreams I have had in this room! I have seen people standing by my bedside at night as

clearly as I see you now. They called me delirious, but I believe I was stark mad."

"I remember it well," said Mr. Long, "although I did not recollect that you occupied this room. How was it that you came to change your quarters?"

"Oh, the doctor recommended the removal very strongly. Sir Massingberd said it was all nonsense about the look-out from my window, and that the east was as bad as the north for a boy in a fever; but he was obliged to give way. And I certainly benefited by the change. The Park is a much more cheerful sight than that forest of firs, and one is glad to see the sun, even when one cannot get out of doors. At all events, I had no such evil dreams."

"Yet this is what always used to be held the state-chamber," replied my tutor. "Charles I. occupied that bed while he was yet king; and before your ancestor, Sir Hugh, turned Puritan—a part he was very unfitted to play—it is said he used to swear through his nose. Peter the Great, too, is said to have passed a night here. Your dreams, therefore, should have been historical and noteworthy. I forget which of these smiling Phyllises is so complaisant as to make way when you would leave the room without using the door."

Two full-length female portraits were painted in panel, one on either side of the huge chimney-piece; a circlet of roses carved in oak surrounded each by way of frame. Mr. Long advanced towards the one on the right, and touched the bottom rose; it did not move. He went to the other, and did likewise; the rose revolved in his fingers, and presently, with a creak and a groan, the whole picture slid sideways over the wall, disclosing a narrow flight of wooden stairs.

"That is charming," cried I. "That is the 'Mysteries of Udolpho' realized. Where does it lead to, Marmaduke?" There was no answer. Mr. Long and I looked round simultaneously. The lad was ghastly pale. He stared into the dusty, gaping aperture, as though it had been a grave's mouth.

"I do not know," he gasped with difficulty.

"Not know?" cried my tutor. "Do you mean to say that you have never been told of Jacob's Ladder? The foot of it is in the third bookcase on the left of the library door; the spring is somewhere in the index to "Josephus." It is evident you never attempted to take down that interesting work, which in this case is solid wood. The idea of your not knowing that! And yet Sir Massingberd is so reticent that, with the exception of Gilmore, the butler, I dare say nobody *does* know it now. It is twenty years ago since I made Phyllis move aside, to the astonishment of Mr. Clint, who came down here on business with poor Sir Wentworth. I dare say nobody has moved her since."

"Yes, yes," cried Marmaduke, passionately; "my uncle has moved her. Those visions were not dreams. I see it all now. He wanted to frighten me to death, or to make me mad. When I knew the door was fast locked, he would come and stand by my bedside, and stare at me. Cruel, cruel coward!"

"Hush, hush, Marmaduke; this is monstrous—this is impossible!" cried Mr. Long, endeavouring to pacify the boy, who was rocking himself to and fro in an agony of distress and rage. "See how you terrify Peter! Be calm, for Heaven's sake! Your uncle will hear you presently, and you know how he hates to be disturbed."

At the mention of his uncle, Marmaduke subdued his cries by a great effort, but he still sobbed and panted, as if for breath.

"Oh," moaned he, "consider how I came hither from my dead mother's arms to this man's house—my only living relative, my father's brother—and was taken ill here, a mere child; then this wretch, this demon, my host, my...—Oh, Mr. Long, could you conceive it even of a Heath? He came up to my lonely room by that secret way, and stood without speaking by my pillow, while I lay speechless, powerless, imagining myself to be out of my mind!"

"I do remember now," said my tutor, gravely, "how you harped upon that theme of your evil dreams, and how the doctor thought you were in reality losing your reason. Let us be thankful, however, that you were preserved from so sad a fate; you are no longer a child now; Sir Massingberd can frighten you no more, even if he had the wish. It was a wicked, hateful act, whatever was the motive. But let us forget it. In a few years you will be of age; then you will leave the Hall; and in the meantime your uncle will annoy you no more. It will be his interest to make a friend of you. Even now, you see, he provides you with the means of enjoyment. You will ride out with your friend whenever you please; and I will take measures so that you shall be more with us at the rectory, and less at this melancholy place, which is totally unfit for you. Mr. Clint shall be spoken with, if necessary. Yes, yes," added Mr. Long, reversing the rose, and thereby replacing the shepherdess, but quite unaware that he was still speaking aloud, "there must be a limit to the power of such a guardian; the Chancellor shall interfere, and Sir Massingberd be taught—"

"Nay, sir," cried Marmaduke in turn; "for Heaven's sake, let no complaint be made against my uncle upon my account; perhaps, as you say, I may now meet with better treatment. I will be patient. Say nothing of this, I pray you, Meredith. Mr. Long, you know—"

"Yes, I know all," interrupted my tutor, with excitement. "You have a friend in me, Marmaduke, remember, who will stick by you. I have shut my eyes and my ears long enough, and perhaps too long. If things get worse with you, my lad, do not forget that you have a home at the rectory. Once there, you will not return to this house again. I will give evidence myself; I will—"

"Thank you, thank you," replied Marmaduke, hurriedly. "All will now be well, doubtless; but my uncle will wonder at your long delay—he will suspect something. I think it will be better if you left."

He led the way down the great staircase, throwing an involuntary glance over his shoulder, as we crossed the mouth of the dark passage leading to the baronet's room. "This is a wretched welcome, Meredith; some day, perhaps, I may take your hand at this Hall door under different circumstances. Good-by, good-by."

And so we parted, between the two grim griffins.

"Peter," said my tutor, gravely, as we went our way, "whatever you may think of what has passed to-day, say nothing. I am not so ignorant of the wrongs of that poor boy as I appear to be; but there is nothing for it but patience."

CHAPTER VI.

HEAD OVER HEELS.

I obeyed my tutor and my friend in keeping all I knew regarding Sir Massingberd to myself; but the knowledge weighed heavily upon my spirits for several days. Soon, however, my mind recovered its youthful elasticity. I began to think that Marmaduke's morbid disposition had perhaps exaggerated matters; that the baronet was not so black as was painted; that my friend would soon be his own master; and, in short, I laid all that flattering unction to my soul which is so abundant in the case of the misfortunes of others, and so difficult to be procured when the calamity is our own. Moreover, in a few days I was in possession of an excellent horse, and there is nothing more antagonistic to melancholy—especially when it is vicarious—than a good gallop. Nay, more, after a little, Marmaduke had a horse also. He came to call for me, that we should go out for a ride together the first day, and I shall not easily forget it. How handsome and happy he looked! As if the high-conditioned animal he bestrode had imparted to him some of his own fire and freedom, he wore scarcely any trace of his habitual depression. "This is our 4th of July," said he gaily; "my day of independence, as the rebels say!"

It happened to be his birthday also, he was seventeen, so that all things conspired to make it a gala-day. My tutor, who was a judge of horseflesh, examined the new steed with great attention. "He is superb," said he, "and you sit him, Marmaduke, considering your scanty experience, like a young centaur. No one could imagine that your equestrianism had been heretofore limited to a keeper's pony; and, moreover, Oliver's ponies are not apt to be very high-couraged. But what a tight curb has this Bucephalus! He will not give you much trouble to hold him. So-ho, so-ho, my nag! Are you a hypocrite, then, that you need be so alarmed at being inspected?" The sleek bay plunged and curveted, so that my own sober brown began to dance in rivalry. "By the by," continued Mr. Long, as though a sudden thought had struck him, "I have occasion to visit Mr. Jervis of the farm at Staplehurst some day this week; if it is the same to you, let us go there to-day; it will be an object for your ride, while I shall have the pleasure of your company."

In a few minutes, my tutor's old white mare was brought round to the Rectory door by the gardener, who was groom and butler also, and we set out together at a foot's pace. Mr. Long never took his eyes off the bay, and therefore did not observe Sir Massingberd, who, with his huge arms resting on a gate by the roadside, watched us pass with a grim smile. "Well, parson," exclaimed he—and at the sound of his voice I perceived my tutor start in his saddle—"what think you of the little Londoner?"

"I cannot say at present, Sir Massingberd," returned my tutor with deliberation. "He is a beauty to look at; and if he has no vice, is a bargain at five-and-thirty pounds."

"Vice! Why should he have vice, man? A child might ride him for that matter. I got him with the best of characters. But you'll never teach those lads to ride if you are always at their stirrup-leather, like this. Let them ride alone, and race together. Don't treat them like a brace of mollycoddles. Why, at their age, I could have backed any horse in Christendom without a saddle. I wonder you don't give Miss Marmaduke a leading-rein."

The colour, which had faded from the lad's cheeks, returned to them again at this sneer; but Mr. Long only remarked: "If you had had a leading-rein yourself, Sir Massingberd, at seventeen, it would have been a great deal better for you," and rode on without the least consciousness, as I believe, of having made any such observation.

When we had advanced about a mile, and had left the village quite behind us, my tutor expressed a wish to change horses with Marmaduke.

"I want to try his paces," said he; and certainly, if he had been a horse-breaker by profession, he could not have taken more pains with the animal. He trotted, he cantered, he galloped; he took him into a field, and over some fences; he forced him by a wind-mill in full work; and, in short, he left no means untried to test his temper. In the end, he expressed himself highly satisfied. "Really," said he, "Sir Massingberd has got you a first-rate steed, with plenty of courage, yet without vice; he makes me quite dissatisfied with my poor old mare."

The next day, and the next, we rode again without my tutor; and on the fourth day it was agreed that we should take an expedition as far as Crittenden, some ten miles away, where Mr. Long wished us to do some commissions for him. By this time, Marmaduke was quite accustomed to his recent acquisition; enjoyed the exercise greatly; and since Sir Massingberd was much engaged with his guests, passed altogether more agreeable days. On the afternoon in question, the Hall party were out shooting, and had taken with them all the stable domestics except a raw lad who scarcely knew how to saddle a horse.

"I cannot think what is the matter this afternoon with 'Panther'" (we so called his skittish animal), exclaimed Marmaduke, as he rode up to the Rectory door. "I could scarcely get him to start from the yard, and he came here mostly upon his hind-legs. Is there anything wrong with his girths, think you? Ned did not know where to lay his hands on anything, and my uncle has taken William with him to 'mark.'"

"Nay," said I, "I see nothing the matter. We will soon take off his superfluous energy over Crittenden Common."

Long, however, before we reached that spot, we had had galloping enough and to spare. Twice had Panther fairly taken the bit between his teeth (as the romance-writers term it, and Heaven forbid that a mere sportsman should correct them), and sped along the hard high-road at racing pace; and twice had Marmaduke, by patience and hard pulling, recovered the mastery, albeit with split gloves and blistered hands. It was not enjoyment to ride in this fashion, of course, and had it not been for the commissions which had been entrusted to us, it is probable that we should have returned home. It puzzled us beyond measure to account for the change of conduct in the bay. The difference was as decided as that between a high-spirited child who requires, as we say, "careful treatment," and a vicious dwarf: heretofore he had been frisky, now he was positively fiendish. He shied and started, not only at every object on the roadside, but before he arrived at them. At the end of the high table-land which is called Crittenden Common, and descends into the quiet little market-town of the same name, there really was something to shy at. A gipsy encampment, with fire and caldron, and tethered donkey, which had been concealed in a hollow, came suddenly into view as we cantered by; an old crone, with a yellow handkerchief in lieu of a bonnet, and shading her beady eyes with her hand, watched with malicious enjoyment the struggle between man and horse which her own appearance had gone far to excite. In a very few moments, Marmaduke's already overtaxed muscles gave way, and the bay, maddened with resistance, and released from all control, rushed at headlong speed down the steep chalk-road that led by many a turn and zigzag into Crittenden. It was frightful to watch from the summit of this tamed precipice—this cliff compelled into a road—the descent of that doomed pair. No mule could be surer footed than was Panther, but the laws of gravitation had nevertheless to be obeyed. At the second turning, the bay, after one vain effort to follow the winding of the road, pitched, head first, down the grassy wall which everywhere separated the zigzags from one another; over and over rolled horse and rider to the hard road below, and there lay, their horrible and abnormal movements exchanged for a stony quiet. I jumped off my horse, and ran down the two steep slopes, which at another time I should have descended hand over hand. Yet on my way I had time to think with what sorrow this news would be received at Fairburn Rectory, with what joy at the Hall! Marmaduke's hand still held the rein, which I disentangled from it with feverish haste, lest that four-footed fiend, which snorted yet through its fiery nostrils, and glared defiance from its glazing eyes, should arise and drag the dear lad's corpse among the cruel stones. After what I had seen of his fall, I had scarcely a hope that he was alive. There was blood at his mouth, blood at his ears, blood everywhere upon the white and dazzling road. "Marmaduke, Marmaduke," cried I, "speak, speak, if it be but a single word! Great Heaven, he is dead!"

"Dead! no, not he," answered a hoarse, cracked voice at my ear. "He'll live to do a power of mischief yet to woman and man. The devil would never suffer a Heath of Fairburn to die at his age."

"Woman," cried I, for it was the old gipsy crone, who had somehow transported herself to the spot with incredible speed, "for God's sake, go for help! There is a house yonder among those trees."

"And why should I stir a foot," replied she fiercely, "for the child of a race that has ever treated me and mine as though we were dogs?"

"Because," said I, at a venture, "you have children yourself."

"You are right," exclaimed she, clapping her skinny hands together, and seating herself calmly on the turf. "It is well that you have mentioned my kith and kin. One lad is across the seas, and will never see the green lanes and breezy commons of England more; another lies caged in yonder jail—and both for taking the wild creatures of the earth and air, to which such men as Massingberd Heath lay claim; while my little sister—ah, my Sinnamenta, my fair pearl!—may the lightning strike him in his wickedest hour! nay, let him perish, inch by inch, within reach of the aid that shall never come, ere the God of the Poor takes him into his hand!—Boy, you may talk to that flintstone, and it will rise up and get you help for that lad there—bonny as he is, and the bonnier the worse for them he sets his wilful eyes on—before you get this hand to wag a finger for him."

"Woman," said I, despairingly, "if you hate Massingberd Heath, and want to do him the worst service that lies in your power, flee, flee to that house, and bid them save this boy's life, which alone stands between his beggared uncle and untold riches."

"Is it so?" cried the old woman, rising up with an agility for which no one would have given her credit, and looking at me with furious eyes. "Is it indeed so, boy?"

"Yes, woman, upon my soul!"

Revenge accomplished what pity had failed to work. In an instant, she was with me down by Marmaduke's side; from her pocket she produced a spirit-flask in a leathern case, and applied it to his lips: after a painful attempt to swallow, he succeeded; his eyelids began tremulously to move, and the colour to return to his pallid lips.

"Keep his head up," cried she, "and give him another drop of this, if assistance does not arrive within five minutes."

Before she had finished speaking, she had lifted the latch of the gate that opened from the road into the grounds of the house in question, and in another instant I was alone—alone with what I believed to be a dying man, and surrounded with the blood that had flowed in a mingled stream from him and the dead horse, for Panther had ceased to move—alone with recollections and anticipations scarcely less horrible than the visible scene; and yet, so strangely constituted is the human mind, that I could not forbear to glance with some sort of curiosity at the flask the gipsy had left with me, and to wonder exceedingly that its worn and tarnished top of silver bore upon it a fac-simile of one of those identical griffins which guarded each side of the broad stone steps that led to Fairburn Hall.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE DOVECOT.

After an interval, which doubtless appeared much longer than it really was, there issued from the gate a groom and butler, bearing between them a small sofa, and accompanied by a young and lovely girl. The scene that presented itself was enough to shock persons even of strong nerves, and I hastily exclaimed, "The young lady had better not see this." But she came on nevertheless.

"I am not afraid of blood," said she, "and perhaps I may be of use." Then she directed her servants how to handle the wounded man; and when he was gently lifted on to the couch, she applied a handkerchief dipped in Eau-de-Cologne to his forehead, and walked by his side regulating the pace of his bearers, like some Miss Nightingale of a generation and a half ago. "Let him be placed in your master's room, James: and then take my pony, Thomas, and ride as fast as you can for Dr. Sitwell; and as you come back—but think of nothing but bringing the doctor first—call at the nursery-garden for your master; he said he should go there about those roses." And some other directions she gave, as the men moved on with their ghastly burden, like one who knew the value of time. Notwithstanding this presence of mind, her anxious eyes betrayed that she was not wanting in sensibility, and with every groan which the motion of the fitter extracted from the sufferer, her own lip quivered. I dare say that I saw nothing of her exceeding beauty at that dreadful time; but while I write of Lucy Gerard now, a vision of surpassing loveliness perforce presents itself before me. A tall, lithe, graceful form; a face, nay, rather a soft, sad smile overspreading and pervading every feature—a smile that I never saw surpassed save on her own fair countenance after Love had taken her sweet soul captive—a smile the reflex of all good and kindly thoughts that dwelt within. There are some so great and noble that they smile, where other good folks can only weep and wail; the true sympathizer with human griefs wears no lugubrious aspect; the angels smile when they weep over human wretchedness—they know that it is only for a little while, for that the gates of heaven are standing open very, very near; and some such knowledge, or happy faith, seems to influence the best of mortals, or how should they go smiling through this world?

So Marmaduke was carried along the gravel-drive, and across a little flower-studded lawn, to the room in Mr. Gerard's house which was called the master's room, it being half a sleeping-chamber, and half a library, which Lucy's father used both night and day. This was so evident from the appearance of the place, that when I had, with James' help, put Marmaduke to bed there, where he lay breathing heavily, but quite unconscious, I went to the young lady of the house, and expressed my apprehension that my poor friend, being in that apartment, would cause additional inconvenience in the household.

"I understand," said I, "that it is Mr. Gerard's room."

"Ah, sir," said she, with a glance of pride more becoming, if that were possible, than even her ordinary modest look, "you do not know my father. When I say that it will give him the greatest pleasure to find that his favourite room has been of service to your friend, I use a conventional phrase which literally expresses what he will feel Please to forget that there is anybody in this house but yourselves; it is only right that sickness should be considered before health; though, alas! every room to those who are ill is but an hospital. This little drawing-room, which your glance tells me you think pretty, with its conservatory and fountain, and the rest, my poor young sister was very, very weary of before she died, on yonder sofa, after fourteen months of the gay prison."

Her voice trembled as she spoke, and I thought I detected in it that shade of bitterness with

which some affectionate persons speak of the sufferings of those they love, as though they would almost arraign that Providence for unnecessary harshness, which might inflict any misery upon, themselves without evoking one impatient thought.

"Then you are left all alone here, Miss Gerard. With such a sad reminiscence, this spot must—"

"Alone!" interrupted she, with astonishment. "What! when I have my father? See, he is coming through the shrubbery now, and Dr. Sitwell with him. Let us meet them. How glad I am that he has lost no time."

It was easy to distinguish the doctor, with his cane, his ruffles, and stiff professional appearance, a little impaired, however, by hot haste; moreover, his companion indicated him with his finger as we rapidly approached one another, exclaiming, "This is your man, young gentleman; don't waste one word on me at present."

So, rapidly detailing what had happened as we went, I took the man of physic to Marmaduke's bedside. As we entered the room, and first caught sight of his pale features distorted with pain, my companion stood for an instant aghast. "Great Heaven!" murmured he, "I thought the horse had trodden upon the poor lad's forehead; but now, I see it is an old scar."

"No," returned I; "it is not a scar; it is only a mark which in moments of pain or anger comes out more distinctly than at other times. All the Heath family have it. This is Mr. Marmaduke Heath, the nephew of Sir Massingberd."

"Indeed—indeed, sir!" exclaimed the doctor with an accession of sympathy. "Dear me, how sad! What a fine property to risk losing at his time of life. But the eye, you see, gives us hope; the brain has suffered but slightly. He has not been sick, you say—not been sick; he has not been sick, sir."

It was the worthy doctor's habit to reiterate his last sentence in an arrogant manner, as though he had been contradicted on a matter of fact, while in reality his mind was entirely occupied by quite other thoughts. Thus, at the present speaking, he was engaged in manipulating Marmaduke's head, and examining his ribs and limbs with the greatest attention. I waited for his verdict in anxious silence, and presently it was delivered. "It is my opinion, sir, that the young man will live to be a baronet."

Life and Death, the immortalities of Heaven and Hell, were matters that had but small space in Doctor Sitwell's mind compared to this all-important futurity; he was accustomed to *them* in connection with the merest paupers and persons of no sort of consequence; but it was not every day in the week that a gentleman of Marmaduke's condition was pitched on his head within the Crittenden doctor's professional orbit.

"Mr. Marmaduke Heath must be kept perfectly quiet; he must not be moved from hence upon any consideration—it may be, for weeks. What science can do, through my humble agency, shall be done for the young gentleman; but rest and quiet are essential. Sir Massingberd should be sent for instantly; the responsibility upon my shoulders would otherwise be too great. He will doubtless yearn to be by the bedside of his beloved nephew. You had better arrange with Mr. Gerard for this being done, as I have my round to make, which to-day is all-important. The Hon. Mrs. Flinthert—widow of the late admiral, you know—she requires constant supervision; nature has to be supported; but for brandy, she must have sunk before this. Then Mr. Broadacres, who lives Fairburn way—by the by, that is a very curious case. However, my post is here, of course, until my assistant arrives, who will remain in my absence. You may leave your friend now without the least anxiety. When he awakes to consciousness, you shall be sent for—you shall be sent for, sir."

Upon this, I returned to the drawing-room to give a much more cheerful report of the patient's case than I had ventured to anticipate. I found our host issuing orders for his comfort and attendance, as though he had quite made up his mind to make him his guest for a lengthened period. A noble-looking gentleman he was, as like his daughter as an old man can be to a young girl. Harvey Gerard's face was wrinkled neither by years nor care, though marked here and there with those deep lines which indicate the Thinker—one whom the gods have placed above the drudgery of life, with a disposition to philosophize—a man among men rather than of them, who stands apart from the high-road somewhere half-way up the hill of Fortune, and watches the toilers above and below with a quiet but not cynical smile. "The news you bring me of our patient, Mr. Meredith," said he, "is most welcome; but I think we should still lose no time in communicating with his friends."

"That is also the opinion of Dr. Sitwell, sir; he, too, recommends that my poor friend's nearest relative should be sent for; but in circumstances of this kind, it would be wrong not to say at once that that relative and the invalid here are on the worst of terms, and that his coming would most certainly aggravate any bad symptoms, and retard his cure."

"I am sorry to hear," returned Mr. Gerard, gravely, "that the young gentleman is not on good terms with his own flesh and blood; that is a bad sign."

"However that maybe, sir, generally," replied I, with warmth, "it is not so in this instance. Mr. Long, the rector of Fairburn, and tutor to my friend, will certify to his being a most well-conducted and excellent youth. His uncle, however, Sir Massingberd Heath—"

"I will not have that person under my roof," interrupted Mr. Gerard, "under any circumstances

whatsoever." This he said without the least trace of irritation, but with a firmness and decision which left me nothing to apprehend upon Marmaduke's account. Then turning to his daughter, as if in explanation, he added, "The man I speak of, my love, is a wicked ruffian—worse than any poor fellow who has ever dangled yonder outside of Crittenden jail."

Miss Gerard did not answer except by a look of gentle remonstrance, which seemed to me to murmur, "But, dear papa, for all we know, this gentleman may be a friend of his."

I hastened, therefore, to observe with energy, that Mr. Gerard's view of the baronet's character was a perfectly just one, as far as I knew, or, if anything, rather lenient. I recommended that Mr. Long should be apprised of what had happened, and that he should give Sir Massingberd to understand that while his nephew was receiving every attention at the Dovecot—for so I had learned the house was called—its doors were immutably closed against himself. It was not a pleasant task to impose upon the good rector, but it was a necessary one; for, independently of Mr. Gerard's determination, I felt it was absolutely essential to Marmaduke's life that his uncle should be kept away from his bedside. If in health his presence terrified him, how much worse would it be for him in his prostrate and perilous condition! It was arranged, too, that I should remain to look after my sick friend, and the messenger was instructed to bring back with him all that we required from the Rectory and the Hall. Mr. Long arrived at the Dovecot late that same afternoon, in a state of great anxiety. He had come away almost on the instant after receiving the news of Marmaduke's mis-chance, and without seeing Sir Massingberd, who had not yet returned from shooting; but he had left a letter for him, explaining the circumstances as well as he could. "My only fear," said he, after visiting his pupil, who still lay in a lethargic slumber, "is that he will come here immediately, and insist on seeing his nephew—a desire that would appear to be natural enough to persons who are unacquainted with the circumstances."

"Nay," said I; "but surely he cannot do this in the face of Mr. Gerard's prohibition."

"Ah, my boy, you do not know Sir Massingberd yet," observed my tutor, gravely; "he will come where and when he will."

"Nay," returned I; "but neither do you know Mr. Harvey Gerard. From what I have seen of that gentleman, he understands how to say 'No,' and to suit to the word the action. When the strong man armed keepeth his house, his goods, including his sick guest, are in peace."

"But where a stronger than he cometh," added the rector, shaking his head, "what then?"

"We shall see," said I, "what will happen. It is plain, at all events, that our host is well aware of the sort of man with whom he has to deal. Mr. Gerard is a most pleasant person, and his daughter is charming beyond measure: they are far the most interesting people I have yet seen about Fairburn. How is it I have never heard any mention of them?"

"The Gerards have always lived a very retired life," returned my tutor. "The old gentleman entertains, it is said, some strange opinions. In fact, I have never met them myself but once, and that on some public occasion; so you must introduce me, Peter."

I had been watching for Mr. Long at the entrance-gate, and taken him straight into Marmaduke's room upon his arrival, so that he had seen neither our host nor hostess; and I thought it strange that my tutor did not speak of them with more enthusiasm, after their great kindness to Marmaduke; something evidently a little chilled his feelings towards them. When he and Mr. Gerard met, I thought there was more cordiality upon the part of the latter than of the former; the expression of Mr. Long's gratitude was earnest, but not genial. His admiration of Miss Lucy, although not to be concealed, was mitigated, as it seemed, by some sort of compassion; he regarded her with a shade of sadness. Boy as I was, it was evident to me that some antagonism existed between my host—for whom I naturally entertained most kindly feelings—and my respected tutor; and this troubled me more than I should have liked to say.

Miss Lucy presently left the drawing-room, and then I was continually appealed to by one or the other, on various trifling matters, as though they found a third party a relief to their conversation. At last Mr. Long requested me to narrate particularly the circumstances of Marmaduke's accident, and I did so, down to the period when I found him bleeding on the road.

"Well," observed my tutor, "I am totally at a loss to account for poor Panther's behaviour. I confess, upon the first day I saw him, I did not like the look of his eye: you remember, Peter, that I made Marmaduke exchange horses with me, and endeavoured, by every means in my power, to find out the peculiarities of the animal. I wish Sir Massingberd had permitted me to choose a horse for his nephew myself, when I bought your honest brown."

"Sir Massingberd selected his nephew's horse himself, did he?" inquired Mr. Gerard, carelessly.

"Yes," replied my tutor; "he sent for him from town a few weeks ago. He was a mettlesome frisky creature, it is true; but his curb was a very powerful one, and seemed quite sufficient to subdue him."

"Does Sir Massingberd himself ride when he is in the field?" observed our host. "He must be a great weight for a shooting pony."

"Well, if you had asked me yesterday, I should have said he almost never rides; but it so happens that he did take the keeper's nag with him this morning. His great stables are all empty now, for, as probably you are aware, things are not kept up as they used to be at the Hall. Old Dobbin is

the only representative of the magnificent stud that was once maintained there, now that Panther is dead. By the by, what has been done with him?"

"The carcass has been taken into the town," said Mr. Gerard. "He must have been a fine creature."

"His mouth, however, was of iron," said I. "Poor Marmaduke had no control over him whatever, at last; he had almost pulled his arms off."

"Notwithstanding the powerful bit?" observed Mr. Gerard.

"Yes," replied my tutor; "the bit was not only powerful, I should have almost called it cruel; but Sir Massingberd is a very good judge of all things belonging to a horse, and seems to have known that, at all events, no less was required. It was a town-made article, and came down from London with the animal."

"Ah, indeed," remarked Mr. Gerard. "But you have never told us, Mr. Meredith, how you managed to give the alarm here, without leaving your poor friend."

I am ashamed to say I had never given the old gipsy crone a thought from the moment that help arrived, although it was of her sending.

"The very woman whose appearance frightened the horse, repaired, as far as she could accomplish it, that mischief. She left in my hands, too, this fine old case-bottle, of which I should be sorry to rob her; and very curious is it that it has the Heath griffin, or some crest very like that, upon its stopper."

"It is the very crest," said the rector. "I am quite sure of that, although it is long since it last saw plate-powder. It is but too likely that the dark lady came wrongfully by it."

"Let us not be hasty to impute crime," observed Mr. Gerard, gravely. "This is a shooting-flask carried about the person; and gipsies are rarely pickpockets. When the owner is at home, it lies in someplace of safety; and gipsies are not burglars."

"Ably reasoned," observed Mr. Long. "It may, however, have been a case of 'findings, keepings,' as the school-boys say. I should think the Cingari claimed for themselves all flotsam and jetsam."

"It is too heavy, and has too much bulk, not to have been missed by him who carried it as soon as it fell," continued Mr. Gerard, taking up the flask. "It has but very little spirit left in it—see—and yet how—"

Here the butler entered somewhat hurriedly, and was about to speak, when a figure brushed by him, and set him aside. The daylight was beginning to wane; but it was impossible to mistake that herculean form, and its irresistible motion, even if I had not heard the harsh decisive voice of Sir Massingberd saying, "By your leave, sirrah; but in this good company I will announce *myself*!"

CHAPTER VIII.

MEETING HIS MATCH.

Sir Massingberd's unlooked-for entrance into the drawing-room at the Dovecot had a result that must seem almost farcical to those who read it, but which to me, who dwelt among big trembling vassals, and had learned, day by day, to fear and hate him more and more, had nothing in it extraordinary. I, Peter Meredith, bolted straightway into the conservatory, and there ensconced myself within the shadow of an orange-tree, while the Rev. Matthew Long left the room with equal celerity by the door. As for me, I confess that I was actuated by panic on my own account; my tutor's apprehensions were aroused on behalf of another. The instant after he disappeared, I heard the lock of the library door shot into its staple, and knew that Marmaduke was in a friend's keeping, and safe from any incursion of his uncle. I could see that Mr. Gerard knew this too, for a gleam of pleasure passed over his face, and then left it determined, defiant, and almost mocking, as when he had first set eyes upon the intruder. There was a fire in the otherwise darkening room, and from my place of concealment, I could watch the lineaments of both its inmates—and two more resolved and haughty countenances I had never beheld.

"Is it the custom of your respectable family, Sir Massingberd Heath," observed my host, "to force themselves into houses whose owners do not desire the honour of their presence?"

"It is their custom to hold their own, sir," answered the baronet curtly; "and I am come after my nephew."

It is impossible to convey the effect which this audacious speech had upon me, its unseen hearer; unblushing, scornfully open as it was, an awful threat seemed to lie within it, and above all, a consciousness of the power to carry it into effect. Even Mr. Gerard, who could have had no knowledge of the things that I knew, and had never heard the history of Grimjaw, seemed to feel a tremor as he listened.

"Your nephew, sir, is not in a condition to receive you," returned my host. "The consequences of seeing you might, I do not hesitate to say, be fatal to him."

"The opinion of his medical man is different," observed Sir Massingberd with a sneer. "Dr. Sitwell—a most estimable person, I should say, and endowed with excellent sense—has been so very kind as to ride over himself to Fairburn as soon as he could leave his patient, in order to apprise me exactly how the matter stands. He recommends my seeing Marmaduke in his first lucid interval—'There is no knowing,' said he, 'whether that may not be your poor dear nephew's last.'"

"Your poor dear nephew," repeated Mr. Gerard, with great distinctness. "Very dear, doubtless, but not what one would call poor, at least in the matter of expectations."

"Poor or rich, sir," retorted the other, "he has been placed in my hands as being those most fitted to take care of him."

Mr. Gerard shrugged his shoulders, and smiled sardonically.

"You seem to conceive that confidence misplaced, sir," continued the baronet. "The want of your good opinion afflicts me beyond measure. I am aware that I fail to satisfy pious persons in some particulars, but that Mr. Harvey Gerard's susceptibilities should be offended is indeed a serious consideration; it is as though the devil himself should cry, 'For shame!'"

"Sir Massingberd Heath, you are under my roof, although unbidden and unwelcome," returned my host; "your tongue, therefore, is chartered, so far as I am concerned. I could not, I confess, help my countenance expressing some astonishment when you spoke of your fitness for the education of youth."

There was a pause here for which I could not account. Sir Massingberd's eyes were riveted upon something on which the firelight danced and shone. I should very much misrepresent the baronet's character, and probably even exaggerate his capabilities, if I said he blushed, but certainly his countenance changed. Then he broke out fiercely, "I live as I choose, sir, and am answerable to no man, least of all to you. The parsons had their say, and have got their reply long ago, but am I also to be arraigned by—"

"You cannot justify yourself by any quarrel with me," interrupted Mr. Gerard. "I have, as you say, although not for the foolish reason you would mention, no right to be either your judge or accuser. But, Sir Massingberd, there is a God whom we have both good cause to fear."

"So you make your own sermons, I perceive," exclaimed the other, bitterly. "That is the reason, is it, why the good folks never see you at church? Cant amuses me always; but religion out of your mouth is humorous, indeed. Pray go on, sir, if my dear nephew can wait a little, for I should be sorry to miss him altogether. You were affirming, I think, the existence of a God."

"I was about to urge," continued Mr. Gerard, with grave severity, "since howsoever persons differ on religious matters, they generally acknowledge a common Father, that if there is one crime more hateful to Him than another, it is the deliberate debauchery of the mind of youth. I had no intention of making any particular accusation, such as the sight of this flask seems to have suggested to you. I know nothing—but what I guess—of its history. It has only been in my hands a very few minutes. The person by whose means it came into this house was, I believe, an old gipsy woman, and you are, doubtless, well aware how it got into her possession."

Mr. Gerard paused. Sir Massingberd, who, though smiling scornfully, had been beating the ground with his foot, here observed, with a forced calmness, "She is a liar; she is a thief, and the mother of thieves."

"Did she steal this flask?" inquired Mr. Gerard, regarding the other attentively. "It has your crest upon it. She did not. Good. It was then, I suppose, only a *gage d'amour* of yours."

A lurid light came over Sir Massingberd's evil face; for a moment I trembled for the man who dared to speak such words to him, but almost instantly he recovered his usual cruel calm.

"Your sagacity, Mr. Gerard," returned he, "is truly admirable. Is it the result of experience or intuition? or has this old ginger-faced harridan made you her favoured confidant? With your fondness for all such vagabonds I am well acquainted."

"The reprobation of a man like you, Sir Massingberd, should be dearer than the praise of ordinary mortals; but this matter does not concern myself in any way."

The baronet muttered something between his set teeth.

"Pshaw! man," continued Mr. Gerard, with unutterable scorn; "think not to frighten *me*. I am stronger than you, because I am richer; you are as poor as those very vagabonds whom you despise; your very existence depends upon the alms of a stranger. That you are unscrupulous in your revenges, I do not doubt; but you would have to deal in Harvey Gerard with one who only uses honourable weapons with an honourable foe. If you did me or mine a mischief, I swear to you that I would shoot you like a dog."

The frame of the speaker shook with contemptuous passion. Defiant as was his language, it fell far short of the disdain expressed in his tone and manner. It was not in Sir Massingberd's nature to be overawed, but his truculent features no longer maintained their grimness—their cruel humour. He could not put aside a man like Gerard with a brutal jest. I do not say that he was conscious of his own inferiority, but he knew that his opponent not only did not fear, but actually despised him. This was wormwood.

"I am ashamed," continued Mr. Gerard, after a pause, "to have lost my temper with you, Sir Massingberd, upon my own account. I wish to have nothing in common with you—not even a quarrel. We were speaking of this gipsy woman, and you called her thief, and what not. Whatever may be her faults, however, it does not become you to dwell on them; but for her and her prompt assistance, your nephew would not at this moment be alive. Out of this very flask she administered to him—" So frightful an execration here broke from the baronet's lips that I anticipated it to be the prelude to a personal assault upon my host. Mr. Gerard, however, stood quietly stirring the fire, with his eyes fixed firmly but calmly on those of Sir Massingberd, just as a mad doctor might regard a dangerous patient.

"That is a very singular exclamation of gratitude," observed Mr. Gerard, sardonically, "to one who has just performed you—or at least *yours*—so great a service. It really seems as though you almost regretted that it *was* performed."

A look of deadly hatred had now taken the place of all other expressions on the baronet's face. It forgot even to wear its sneer.

"I have been insulted enough, I think," said he, with a calmness more terrible than wrath. "Even as it is, I shall scarcely be able to requite you, though, be sure, I will do my best. But, with respect to my errand, I am come here to see my nephew, and that I will do."

"That you shall not do, Sir Massingberd, so surely as this house is mine."

"And who shall prevent me?" exclaimed the baronet, contemptuously measuring his foe from head to foot.

"Not I, sir, indeed," returned Mr. Gerard; "but I will see that my servants put you out of doors by force," and as he spoke he laid his hand upon the bell.

"Before night, then, I shall send for Marmaduke, and he shall be carried back to Fairburn, which, after all, is his proper home, and be there nursed."

"Nursed!" repeated my host, hoarsely. "Nursed by the grave-digger, you mean."

Sir Massingberd turned livid and sat down; then, as one who acts in his sleep, he passed his handkerchief once or twice across his forehead. "How dare you speak such things to me?" said he, looking round about him. "To hear you talk, one would think that I had tried to murder the boy."

"I *know* you did," cried Mr. Gerard, solemnly, laying his finger upon the baronet's arm. "If your nephew, Marmaduke, dies, his blood is on your head."

"On mine! how on mine? How, in the name of all the devils, could I have hindered the lad's horse from running away with him?"

"I will tell you how. You might have suffered Mr. Long to purchase a horse for the boy, as he offered to do, and not have sent to London for a confirmed run-away."

"He rode it half a dozen times without any harm," replied Sir Massingberd, sullenly.

"Yes, with a curb that would have tamed a wild horse fresh from the lasso. But when you took that curb for the keeper's pony, riding with gun in hand for the first time in your life—and sent your nephew forth upon that devil with a snafflebridle—nay, I have it yonder, sir—don't lie; you calculated that if what you wished should happen all would be laid to chance. A change of bridles is an accident like enough to happen; lads are thrown from horseback every day. See, I track your thoughts like slime. Base ruffian! rise; begone from beneath this roof, false coward—"

Sir Massingberd started up like one stung by an adder.

"Yes, I say coward! Heavens! that this creature should still feel the touch of shame! Be off, be off; molest not any one within this house, at peril of your life—murderer—murderer!"

Without a word, without a glance of reply, Sir Massingberd seized his hat, and hurried from the room. I felt some alarm lest he should make some violent effort to visit Marmaduke; but Mr. Gerard's countenance gave me comfort. He stood quite still, listening with grim satisfaction to the baronet's retreating footsteps.

They were heard for an instant striding along the floor of the hall, and then were exchanged for the sound of his horse's hoofs urged to speed along the carriage-drive. Sir Massingberd Heath had met for once with his match—and more.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. HARVEY GERARD.

So entirely engrossed had I been with the action and dialogue of the speakers in the preceding scene, that it scarcely struck me while it was going on that I had not paid for my place in the pit in the usual fashion, but was a mere eavesdropper under an orange-tree.

So soon as Sir Massingberd was really gone, however, I became conscious of the impropriety of my situation, and not wishing to own what I had done, I stole noiselessly out into the garden, and then re-entered the conservatory, and thereby the drawing-room, as though I had been out of sight and hearing all the time. It was not quite a chivalrous act; but I do not think that the boys of my time, myself included, were quite so honourable and frank as Mr. Tom Brown describes those of the present day to be. There was something, moreover, about Mr. Harvey Gerard which told me he would have loathed a listener, nor would have been very ready to have accepted fear as any excuse for my conduct. He was a man of noble bearing, nearly six feet in height, and extremely well formed. He was dressed in a blue lapelled coat, light waistcoat and kerseys, and Hessian boots. These last I had not seen before upon any person, and I remember them well. I think they were the most graceful covering for the leg that has yet been devised, although, I own, they may not have been so convenient as the modern knickerbockers. He wore his own grey hair —which was not very usual with persons of his rank of life—and rather long. His features were large, but handsome; and there was a kind of youthful blandness about them which gave his face a most agreeable expression in ordinary. When excited by passion, however, as I had lately seen him, his appearance greatly changed. His thin lips parted contemptuously, and showed his threatening teeth, while his blue eyes, gentle almost to dreaminess, became blood-streaked, and almost started from their sockets. As I now beheld him calmly kindling a lamp on the drawing-room table, no one could have been a greater contrast than himself to the man who had just driven Sir Massingberd Heath from the room with such a hail-storm of invective.

"Well, young gentleman," exclaimed he, cheerfully, "the enemy is repulsed, you see, although, I confess, your friend the baronet is rather a formidable fellow. He's uncommonly like Front de Boeuf. I daresay you have read the new romance of 'Ivanhoe,' have you not?"

"Marmaduke has, sir, I believe," replied I; "but I am sorry to say I am no great reader."

"That is not well, Mr. Meredith; youth is the time for reading. A knowledge of books, if they are sufficiently varied, is half-way towards the knowledge of men. It is true that a student may turn out a fool, because he may have been a book-worm; but the probability is greater of that misfortune befalling one who has been 'no great reader.' I would not say so much, if you were older than you are, and had not plenty of time before you to redeem the past. There is nothing more contemptible than ignorance; save, perhaps"—here he sighed—"than knowledge misapplied. What a dangerous villain would that man be, for instance, who has just been here, had his natural powers been cultivated by study. As it is, he rushes headlong, like the bull." Here he turned upon me gaily. "Did he ever toss you, my young friend?"

"Well, sir," returned I, remembering that interview in the churchyard, "he bellowed at me once a little."

"Did he, my boy, did he?—the cowardly brute! Well, I've put a ring through his nose for a considerable time to come, I flatter myself. I *like* a bull-fight. I think I should have made a capital matador," cried Mr. Gerard, rubbing his hands and laughing.

"How did you—how did you manage to *ring* him, sir?" inquired I, with hesitation, for I was curious to see whether Mr. Gerard would make me a confidant of what had passed.

"Oh, I watched him carefully—never took my eyes off him for a moment. When he was calm in his white malice, then I irritated him by waving my red flag—this silver-headed brandy-flask put him in a horrible rage. When he made his rushes, I stood aside, and let him go where he would. When he had exhausted himself, I stepped in, and gave him the steel. I wonder," soliloquized Mr. Gerard, aloud, as he slowly paced up and down the room—"I wonder if it would be safe to give him the *coup de grace*!"

"But," said I, "were you not afraid—"

"My dear young friend," said my host, with seriousness, but placing his hand kindly upon my shoulder, "an honest man should never be afraid of a fellow-creature. 'Fear God,' it is written; but even the king is only to be honoured."

It is impossible to express the grave and noble air with which Mr. Gerard spoke those words: I felt such an affectionate awe of him from that moment, as no other person has ever inspired within me.

"But," continued I, "supposing he had made a personal assault upon you: he is perfectly reckless, and a much more powerful man, I should think."

"Very true, my young friend; and indeed at one time I thought he would certainly have done it; that was why I placed the poker in the fire. It would not have been a romantic action; but so sure as he laid finger upon me, I would have played Bailie Nicol Jarvie, and 'burned a hole in him one might put a kail-pat through.' It would have give me genuine pleasure."

"Burned a hole in Sir Massingberd!" cried I aghast.

"Ay, that would I. As it was, I threatened him with my servants; and had he ventured to force his way into yonder room, they should have flogged him, though he were ten times Sir Massingberd. Better men than he are often flogged for less offences. Did you hear of Admiral Flinthert's funeral at Crittenden a month ago or so? You did; and I daresay you were told that he was a good man and a brave sailor."

"So it was said, indeed, sir," replied I. "Mr. Long attended the funeral out of respect, and I believe a great number of gentlemen of the county."

"Yet, for all that, he was a bad man, and a coward," returned Mr. Gerard, his voice rising, and his blue eyes flashing with indignation. "One part of the naval creed—'to hate the French'—it is true, he did believe, and acted in that faith; but he omitted the other, and the more important, 'to hate the devil.' He loved and served the devil of his own arrogant passions; he made the men miserable over whom he ruled; his ship was called the Floating Hell. When the carriage of the lord-lieutenant had driven away from the church, with all its load of sympathy—for there was nothing else inside it—and the county gentry were rolling homewards, congratulating themselves that they had paid due reverence to a gallant officer and a friend of order and good government, I will tell you what happened. The very evening those honoured remains were laid in their resting-place, a sailor called at the house of old Marks, the sexton, and begged to be shown the admiral's coffin. 'I have sailed with him for years,' said he, 'and I have made right away from Portsmouth on purpose to do this; and though I cannot see his face, I should like at least to look upon that which contains it.'

"Now, old Marks did not fancy unlocking the church, and descending into a damp vault; beside which, he had really no right to enter the last home of the Flintherts without due occasion. So said he, 'I cannot admit you to where the admiral lies, and certainly not at this hour; it is as much as my place is worth.'

"Then the sailor, who was as fine and hearty-looking a man, said Marks, as need be, held up half a sovereign between his finger and thumb. 'I have been just paid off,' said he, 'and will gladly give you this for your trouble; while as for your scruples, why, don't you think the admiral's family here, and all his great friends who came to do him honour to-day, would be glad enough that a poor tar should pay a humble tribute to his memory?'

"'Well,' said Marks, regarding, I daresay, the half-sovereign, rather wistfully, 'what you have just said seems certainly to alter the matter. I will take you to the church, and you shall see the coffin, for the vault is not yet sealed.'

"So they started with a lantern, and Marks was for going first to show the way, but the sailor went ahead, saying that he knew the road blindfold, for that he had been brought up in that neighbourhood, and knew it well.

"'Well,' said old Marks, 'I thought I recognized something about you, although you are much changed in the last twenty years. You are Will Moody, who got into trouble with Sir Wentworth Heath about poaching; only he couldn't quite prove it agin you.'

"'No,' returned the sailor; 'but he went to work by a surer way than even the law—he got me pressed when I went to visit my sister down at Deal.'

"That, my young friend," observed Mr. Gerard, interrupting himself, "is a method by which not only we man our fleet, but rid the country of a number of obnoxious persons."[1]

"'Yes,' continued the sailor, 'I was pressed; if it had not been for that I should not have sailed under Admiral Flinthert.' He spoke no more till they had entered the church, and had moved away the stone, which had been only dropped, and not yet fastened over the mouth of the vault. Then they descended the steps, and old Marks turned his lantern on to the spot where the first—that is, the latest—coffin of the long row was lying. 'That is the admiral's,' said he; 'you may read his name upon the silver plate.'

"William Moody spelled it out aloud, so as to be quite sure. 'Well,' said he, 'I will tell you a little story about that dead man, and then we will come away.'

"'Tell us the story when we get home,' replied the sexton.

"'No, no, man; I will tell it here, else you would think ill of me, may be, for what I am going to do. Now listen. For a long time after I was pressed, I hated and detested what I had to do, and also those who gave me my orders; but after a bit I got more used to the work, and some of the officers I learned to like very well, especially our captain. I was a strong active fellow, without home-ties to think upon and sadden me, for mother had other sons to maintain her, and in that respect I was luckier than most. There were pressed men on board of the same ship, man, whose wives and helpless children were starving because their bread-winner was taken from them, and who knew not whether he was dead or alive. However, as I say, I soon got used to my new position, and became so good a sailor that I was made what is called captain of the main-top. When our ship was paid off, which was not, however, for a long time, I liked the salt water so well, that after I had been home for a little, I volunteered to serve again.

"'My next captain was this man who lies here. He was as cruel a tyrant as ever trod a quarter-deck, and a terror to good and bad alike. You could never please him, do what you would. If an officer is worth his salt at all, he knows and respects those men who do their duty well under him. Captain Flinthert knew, but did not respect them; on the contrary, he behaved towards them as though he resented some imaginary claims on their part to his consideration. I held in his ship the same position that I held in the last, for it did not contain a more active sailor. Yet he found occasion—I should rather say he made it—to get me punished. I swear to you that I had not committed even that slight fault which he laid to my charge; if I had done so, it was one for which the stopping of a day's grog would have been chastisement enough. This ruffian'—here he smote

the coffin with his clenched hand—'ordered me three dozen lashes. Now, I had never been flogged yet, and when I went to the captain with almost tears in my eyes, and told him so, and that I had never even been reported for misconduct, he replied with a sneer that I was too good by half, and that it was high time I should become acquainted with the cat-o'-nine tails. "To prevent mistakes, you shall have it at once," said he: "call up the boatswain's mate." Now, I thought to myself, in the pride of my manliness and independence, that such a disgrace should never happen to William Moody, but that I would die first; so I walked straight from that part of the deck where I had been speaking with Captain Flinthert, and leaped from the bulwarks into the sea. I believed I tried at first to drown myself, but I was a strong swimmer, and nature compelled me presently to strike out. The cry of "A man overboard!" had caused the boat to be lowered at once, and though we had been sailing very fast, I was picked up, not much exhausted, and almost in spite of myself. As soon as I had got on board, and put on dry things, the captain sent for me on deck, where I found the boatswain's mate at the grating, and all hands piped for punishment. "William Moody," said that ruffian in a mocking voice, "I had ordered you three dozen lashes for a certain offence, but you have now committed a much graver one in endangering, by your late act, the life of one of his majesty's sailors; you will therefore now receive *six* dozen instead. Boatswain, do your duty."

"'I was, therefore, tied up and punished. I don't think I suffered much at the time, although I was laid up in the sick ward for long afterwards. I was entirely occupied with thoughts of revenge. When I was able to get about again, Captain Flinthert had got another ship, and was away out of my reach. I never met him, again, or he would not have lived to the age that is inscribed on yonder plate; but as soon as I heard that he was dead, I swore to come and spit upon the tyrant's coffin.'

"Then the sailor suited the action to the word, and turned from the dishonoured corpse with a lighter step than that with which he had approached it; and old Marks followed him from the vault, as he confessed to me himself, 'half frightened out of his wits.'"

"I do not wonder," said I to Mr. Gerard, "it was a terrible revenge."

"Ay, but how much worse was the provocation; from the very man, too, placed in authority of him, whose duty was to foster, not to oppress him. Verily, they that are in honour, and understand not, are as the beasts that perish."

"True," returned I, "but then the wretch was dead."

"Just so, young sir," replied Mr. Gerard, impetuously, "was dead, and never felt the insult. The sailor felt both the insult and the lashes. How is it that, at your age, you have already learned to be the apologist of the rich in high places?"

"Nay, sir, I—?"

"Yes, *you*," continued my host with vehemence; "your pity is for the admiral, and does not descend to the captain of the maintop. Still," added he, in a milder tone, "I should not judge you harshly, even if you so judge others. You were brought up in India, were you not? where in the eyes of the cowering natives, to be white is to be powerful, and wise, and all in all—save to be good. Great heavens, what a retribution is waiting for us there!" Again my host paced the room, but this time rapidly, wildly, and uttering exclamations like a sibyl inspired by her god. "If the nabobs we see here are specimens of those who rule the East, Heaven help the ruled! What blindness, what infatuation! Do you know, young man, the very men that cause revolutions am the last to believe in them?" This was an observation so entirely beyond me, that I could only murmur that such was doubtless the case, although I did not remember having heard it remarked before. "It is so," continued Mr. Gerard, positively, "and it always has been so. It was so in France. I suppose you have always been taught to consider the French Republicans the vilest and wickedest of men, and the Revolution to be the mother that produced them at one monstrous birth. Yes, when the day of reckoning comes, and the ruin is undeniable, Democracy, forsooth, is blamed. The taunt is hurled—

> '"Behold the harvest that we reap
> From popular government and equality!"
> Whereas, in truth, 'tis neither these, nor aught
> Of wild belief ingrafted on their names
> By false philosophy, have caused the woe,
> But a terrific reservoir of guilt
> And ignorance, filled up from age to age,
> That can no longer hold its loathsome charge,
> But bursts, and spreads in deluge through the land.'

High truth embalmed in noble verse, yet no one heeds. The author of those lines, my friend, is the greatest poet in Great Britain, and has never possessed an income of a hundred pounds a year. They say that my Lord Castlereagh has thirty thousand...—Stay, do you not hear wheels? That must be Sitwell's gig. I have not the patience to see him now. His sycophantic officiousness in fetching Sir Massingberd was too contemptible. How can a man who has two legs given him to stand upright upon, persist in grovelling through life upon all-fours?

> 'Heaven grant the man some noble nook;
> For, rest his soul! he'd rather be
> Genteelly damned beside a duke

Than saved in vulgar company.'

Do you receive him, Mr. Meredith; and tell him from me that it is no thanks to him that his patient is yet alive. Now that the siege is raised, I will just step in and see how the lad is getting on."

My host had left the room only a few seconds when Dr. Sitwell entered it.

"My dear young friend!" exclaimed he, in an excited manner, "what on earth has happened to Sir Massingberd Heath? He very nearly rode me down ten minutes ago on Crittenden Common; and when I inquired after his nephew, he replied—Well, I cannot repeat the exact words, because they are so excessively shocking. Why, he must be out of his mind with grief! I trust he did nothing impetuous, nothing that is to be regretted, here?"

"No, sir," replied I; "he did not, thanks to our good host, who withstood all his attempts to see his nephew. It was, however, most indiscreet of you to send him hither. Mr. Harvey Gerard was exceedingly annoyed by your doing so."

"My dear young friend," observed Dr. Sitwell, sinking his voice to a confidential whisper, "Mr. Harvey Gerard is annoyed at many things which would give most sensible persons a great deal of pleasure. He would as soon admit a rattle-snake within his doors as a man of title, unless, indeed, it be his friend, Sir Charles Wolseley. By the by, it is to Sir Charles that my dear patient, Mr. Broadacres, is indirectly indebted for his wound. If Sir Charles had not convened that revolutionary meeting at Bangton, Mr. Broadacres would not have had to read the Riot Act, and eventually got shot by mistake by his own men. It is denied by the government, I perceive, that ball was fired by the troops at the first discharge; but between ourselves such was certainly the case; for I extracted the bullet from poor Mr. B. myself, and he has had to lie upon his face ever since. Good heavens, sir, what a position for a man whose family came in with the Conqueror!"

"Is this Sir Charles Wolseley, then, of whom one reads so much in the papers, a friend of Mr. Gerard's?" said I. "I have heard Mr. Long remark that he was a very dangerous man."

"So he is, sir. He'll be hung some day, as sure as he lives. And the gentleman in whose house we stand is tarred with the same brush. It's terrible to think of. Why, do you know, Mr. Meredith, that Mr. Harvey Gerard goes the length"—here the doctor looked about him to be sure that we were alone, and placing his lips close to my ear, whispered solemnly, "of wearing a white hat!"

"Gracious goodness," returned I, "why shouldn't he? My father always wears a white hat in India."

"Yes; but *let me tell you this*, India is not England," observed the doctor, sagaciously. "A white hat here is the badge of Radicalism, Republicanism, Atheism—I don't say that Mr. Gerard is a downright atheist, but he's a sectary, and that's nearly as bad. And hark ye, I know this for certain: the only reason why Henry Hunt himself is not hand and glove with our friend is this, that when Hunt was tried for his life for sedition, he came into the dock, like a prudent man, with a black hat, and that is the one act of caution and good sense for which Mr. Gerard has never forgiven him."

[1] This sarcasm was founded on literal truth; I myself remember a time when Englishmen submitted to a system of oppression almost precisely similar to that which has of late driven the Poles to insurrection, and enlisted for them the sympathies of Europe—namely, a forced conscription, the subjects of which are *selected*.

CHAPTER X.

LOVE THE LIFEGIVER.

It was about four o'clock in the morning, or nearly twelve hours after his frightful fall, that Marmaduke Heath first woke to consciousness. Mr. Long and myself were passing the night in his apartment, which was a very roomy one, my tutor upon a sofa, and I in a comfortable arm-chair. I had begged that for that once at least it should be so, for I knew the dear lad would like to set his eyes upon me when he first opened them. Dr. Sitwell and his assistant, both agreed that if he woke at all from his heavy stertorous slumber, it would be in his sane mind; and it was so. Mr. Long was asleep, but I had so much to think about in the occurrences and disclosures of the preceding evening, that slumber had refused to visit me.

I was as unused as happy youth in general is to sleeplessness. I did not know at that time what it is to lay head upon pillow only to think upon the morrow with a brain that has done its day's work, and would fain be at rest; or worse, only to let the past re-enact itself under the wearied eyelids; to watch the long procession of vanished forms again fill the emptied scenes, and yet to be conscious of their unreality. How different in this respect alone is the experience of age and youth, and again of poverty and competence! A young man in tolerable circumstances, and who does not chance to be a sportsman, may never have seen the sun rise, that commonest of splendid spectacles to all men of humble station. For my own part, I had never done so in England until the occasion of which I speak, and I remember it very particularly. The weary time spent in listening to the various noises of the house, now to those consequent upon the retiring to

rest of its inmates, and then to those more mysterious ones which do not begin till afterwards—the crickets on the hearth, the mice in the wainscot, the complaining of chairs and wardrobes, and the clocks, which discourse in quite another fashion than they do in the day. The slow hours consumed in watching the rushlight spots, first on the floor and then on the wall, and at last exchanged for the cool grey dawn, stealing in through cranny and crack, and showing my companions still in the land of dreams; later yet the drowsy crowing of cocks, and presently, as the light grows and grows, notwithstanding shutter and curtain, the indescribably welcome song of the early robin, the busy chirping of the house-sparrow, followed by the whole tuneful choir of birds; then the lowing of cattle in the distance, and the distant barking of the watch-dog, so strangely different from that sad and solitary howl with which the same animal breaks the awful stillness of the night. About four, I say, as I looked for the thousandth time towards Marmaduke's bed, I saw him sitting up supporting himself on his elbow, and pushing his other hand across his brow, as if trying to call to mind where he was. In an instant I was at his bedside. "Marmaduke, I am here," said I; "Peter Meredith."

"I am not at Fairburn Hall, am I?" asked he, in a hoarse whisper.

"No, Marmaduke, you are amongst friends."

"Then *he* is not here," gasped he—"nowhere near."

"He is miles away, my friend, and he will never come under this roof."

"Thank Heaven—thank Heaven!" cried the poor boy, sinking back upon the pillow; "it was only a dreadful dream, then. I shall die happy."

"You need not talk of dying, Marmaduke. On the contrary, let us hope you are about to begin a life unshadowed, natural, without fear."

"No, Peter, I must die. I feel that; but what is death to what I have been dreaming? Do you remember that poem which came down in the box of books, from Mr. Clint, last week, about a wretched man that was bound upon a wild horse and sent adrift in the Ukraine?" And then he repeated with some difficulty—

"'How fast we fled, away, away,
And I could neither sigh, nor pray,
And my cold sweat-drops fell like rain
Upon the courser's bristling mane,
But snorting still with rage and fear,
He flew upon his far career;
At times I almost thought indeed,
He must have slackened in his speed;
But no; my bound and slender frame
Was nothing to his angry might,
And merely like a spur became.'

Well, Peter, that was I. But instead of the wolves which followed upon *his* track, it was my uncle Massingberd who followed *me*. He had chosen to kill me as the Count Palatine would have killed Mazeppa, but he wanted also to see it done.

'All through the night I heard his feet,
Their stealing rustling step repeat.'

Great Heaven, I hear them now!"

"Nay, Marmaduke, it is only I, your old tutor," said Mr. Long, tenderly, who had not been able to leave his sofa entirely without noise. "You must not give way to these fancies; you had a fall from Panther, that is all."

"Ay," returned the poor boy, "it *was* Panther, only I thought he was a wild horse, and not my pony at all.

'But though my cords were wet with gore,
Which oozing through my limbs ran o'er;
And in my tongue the thirst became
A something fiercer far than flame;'

that was nothing; nothing to the knowledge that that man was close behind. Now that I am awake, I feel bruised from head to heel, my bones ache, my head seems as though it were about to burst, but that is nothing to—" the poor lad could not finish the sentence, but exclaimed with piteous vehemence—"do, Mr. Long, do promise me that I shall never see him more."

"You shall never see him more, if I can help it," returned my tutor, with unusual energy. "Yes, I think I can promise that you never shall." I well knew that so cautious a man as Mr. Long would not have said so much without full warrant; it was evident to me at once that he had heard from Mr. Gerard all that had passed between that gentleman and the baronet in the drawing-room, and was now determined to act with vigour in Marmaduke's behalf. Perhaps the coincidence of the lad's dream with what had in fact occurred, may have helped my tutor's decision, but now that he had once passed his word, I felt sure that he would stand by Marmaduke to the last.

The sick boy seemed to feel this too, for he uttered many expressions of gratitude and

contentment, while he kept fast hold of his new protector's hand.

"But mind, Marmaduke, you must now make haste and get well, and not give way to despondency about yourself. I am going for the doctor, who is sleeping in the house, and whom I promised to call as soon as you awoke; and, Peter, don't you let him talk too much. For a boy like that to talk of death," added Mr. Long, aloud, as he drew on his slippers, "is to go half-way to meet it."

Marmaduke smiled feebly at this remark of his unconscious tutor's, and when he had left the room, observed, "There is no need of any doctors; this is my death-bed, Meredith, I know."

"Marmaduke," replied I, gravely, "I will not listen to such dreadful things; it is wrong, it is wicked, it will do you harm."

"No, Peter, there is nothing dreadful in the thing I mean, and it seems to soothe me when I speak of it. Since I have been ill, I have had a sign that tells me I must go. We shall not grow up together to be friends through life, as we had planned. I shall watch you perhaps—I hope I shall—and be happy in your happiness, but you will soon forget *me*. There will be a thousand things for you to think of; there have been such even now for you while *I*—it seems hard, does it not, Peter, that I should have grown up under the shadow of that man, and never felt the Sunshine? They say that boyhood is the blithest time of life, but I have never been a boy. I think I could almost tell him, if he stood here now, how he has poisoned my young life, and sent me to the grave without one pleasant memory to moisten my dying eyes. Yes, my friend, dying. I have seen a vision in the night far too sweet and fear not to have been sent from heaven itself. If there indeed be angels, such was she. They say the Heaths have always ghastly warnings when their hour is come, but this was surely a gentle messenger. I close my eyes and see that smile once more."

"Has she hair of golden brown?" inquired I, gravely, "and hazel eyes, large and pitiful, and does she smile sad and sweet as though one's pain would soon be over?"

"That is she, that is she," exclaimed Marmaduke, eagerly, while from his heavy eyelids the light flashed forth as from a thunder-cloud; "oh, tell me who and what she is!"

"Her name is Lucy Gerard," replied I, quietly, "and we are, at this moment, in her father's house."

Marmaduke's mention of her smile had revealed to me the secret alike of dream and vision. He must have been dimly conscious of the catastrophe that had occurred to him throughout, although he had confused himself, poor fellow, with Mazeppa, and the daughter of our host with a vision from the skies. His eyes were now closed, and with features as pale as the pillow on which he lay, he was repeating to himself her name as though it were a prayer.

"Marmaduke," said I, "we will talk no more, since it exhausts you thus; I hear Mr. Long returning with the doctor, be of good heart, and keep your thoughts from dwelling—"

"Yes," interrupted he, as though he would prevent the very mention of that grisly king of whom he had been but now conversing so familiarly, "I will, I will. It would indeed be bitter to die *now*."

CHAPTER XI.

WOOING BY PROXY.

The medical report of Marmaduke Heath was more than cheering; it was confident. "One of the very best features of that young man's case is this," said Dr. Sitwell, "he does not give way. Foolish youths of his age will sometimes, as it were, fall in love with Death, until it is absolutely close beside them, poor fellows, when they shrink from him like the best of us."

"You should rather say the worst of us, Dr. Sitwell," observed my tutor.

"Well, sir, as far as my experience goes," returned the doctor, cheerfully, "and I have 'assisted,' as Mr. Gerard here will have it, at the demise of many persons of the very first respectability, few of us are apt to welcome death; the majority, contrary to what is vulgarly believed, pay him no sort of attention whatsoever."

"And yet," remarked Mr. Harvey Gerard, slily, "he came over before the Conqueror, and possesses a considerable amount of land all over the country."

"True, sir, true," replied the doctor, gravely; "and those are attributes which should always command respect. With regard, however, to our young patient, he seems determined, notwithstanding his sufferings, to be cheerful, and bear up. I have told him how essential it is to do so, and the young gentleman is most reasonable, I am sure. 'I do not want to die, I wish to live,' were his very words—a most satisfactory and sensible state of mind. Fairburn Hall—he did not say this, but I knew what was passing through his brain quite well—Fairburn Hall, and one of the oldest baronetcies in the kingdom, are something to live *for*—that is a great point in cases of this kind."

I am sure I felt thankful and glad to hear this account of my dear friend; yet I could not help wishing that Dr. Sitwell had been as correct in the cause of Marmaduke's clinging to life, as in the fact itself. For I too was stricken with love for Lucy Gerard, and would have laid down my life

to kiss her finger tip. It is the fashion now to jeer at that which is called First Love, as though affection were not worth having until it has first exhausted itself upon a score of objects; nay, perhaps, the thing itself is as extinct as the Dodo. In my day, however, the Great Three-Hundred-a-Year Marriage-Question was not yet broached, and gentlemen did not complainingly publish their rejections at the hands of the fair sex in the "Times" newspaper. Nearly half a century has passed over my head since the time of which I write, and has not spared its snows, and yet, I swear to you, my old heart glows again, and on my withered cheek there comes a blush as I call, to mind the time when first I met that pure and fair young girl.

The worship of a lad is never lasting, it is said, although I know not upon what authority—society so seldom permitting the experiment to be made, that the *dictum* can hardly be established; but while it does last, at least, how clear and steady is the incense! how honest is the devotion! how complete the sacrifice! Since I have been an old fogey, it has been confided to me by more than one ancient flirt that they still experience a rapture when they chance to catch the affection of a boy. They are kinder to him than they are to older men; they let him down easy; they respect the infatuation which they themselves have long lost the power of entertaining. How delicious, then, must such a conquest be to a maiden of seventeen! I claim for myself the possession of no tenderer nor truer feelings than other lads, but I know that a queen might have accepted the heart-homage which I paid to Lucy Gerard. And never was fealty more disinterested. I have written down not a little to my discredit; let me then say this much in my own favour. From the moment that Marmaduke Heath spoke to me as he did, upon his bed of sickness, of our host's daughter, I determined within myself not only to stand aside, and let him win her if he could, but to help him by all means within my power. If he lived for her alone, should I endeavour to slay him? If a promise, however distant, of a bright and happy future seemed at length to be held out for him whose life had been so saddened and so bitter, should I strive to make it void? I could not *afford* to lose her; no. I would have given all that I had in the world to hear her whisper, "I love you;" I would have beggared myself, I say, for those mere words; but could *he*, poor lad, afford the loss of her so well?

Doubtless, in modern eyes, we both appear mere foolish victims of calf-love; green hobbardy-hoys, dazzled with the first flutter of a petticoat. As for me, let it be so received, and welcome, although, my young male readers, this is to be said, You never saw Lucy Gerard. Otherwise you would wonder little at my—well, at my poor folly. But with respect to Marmaduke, it must be admitted that his was not an ordinary case. Although a boy in years, he had long been sitting on the shores of old romance, and had probably more of the divine faculty for Love within him than all the ardent souls of five-and-thirty put together, who are at this moment turning their eyes about them for a suitable young person with whose income to unite their own. Since his mother died, he had scarcely beheld a virtuous woman, with the exception of dear Mrs. Myrtle, the housekeeper at the Rectory, whose appearance was calculated to excite respect rather than the sentimental emotions; and now he had suddenly been brought face to face with one whose equal for form and feature, for gentleness and graciousness, for modesty and courage, these eyes have never yet beheld. I have done. There shall be no more ecstasies, reader; an old man thanks you that you have borne with his doting garrulity even thus long.

Since the days of Earl Athelwold, and probably long before them, the wooing by proxy has been held to be a perilous undertaking; we cannot take the fingers of a fair lady within our own, and say, "This is not my hand at all," as though we were Bishop Berkeley; or still more, "This is somebody else's hand," which it manifestly is not. If credit is to be given to such protestations at all, there is no knowing where to stop; and yet we must be doing something tender, or we are not performing our duty as deputy. But how tenfold are the dangers of this enterprise, when the delegate of another has at one time contemplated performing the mission in question upon his own account. Of this peril—although fully determined to speak a good word for Marmaduke—I was well aware; I even considered within myself whether it would not be safer, upon the whole, to return at once to Fairburn Rectory, lest I should do my friend an involuntary wrong. Yes, I was walking in the garden at the Dovecot after breakfast, considering this, when I came upon Lucy Gerard herself, and flight became impossible to me, being mortal. I was pacing a winding path that ran beside the lawn, but was hidden from it by a glittering wall of laurel, and lo! there she stood, unconscious of my advent, beside—what? a statue? a sun-dial? No, a rose-tree, striving upwards by help of a little cross of white marble. Her face was westward, so that the morning sun shone like a glory on the wealth of hair that rippled down her shoulders: beside her indoor garments she wore only a little braided apron, full of pockets that held scissors, pruning-knife, the thing which is called "bass" I believe, and other horticultural weapons, and on her head the tiniest straw-hat, with a brim obviously intended to shelter more than one—a perfect garden-saint; and at her prayers! for while I looked, she knelt upon the grass-border (to shake some insect from a rose, I at first thought, or remove a faded leaf), and so, with bowed head, remained for several minutes. When she arose, and saw me hesitating whether to advance or retreat, she blushed a little, but in her usual quiet tone begged me not to be disturbed. "You could not know that this is forbidden ground here; it was my fault, who ought to have told you; our own folks all know it, and so few guests ever come to the Dovecot, that it never struck me, Mr. Meredith, to give you a Trespass notice."

"But since I am here, Miss Gerard, and the intrusion has been made—most innocently, I assure you—may I not be suffered to satisfy what, believe me, is not a mere vulgar curiosity?"

"I do not think," returned the young lady, with some hesitation, "that my father would object to your knowing our little secret; you are going to remain with us some time, he hopes, and—yes, I

am sure you will respect what with us is held so secret. This cross and rose-tree are set above my little sister's grave. See, that is what we used to call her—LITTLE ELLA. She of whom I spoke to you in the drawing-room yesterday."

I daresay my stupid face exhibited more of astonishment than sympathy. No wonder, thought I, that the doctor called Mr. Gerard a sectary, and that Mr. Long was so cold and distant in his manner!

"You seem surprised, Mr. Meredith, that my father should have acted thus—should have placed the tomb of his dear child where he can always come to weep and pray at it, and not amid the long dank grasses in Crittenden churchyard. Is it so very rare a thing to bury those we love elsewhere than in a churchyard?"

"I only know one other instance," said I, "and that is in the Heath family."

"Indeed," replied Miss Gerard, gravely, moving away as though not wishing to converse of ordinary things in that sacred neighbourhood, "I trust we have but little in common with *them*."

"Truly, I can scarcely imagine that you and they are of the same species," replied I, with irrepressible admiration, "you who do not even know what wickedness is!"

"What! I? Oh, but I am sometimes very, very wicked, I assure you," replied Miss Gerard. She looked so serious, nay, so sad, that I could have taken up her little hand and kissed it, there and then, to comfort her. But would such a course of conduct assist poor Marmaduke? thought I, and fortunately in time.

"There is one of the Heath family," said I, "at all events, whose good qualities will go far to atone for the shortcomings of his adversaries, if he only lives to exercise them."

That "if he only lives" I considered to be very diplomatic; it was enlisting a tender sympathy for his perilous condition to start with.

"Dr. Sitwell says that there is little danger," replied Miss Gerard, quietly.

"I know better," observed I, confidentially; "his life or death hangs upon a thread, a chance."

"Good heavens! Mr. Meredith, what can you mean? The brain, we are assured, is quite uninjured."

"My dear Miss Gerard," returned I, "it is not his brain that is affected; it is his heart. His recovery, I am positively certain, depends upon you."

"Upon me! Mr. Meredith?" replied she, while a blush sprung from neck to forehead on the instant, as though a white rose should become a red one—"upon *me*?"

"Yes, dear young lady; that is, upon you and your good father. This lad will find here, for the first time in his young life, peace and tenderness—a new existence, if you only choose, will expand around him, such as he has never even dreamt of. I do not ask you to be kind to him, for you cannot be otherwise than kind; but consider his sad condition—fatherless, motherless, and having for his only relative a wretch whose atrocity is unspeakable, what reason has he to wish for life? But you, you may teach him to feel that existence has something else to offer than sorrow, and shame, and fear."

"Alas, sir! I am nothing," returned Miss Gerard. "But if your friend desire a teacher to whom fear and shame are unknown, and whom sorrow has rendered wise, not sad, he will find one in my dear father. Oh, Mr. Meredith, if you knew him as I know him, how tender he is as well as strong, you would go straight to *him*! What I have of help within me, if I have anything, is derived from him alone."

"There are some maladies," said I, "against which not the most skilful physician can avail without a gentle nurse to smooth the pillow. I am sure I need say no more, except to assure you that what ever kind offices you may bestow upon Marmaduke Heath, will not be wasted upon an unworthy object. He is most honourable, generous, warm-hearted—"

"And very fortunate," interrupted Miss Gerard, cordially, "in having a friend to be thus enthusiastic for him in his absence!"

Her eyes sparkled with pleasure; and she held out her hand frankly as she spoke. I took it, and pressed it for an instant. A shock of joy passed through my frame; my whole being trembled with ecstasy. Passion took me by storm, and for one glorious moment held the very citadel of my soul; but it was for the last time, believe me, Marmaduke, the last time in all my life. Fifty years have come and gone, with their full share of pleasure and pain, but have never brought a moment of bliss like that, nor such icy despair as the thought of thee, my friend, caused to succeed it!

I write not in self-praise. I was not so mad as to suppose that Lucy Gerard would have ever stooped to love Peter Meredith when once she had known Marmaduke Heath. If he had so endeared himself to *me*, a selfish boy, who knew not half his gifts, or, at least, knew not how to value them—that I thus rudely broke my own brief love-dream for his sake, would he not draw *her* towards him, laden with all her wealth of heart and brain, as the moon draws the wave! It was so afterwards; but I knew it then, as though it had already been. Yet, Marmaduke, yet I gave you something, for it was all I had, when I laid at your feet, to form a stepping-stone for you, my own heart. You trod upon it, my dear and faithful friend—But, thank heaven! you never knew that

you did so. I wonder whether Lucy ever knew!

CHAPTER XII.

THE COUNCIL OF WAR.

On the second morning after our arrival at the Dovecot, Mr. Long called me into the dining-room, where I found Mr. Gerard and a third gentleman, who had come down by the night-mail, as I understood, from London. Although, I should think, not less than seventy years of age, he was dressed in the height of the then prevailing mode. He wore a snuff-coloured coat, the tails of which trailed from his chair upon the ground, whenever he was so fortunate as not to be sitting upon them; the brass buttons at his back were nearly as large as the handles of an ordinary chest of drawers. A bunch of seals, each about the size of that peculiar to the Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain, dangled from his fob. His pantaloons, which seemed to have shrunk in the washing, set off a pair of legs that were still not uncomely; but what was most remarkable was an enormous muslin cravat, which, in combination with the ruffles of his shirt, gave him the aspect of a pouter pigeon. Unaccustomed as I then was to the toilet of persons of distinction, Mr. Clint of Russell Square—for he it was—made a very strong impression upon me. As the family lawyer of the Heaths, and one who had always greatly interested himself in Marmaduke, he had been sent for by my tutor to give his opinion as to what steps should be taken respecting the future disposal of the poor lad. I guessed by his grave face that he had been put in possession, not only of all that had happened through the agency of Sir Massingberd, but of all that had been designed to happen.

"If you have any doubt still remaining, Mr. Clint, as to the propriety of removing Marmaduke Heath from the custody of his uncle," observed my tutor, after introducing me to this venerable beau, "I think this gentleman can dissipate it. Now, Peter, tell us, in confidence, what sort of footing do you consider your young friend and Sir Massingberd to stand upon; are they good—"

"Stop, stop, Mr. Long," interrupted the lawyer, taking an enormous pinch of snuff from a silver-box, and holding up his laden fingers in a prohibitory manner; "we must not have any leading questions if you please. Mr. Meredith, it is most important that you state to us the truth, without mitigation or exaggeration. You heard your tutor's first inquiry, which was a most correct one. How does Mr. Marmaduke Heath stand with respect to his uncle?"

"Well, sir," said I quietly, "he stands, as it were, upon the brink of a deep river, with his back towards a person who is bent upon pushing him in."

A total silence ensued upon this remark. Mr. Long and Mr. Gerard interchanged very meaning glances.

"Very good," returned the lawyer coolly, administering half the snuff to his nose, and dropping the other half among his shirt-ruffles. "That is a form of speech, I suppose, by which you would imply that Marmaduke is afraid of his uncle?"

"Very much," said I; "afraid of his life."

"And you have had no previous conversation upon this subject with either of these gentlemen, that is—you must forgive me if I press this somewhat hardly—they have never asked your opinion on the matter before?"

"Certainly not, sir."

"You are speaking, too, I conclude from your own observation of course, from your own knowledge of Mr. Marmaduke Heath's sentiments and position, and not from any hearsay rumour?"

"I am perfectly convinced, Mr. Clint," returned I gravely, "that Sir Massingberd Heath wishes to get rid of his nephew, and that Marmaduke knows it."

"Then Sir Massingberd shall be gratified," observed Mr. Gerard, with energy; "he shall get rid of him from this day."

"Stop, stop, my dear sir," interposed the lawyer. "Even supposing that all this is true, both the facts that I have received from you and Mr. Long, and the surmises entertained by this young gentleman, we are still only at the threshold of the matter. From the manner in which Sir Massingberd expressed himself when he wrote to me to demand the custody of the boy, and from his whole conduct since, I am certain that he will not give up his position as guardian without a severe struggle. We must steadily look our difficulties in the face. Supposing that, having been assured of Marmaduke's convalescence, he should send a post-chaise over here next week, or the week after, with a note, insisting upon his immediate return to Fairburn Park, what is to be done then?"

"I should send the post-chaise back again," returned Mr. Gerard, calmly, "with the verbal reply, that Mr. Marmaduke was not coming."

"But suppose he wrote to Marmaduke himself?"

"The reply would come from me all the same, Mr. Clint."

"But if Sir Massingberd appeals to the law?"

"He dare not!" exclaimed my host; "his audacity, great as it is, stops short of that. If he did, as sure as the sun is shining, I would meet him with the charge of attempted murder."

Mr. Clint took out of his other coat-tail a second snuff-box, which he never made use of except in cases of great emergency. "You are prepared to go that length, are you?"

"I am, sir," returned Mr. Gerard, firmly.

"You have not a shadow of foundation for such an assertion," pursued Mr. Clint, reflectively. "The slander will be pronounced malicious; you will be cast in swingeing damages."

"That is possible," remarked my host; "but there, nevertheless, will be such revelations of Sir Massingberd's mode of life, as may well cause the chancellor to reflect whether Fairburn Hall is a fitting educational establishment for a minor."

"John Lord Eldon is not an ascetic—"

"I know it, sir;" broke forth Mr. Gerard; "I am well aware that he is a heartless scoundrel, as dissipated, as dishonest, and—"

"Sir," interrupted Mr. Clint, with irritation. "I will not listen to such mad words. You may utter them, of course, in your own house, but not to me. This is the talk of those who would subvert all authority."

"They are not afraid to speak evil of dignities," murmured my tutor.

"I do not speak evil of dignities, my dear sir, but only of the rogues who fill them," exclaimed Mr. Gerard, laughing. "However, I beg your pardon, gentlemen; the remark escaped me quite involuntarily. You are aware, Mr. Clint, that my Lord Eldon is not absolutely an ascetic."

"I was about to say, sir," observed the old lawyer stiffly, "that his lordship is not so tenderly alive to the necessity of moral training as some of his friends would wish, and he has a strong respect for natural authority. He would lean, therefore, towards Sir Massingberd's view of the question—with whom; indeed, he is personally not unacquainted—and be induced to palliate his way of life."

"Sadder than orphans, yet not fatherless, are those in Eldon's charge," murmured Mr. Gerard. "Still," continued he, in a louder tone, "the charge of attempted murder, Mr. Clint, would have this effect, that even if Marmaduke were reconsigned to his uncle's care—which Heaven forbid—the eyes of the world would be upon Sir Massingberd, and he would not venture to work him a mischief. In the meantime, it rests with us to take good care that he has not the chance of doing so."

"And now," resumed Mr. Clint, after a pause, "supposing that all is arranged thus far to repel Sir Massingberd's claims, there is another matter to be considered. It would take long to explain the details of the case, but you must understand that the Heath property is very peculiarly situated. Sir Massingberd, who is in the enjoyment of it for life, cannot raise a shilling upon it; while Marmaduke does not possess a shilling, although the prospective heir of such vast wealth. They would be, in short, at present a couple of beggars; but by a special arrangement with a certain person, whom I need not name, a small annual sum has been allotted for the benefit of the boy, but, practically, quite as much so for that of his uncle. A certain annuity, I say, is paid to Sir Massingberd for the maintenance of his nephew, and another, solely on the latter's behalf, for that of the estate. It is a most beautifully intricate affair from first to last," pursued the lawyer with unction; "here are two relatives, who mutually support one another, and have yet every reason, looking at the matter in a rather worldly way of course, to wish each other dead. Sir Massingberd could borrow plenty of money, if the usurers were only confident that he could, as well as would, make away with his nephew. There would be even less difficulty under ordinary circumstances in procuring a loan for Marmaduke; but a delicate boy, whose uncle and guardian is bent upon putting a violent end to him—you see that renders the security so very slight. Altogether, it is certainly one of the nicest cases. It is not only a question of responsibility; there are always plenty of people ready to take any amount of *that* at a sufficient premium; but who will undertake the pecuniary charge of the lad if he is withdrawn from his uncle's roof? Sir Massingberd, of course, will never give up one tittle of the allowance entrusted to him to expend, except upon such compulsion as we should scarcely venture to employ. There are three years wanting to the boy's majority; and even when he has arrived at that, and should be willing to promise ample repayment, he may die before his uncle still, who has a constitution of adamant, when those who have maintained him may whistle for the money they have expended. The expression may be coarse," added Mr. Clint apologetically, "but I think it conveys my meaning."

"I thank you, Mr. Clint," observed my tutor, after a little pause, "for putting this matter before us so bluntly and decidedly. For my part, I am far from being a rich man; but, on the other hand, there are no persons who have a better claim upon my resources than my dear young friend and pupil, Marmaduke Heath. That he will repay me if he survives his uncle, I am more than assured; and, if he die early, I shall not regret that the remainder of his young life has been rendered happy through my means, although it may have cost me a few comforts."

I stooped down and said a few words in my tutor's ear. "No, Peter, no," continued he; "you are a

good lad, and your father is, doubtless, generous enough to comply with your wishes; but we must not resort to such a distant source in this emergency, indeed. Mr. Clint, do you think that a hundred and forty to a hundred and sixty pounds a year might be made sufficient to keep Marmaduke with respectability?"

"Half your annual stipend, eh, Mr. Long, eh?" ejaculated the lawyer. "Bless my soul, how this snuff gets in one's eyes! Such a sum should be quite sufficient. I think that would be found more than enough. He cannot live at your rectory, of course; that would be almost as bad as at the Hall; but there are plenty of spare rooms in my house in town. He has stayed there before, so that that can be done, we know. Marmaduke and I are old friends—No, no, it will not hurt me. Such a course cannot bring me into greater antagonism with Sir Massingberd than I am in already. I am always at daggers-drawn with him. He is for ever cutting down trees that don't belong to him, or selling heirlooms that are no more his than mine, or embroiling himself with me, the appointed guardian of the property, in some way or other. Yes, I'll take the lad, Mr. Long, come what will of it."

"You will do nothing of the kind," exclaimed my host, energetically; "you honest lawyer, and very worthy man; and you, you good priest—contradictions in terms, both of you—you shall not give away half your annual stipend, or my name is not Harvey Gerard. I have done each of you a very grievous wrong in thought, if not in word; and I hereby beg your pardon. It is possible, I perceive, to be a Tory, and yet preserve, if not a conscience, at least a heart."

My tutor smiled; Mr. Clint bowed his acknowledgments.

"With regard to Mr. Marmaduke Heath, however," pursued our host, "that young gentleman must be my especial charge. From this day until the period when he comes into his property, or lies in need of decent interment, as the case may be, he is my guest; or, if my house is distasteful to him, I will advance him whatever sums he may reasonably require for his maintenance elsewhere. Please to consider that that is settled, gentlemen."

"Whatever we may think of the political opinions of Mr. Harvey Gerard," observed Mr. Clint, with feeling, "his name has always been associated with acts of matchless generosity."

"Always, always," echoed Mr. Long; then added reflectively, "he has paid the fines of half the rogues in the country, and bailed the other half who have been committed to prison."

A simultaneous burst of merriment from his three hearers greeted this naïve remark of my unconscious tutor.

"I have done so upon one occasion, I confess," replied Mr. Gerard, good-naturedly. "I became surety, in 1791, for the good behaviour of a poor Birmingham rioter, as I thought, who turned out to be a Government spy. However, I assure you, generosity has nothing to do with my present intentions with respect to young Heath. My income is sufficiently large to admit of my accommodating the poor lad with ease, even if the repayment, sooner or later, were not almost certain, as it really is. But, besides all this, I must confess that the undertaking affords me exceeding satisfaction. Mr. Long, you are, I have heard, an enthusiastic fisherman; that is no common pleasure which you feel when your rod is bowed by some enormous trout, cunning and strong, who may break the whole of your tackle, and get away, after all, but who also may be landed helpless on the bank, a victim to your skill and patience. That is exactly the sport which I promise myself with Sir Massingberd Heath. If he were one whit less greedy, less formidable, less pitiless, I should feel less hostility towards him; he has, fortunately, no redeeming point. I have hated tyranny all my life, and I hate this man, who seems to be the very embodiment of it. He makes his boast that no one has ever stood between himself and his wicked will. Let us see what he will make of Harvey Gerard."

The speaker drew himself up proudly, but certainly not with unbecoming pride. His form dilated as he spoke; his voice grew deep without losing its distinctness; and into his mild eyes a sternness crept as when the frost congeals the lake. But for a spice of haughtiness, which to some might have appeared even arrogance, he could have stood for St. Michael in his contest with the foul Fiend,—have personified the Spirit of Good defying the Spirit of Evil.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GIPSY CAMP.

After not a little opposition upon the part of Mr. Long, who would have willingly borne his share in Marmaduke's expenses, it was settled that Mr. Gerard should be the young man's host, if he could only contrive to retain him in defiance of the power of Sir Massingberd; his home, however, was not to be the Dovecot, which was judged to be too much exposed, by its proximity to Fairburn, to the machinations of the enemy. The Gerards were to remove to their town residence in Harley Street, as soon as their guest was fit to accompany them. At first, his progress was tedious, but he grew rapidly convalescent as soon as he was able to exchange his bed for a sofa. Never was sick man more hospitably treated, or so graciously tended. Mr. Gerard possessed that almost feminine gentleness of manner which is generally found in persons of his peculiar organization. His sympathy, at least as easily aroused as his antagonism, was now deeply enlisted

in favour of Marmaduke for his own sake; he recognized his talents, and the beauty and tenderness of his mind, and won him, by pleasant studious talk, from the melancholy that overhung it; and the young man's heart, thrilling response to every touch of kindness, turned towards him, and expanded like a flower in the sun. As for Lucy, what rudest health would I not have exchanged for Marmaduke's languor, as he lay and listened to her clear sweet voice, now singing some cheerful ballad to enliven him, now reading aloud some tale so musically that itself seemed song! He could read to himself but little as yet, and if he did take up a book, his eyes refused to regard it, but followed the lovely girl, wherever she moved, with worship.

"This happiness is too great to last, Peter," he would often say; "it will all fade one day, I know, and leave me desolate. What man living is worthy to possess yon glorious creature? I feel as though I had no right even to love her. Yet, great heaven! how I *do* love her. How unconscious she is of her perfect sweetness! How she graces the meanest thing which she may set herself to do! Her presence seems to breathe very life into me; I then forget everything but her—even Sir Massingberd. To return to him would be death indeed—death death!" Then he would sink back, as if prostrated with the thought, and so remain despairingly despondent until he heard Lucy's voice, or laugh, or footstep. All this was bitter for me to bear. I was glad when Mr. Long suggested to me that he thought it was no longer necessary for me to remain with Marmaduke, and that I should return to Fairburn Rectory and my studies. Still, my heart was heavy upon that morning which was to be the last I was to spend under the same roof with Lucy Gerard. Within the last few weeks—nay, it happened in a few hours—I had Loved and I had Lost. If there be any to read this in whose eyes these words have meaning, they will pity me. I do not match such grief, indeed, for a single instant against the sorrow a man must feel for the loss of the loved companion of his life, against the lone wretchedness of recent widowhood; but it is a grievous blow. I wished Marmaduke and Mr. Gerard "good-bye" without quite knowing that I did so.

"Good-bye, Mr. Meredith," said Lucy, and though her voice was even lower and sweeter than usual, it wounded me like a knife.

"Why don't you call him Peter, Lucy?" exclaimed her father, laughing. "I think it would be more civil, now that we are going to lose him."

"Thank you, sir," said I, gratefully; and she did say "God bless you, Peter," very, very kindly.

Ever since that morning she called me so; but I was Peter to all of them, you see, as well as to her. Then I called her Lucy, and though for the first and last time, I shall never forget it.

> "I couldna say mair, but just 'Fare ye weel, Lucy
> Yet that I will mind till the day that I dee."

Then I mounted my horse, my luggage having already preceded me, and slowly took my way towards Fairburn. My life-blood seemed to ebb with every step. The clang of the gate that shut me out from the last foot of ground belonging to the Dovecot, sent a shudder through me like a knell. I was on the very spot where Marmaduke had met with the accident that had been so nearly fatal. Supposing it had killed him! Supposing...—I thanked God that I was able to thank Him from an honest heart that it had not done so.

Then I felt a little better. Having ascended the hill, I put my horse into a sharp canter upon the common, and the cool air through which I swiftly passed refreshed me. The hollow in which the encampment had been was now deserted, and only the round bare spot amid the green, which is the gipsy autograph, announced that it had ever been there. Some miles further on, however, a little brown-legged boy, evidently of that wandering fraternity, suddenly emerged from a fir plantation, and stood before me in the road as if to beg. I was already feeling in my pocket for a penny, when, showing his white teeth in gratitude, he shook his head, and coming close to my stirrup, exclaimed, "You are the gentleman from Mr. Gerard's, sir, are you not? Would you please to come and see Granny Rachel?"

In an instant, I remembered the pocket-flask, which I had entirely forgotten since the day in which it came into my possession; for all I knew, it was then lying yet in the drawing-room at the Dovecot.

"Yes, my boy, that will I," returned I; "but I fear I have not brought her what she wants."

He looked up in the bright interrogative manner peculiar to his tribe, so different to the stolid wonder of the agriculturist.

"She wants *you*, sir, as I understood. This is the sixth day that she has set me to watch for you by this roadside. Will you please to follow me?"

The boy started off at a pace which compelled me to move too fast for further questioning; and skirting the plantation for a hundred yards, stopped at the entrance of a roadway leading through the wood. The coming winter had not yet turned the broad green track to sand, and it ran so straight and far, that the pine trees seemed to stand on either side—a solid wall—with nothing but the blue heaven for their limit. This landscape of right lines would have delighted a painter of the Pre-Raphaelite school, it looked so stiff and unnatural; but pursuing the track for a little distance, and then plunging over a ditch and bank into the plantation itself, we suddenly came upon a scene which would have suited Morland. A low tent, with half-naked but merry children crawling in and out; a she-ass and her foal; a handsome male Epicurean, lying on his back, smoking a short, well-coloured pipe, the hue of which precisely resembled that of his own skin; a

young girl in scarlet mantle, and with earrings of great splendour, gathering fir-cones to feed the flames which licked around an iron pot suspended on four sticks, piled musket-fashion; and an old crone, sitting by the same, and picking the feathers from a bird, which, had the time of year been beyond the end of September, I should have certainly taken for a hen-pheasant. But to suppose this, would have been to suppose an infraction of the game laws! The walnut-stained children stopped their play as I approached, and stood in various attitudes of wonder, like beauteous bronzes; the man turned over on his side, and opened his slumbrous eyes a hairbreadth; the girl flashed one quick, comprehensive glance upon me, and then resumed her occupation. The old woman nodded familiarly without rising, and observed quietly, "So you are come at last, Peter Meredith. I trust you have brought good news of Marmaduke Heath."

"He is better," said I, "much better; and he knows who brought him help, and is very grateful. You have been expected daily at the Dovecot, where something more substantial than mere thanks is waiting for you."

"Rachel Liversedge desires neither silver nor gold," returned the old woman; "she has had her reward already, if what you say be true. It was not for love of the boy that I acted as I did; he has too much evil blood in him to earn my liking. But I am glad as though he were my own son that he will live."

"Carew," cried she, triumphantly, "no wonder *bura* Sir Massingberd looked *kalo* as ourselves."

"Oh, the great man looks black, does he?" said I.

The old woman dropped the bird, the girl her fir-cones, and both stared wildly at me, as though my voice had come from the clouds; the man sprung to his feet, and uttered a cry of wonder.

"What! do you speak our tongue?" cried he.

"Nay; you speak mine," returned I, calmly. "*Bura* is great; and *kala*, which you call *kalo*, is black, of course; everybody knows that who knows Hindustanee."

Then the three burst out together in a language, one word out of four of which seemed to be more or less familiar to me; as for understanding what they said, of course it was simply impossible; but no matter, I had established my reputation. From that moment, I felt myself to be the honoured guest of the family. Would I smoke? Would I eat? Would I drink? I was thirsty, and I said that I would gladly take some water—which, at a venture, I called *paince*.

"*Paunce*!" cried they, extravagantly delighted. "He talks like a true Cingari; and only look! is he not dark-skinned!"

The few words that my old ayah had taught me in India had thus procured me a hearty welcome in a Midshire fir-plantation.

"Sit down by me, Peter Meredith, my son," exclaimed the old woman; "and do you fetch him water, Mina."

I dismounted, and did as I was bid; while the young girl took a pitcher, and presently brought it filled from a running Stream near by, and offered it to me, like another Rebecca. But her grandmother—for such she was—cried, "Stop! let me put something in it;" and produced from her pocket the self-same flask which she herself had given me a few weeks ago, and which I had thought was left behind at the Dovecot.

"Why, I was blaming myself for not having brought you that thing back to-day," said I; "I never heard of your coming to claim it."

"Nor did I, young gentleman," returned the old woman, proudly. "Harvey Gerard is too kind a man to visit when one is not in need. That was why I left his house that day, directly I had told what had befallen Marmaduke Heath: I did not wish him to think I waited for my reward.

He returned me this with his own hands. He is not one of your proud ones. When we had the fever here—Mina, darling, you remember who came to see you, and saved your life?"

"Ah, yes!" cried the girl, clasping her dark hands, which gleamed with tawdry rings; "and his daughter, too, how I love her!"

There was a little pause; I felt my ears tingle, my cheeks burn. I did not dare look up from the ground.

"Lucy Gerard is very fair," whispered the old woman; "she will make a good and loving wife;" then she added roguishly, and in that gipsy tone which smacks so of the race-course: "Shall I tell your fortune, my pretty gentleman?"

"No, I thank you," said I, hastily; "I have no great confidence in your information as to the future. With respect to the past, on the other hand, you can doubtless satisfy me, if you will. I have a great curiosity to know how you became possessed of yonder flask with the Heath griffin."

"Peter Meredith," returned the old woman, very gravely, "you have asked me to tell you a sad story, and one to relate which will cost me much. It is not our custom, however, to refuse the first request of a new friend. But before I begin, let me ask you a question in my turn. Has it never struck you why Sir Massingberd Heath has not long ago taken to himself a young wife, and begotten an heir for the bonny lands of Fairburn, in despite of his nephew?"

Until that moment, the idea had never crossed my brain; but no sooner was it thus mooted than I wondered greatly at the shortsightedness of those among whom Marmaduke's affairs had been so lately discussed, and in particular at that of Mr. Clint, who, as a lawyer, should surely have at once foreseen such a contingency. "Well," said I, "I confess that, for my part, I have never thought of it; but there cannot be much danger of Sir Massingberd's becoming a wooer now; why, what young woman would be won by such as he?"

"What young woman would *not* be won?" replied Rachel Liversedge, grimly. "Think you that his white head and stony heart would weigh too heavy in the balance against his title and the reversion of his lands? Remember, all that is around us, and all that we could see from yonder hill to the right hand and to the left—pasture and corn-field, farm and park—would fall to the offspring of her who would venture, for a few years, to be Lady Heath. Peter, there is one maiden in Midshire, known to you and me, who would not consent to do this thing, though the offer were thrice as splendid; but I doubt if there be more than one."

"If that be so," said I, "why does not Sir Massingberd marry?"

"The answer to that is the story I am about to tell you," returned Rachel.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHY SIR MASSINGBERD DID NOT MARRY.

"I suppose you have heard, Peter Meredith, young as you are," began the old woman, "a great deal of ill-speaking against us Wanderers. We not only kill game, but even domestic poultry, if the opportunity is given to us; we not only steal wood, but horse-flesh; and since we are so partial to carrion, it is not to be wondered at that we sometimes suffocate a sheep with a piece of his own wool, in order to get the carcass cheap from the farmer. Yet whatever false charges are current about us now, these are nothing, either in gravity or number, to what they were when I was a young girl—that is, fifty years ago. Every man's hand, every woman's tongue, was against us: magistrates committed us without testimony; rogues made a trade of accusing us solely to get blood-money. Our name was more than a by-word, it was a brand; to call a man a gipsy, was to say vagabond and thief in one. Under these circumstances, Massingberd Heath left his father's house yonder, and came to live with us as congenial company. We were in this very wood the day he did so. The sun shone as brightly as now, the streamlet ran just as blithe, the air was filled, as now, with the sweet-smelling pine. The people only are changed—ah me, how changed!—who made up that scene. There was my father; he died! ten years younger than I am now; is not that strange, boy? his brother Morris, dead; poor Stanley Carew, you shall hear of him presently, a handsomer lad by far than his nephew there; my beautiful Sinnamenta, compared to little Mina yonder, though she is pretty enough, like a blush-rose to a mere peony, the flower of womankind. If there are ladies and women born into the world, then she was a lady. There are no such beauties now; no, friend, not even at the Dovecot. Let me see; I have counted four; then I was there also, comely enough, 'twas said, but not to be spoken of for looks with my younger sister.

"We were occupied pretty much as you see us now, for life in the Greenwood possesses but little variety, when Massingberd Heath strode in among us, with his gun upon his shoulder. We knew him well, but were not inclined to dislike him. He was a dissipated, wild, young fellow, but, as yet, his heart was thought, as the saying is, to be in the right place; his popularity, however, was principally owing to his antagonism to his father. Sir Wentworth had long passed through the spendthrift stage, and was very close with respect to money-matters; a harsh and griping landlord, and it is probable enough a niggard parent. His son's extravagances were at that time insignificant compared to what they afterwards became, yet the old man was for ever complaining. He persecuted all who were poor and in his power, but the gipsies especially. He feared for his deer, for his game, for his fences, and, besides, I verily believe he detested us for our improvidence. I remember he sent two of my young brothers to prison for tossing for halfpence upon a Sunday—he who made not even a pretence of religion himself, and had been used invariably to pass his day of rest in town at Tattersall's, betting his thousands on some approaching race. It is said that this wretched old man used to horse-whip young Massingberd almost daily, until a certain occasion, when the latter found himself stronger than he imagined, and reversed the process. After that, Sir Wentworth confined himself to cursing his offspring whenever they quarrelled. It was after some dreadful outbreak of passion on the part of the old man that Massingberd Heath left house and home, and elected to join our wandering fortunes. We were very unwilling that this should be. It was by no means so unusual a proceeding then as now, for persons of good birth, but broken fortunes, to become gipsies, but such had usually their private reasons for remaining so for life. They were very rarely criminals, but generally social outlaws, for whom there could be no reconciliation at home, or younger sons of respectable families, with quite a mountain of debt upon their shoulders. These were regularly nationalized among us; and if they conducted themselves for sufficient time in accordance with our regulations, they were permitted to intermarry with us.

"Now it was certain that Massingberd Heath sought only a temporary home; as soon as his father died, or even offered terms to him, he would leave us, and resume his proper station. Moreover, how was the maintenance of discipline and obedience to the chief of our tribe, absolutely essential as it is, to be kept up in the case of this new-comer? Even at that time, he was a

headstrong, wilful man, to whom all authority, however lawful or natural, was hateful. Was it to be expected that he who defied his own father, himself a man of iron will, would obey Morris Liversedge? On the other hand, Uncle Morris rather liked the young fellow. He had connived at many a raid on his father's own preserves—to such a pitch had the quarrel grown between them—and kept our pot boiling with bird and beast. Many and many a time had he led the Fairburn keepers to one extremity of the preserves, while the slaughter was going on in the other. Moreover, it would be of great importance, could we make a friend of the man who would one day own all these pleasant haunts of ours, and who could say a good word, and a strong one, for the poor persecuted gipsies, when it was needed. Poor Morris did not know that the rebel but too often turns out a tyrant, when he gets his chance. He could not foresee Sir Massingberd Heath sending folks to prison, or getting them kidnapped, and sent across the seas, for snaring the hares that he held so cheaply when they did not happen to belong to himself. If you want to find a gentleman who in his youth, and landless, has been a poacher whenever the opportunity offered, look you among the game-preservers on the bench of justices. This, however, is among the least of the basenesses of him of whom I speak. It is not for his bitter guardianship of bird and beast, or his hateful oppression of his fellow-creatures, that my heart cries out for judgment against this man, that I look with eager longing for that hour when God shall take him into His own hand."

The old woman paused a moment with closed eyes, and muttered something that was inaudible to me, rocking herself at the same time to and fro.

"Massingberd Heath became one of us, Peter Meredith as far as it is possible for such a wretch to be so; he ate with us, and drank with us, which they say is a sacred bond among even savages. It was not so with him. He cast his evil eyes upon Sinnamenta, to love her after the fashion of his accursed race. Perhaps you may think, Peter Meredith, that such an occurrence should have been foreseen by her father or her uncle Morris, and, for my part, I always thought that it was the presence of my lovely sister which mainly caused this man to join our company; but, at all events, neither they nor I dreaded any ill consequences. A gipsy girl is not a light-of-love maiden, like those of fairer skins. Heaven, who gives her beauty, gives her virtue also: this is not denied, even by our enemies. When you call your sweetheart 'Gipsy,' it is in love, not in reproach. Massingberd Heath knew this well, and therefore it was foe took such pains in the matter. It is true that we do not marry in church, but when we wed among ourselves, the marriage is not less sacred; It was a wedding of this sort, indissoluble by one party, but not by the other, which this man wished to compass. He did not gain his end."

The old woman's eyes sparkled with triumph for a moment as she said these words, but her voice sank low as she continued:

"Peter Meredith, if you have a sister, think of her while I speak of mine; she cannot be more pure than little Sinnamenta, nor less designing. Her weakness was one common to all women, but especially to those of our unhappy race; she was fond of finery—fine clothing, jewels, shawls; they became her; she looked like any princess when attired in them. Stanley Carew, who loved her in all honesty, could give her no such costly gifts as Massingberd Heath showered upon her, and, to help his end, even upon me. The gipsy's ragged coat looked mean and poor beside that of our guest. This man, too, whom you know but as a scowling tyrant, with a face scarred with passion and excesses, was then a handsome youth. You smile, Peter, at the wonder of it; it is, however, not less true than that the wrinkled hag to whom you are now listening was then a bonny girl. Imagine *that*, Peter, and you can imagine anything. Ah, Time, Time, surely at the end of you, there will be something to recompense us for all that you have taken away!"

Once more Rachel Liversedge paused as if in pain; then with eyes whose sight seemed to receive but little of what was present, but were fixed on the unreturning Past, continued as follows:

"Yes, Massingberd Heath was handsome enough, unless when enraged; his wrath always brought the horse-shoe out upon his forehead.[1] Ay, and he was agreeable enough, too. He could smile as though he had a heart, and vow as though he owned a God. By his devilish art he managed to ingratiate himself with Sinnamenta; he caused her to treat poor Stanley ill, and then, pretending to take his part, got credit for generosity. There are many who call us gipsies a base people, yet this excess of meanness was quite new to us; my little sister—that was what I always called her, because I loved her so—she believed him. She would have trusted to his word, and married him, according to our rites, and been his wife and drudge for all her life; but since this could not be without the consent both of her father and Morris, he had to ask it of them. He might as well have asked it of Sir Wentworth; they had got to know him well by close companionship, for men fathom men better than women do—even gipsy women, who foretell men's fortunes for them—and they answered, 'No.' They did not believe that he had the least intention of being with us longer that it suited him, and they peremptorily refused his request. After one burst of passionate threats, the young man pretended to yield assent to their decision. Morris was inclined to think this acquiescence genuine; but my father, more warmly interested in the matter, and therefore perhaps less credulous, kept on his guard. Finding out that Massingberd Heath had secretly made overtures of reconciliation to his father, and missing him one night from the camp, he caused Morris to strike tent at once; and before morning we had put twenty miles between us and Fairburn. Nor was this effected too soon, for, as we heard long afterwards, the constables were searching this very wood for us at day-break.

"Our company was bound on a long travel to Kirk-Yetholm, Roxburghshire, one of the few places in Scotland, although but one mile from the frontier of Northumberland, where the gipsies reside in any number. There we should meet with friends, and be safe from all molestation. It was late in

the year to travel so far and into such a climate, but there was no help for it; and moreover, some of the Carews had a house there, to which Stanley said we should be welcome; and so it turned out. I believe Sinnamenta would rather that we had camped out of doors, even in that northern clime, so disinclined was she to be beholden to him or his friends, after what had happened, although she did not dare to say so. Poor Stanley imagined that, now we had removed from the neighbourhood of his rival, he might renew his suit with success; but the proud girl would not listen to him. She did not exactly pine after the man whose wiles she had so narrowly escaped, but her life seemed henceforth saddened. The domestic duties which had hitherto sat so lightly upon her, became burdensome, and she set about them languidly. The whole of the time we remained at Kirk-Yetholm, and it was many, many months, she never mentioned Massingberd Heath, but never ceased to think of him. It was fated that she was to be undeceived about that man too late."

[1] I am reminded by a friendly critic of the "suspicious coincidence" of a horse-shoe on the forehead, in the case of "Redgauntlet." I never think of Sir Massingberd without thinking of that worthy; and it has been a matter of doubt with me, whether Sir Walter Scott might not himself have seen the Squire of Fairburn and drawn him from the life—both as to mind and feature—in his famous novel.

CHAPTER XV.

THE REASON CONTINUED.

"About a year after our departure from Fairburn, Sinnamenta and I had been to sell some baskets, the making of which was a great trade with us at that time, at Wooler, in Northumberland; and on our return from the fair that was being held there, we met a number of gentlemen driving home from shooting in the Cheviots. They went by very rapidly, yet not so fast but that I recognized one of their number; I had only to look at my little sister's cheeks to see that she had recognized him also. The very next day came Massingberd Heath to our camp, professing himself injured by our abrupt withdrawal from his society, volunteering his companionship as before, and reiterating his vows and promises to Sinnamenta. She expressed herself in such a manner as to lead us almost to fear she might be induced to elope with him; while he, upon his side, seemed prepared to sacrifice everything to obtain her: his very selfishness caused him, as it were, to forget himself; and I do believe, if it had been insisted upon, he would have had the banns published in Wooler Church, in the hearing of the fine friends with whom he was staying, and been married by the parson. However, he again proposed to go through the Cingari ceremony, and this time, *Morris and my father agreed to it*. Having acknowledged himself to be an adopted gipsy, Massingberd Heath was joined in wedlock to Sinnamenta Liversedge; the ordinary ceremonies were dispensed with, by command of Morris, the bride and bridegroom only pledging themselves to one another solemnly in the presence of the assembled tribe. It was then, since he could not purchase suitable presents in such an out-of-the-way district, that I received from that man's hand this shooting-flask, as a remembrance of that day; my uncle commanded me to accept it (although I vehemently disapproved of what had been done), and I therefore keep it now, when every other gift of that accursed man has long been committed to the flames. For my part, I could not understand this novel pliancy on the part of Morris and my father; while Sinnamenta, as I think, implicitly believed in her lover's protestation, that for her sake he would all his life be a wanderer like ourselves. That very day, however, he took her away southward, on his road to London.

"For beauty, as I have said, and for gentleness, there never breathed the equal of my little sister, and yet in six short months this Heath grew weary of her; like a spoiled child tired with a fragile toy, he cared not what became of her, so long as it vexed his eyes no more. It is not necessary to tell what brutal insult he put upon her; enough to say that she fled from him in terror, as he had intended her to do, and returned to us, heart-stricken, woe-begone, about to become a mother, with nothing but wretchedness in the Future, and even her happy Past a dream dispelled. It was dreadful to look upon my little sister, and compare her to what she had been so short a time before. She felt the cold after her luxurious life in town; but she was far more ill at ease in mind than body. Above all, she sorrowed because her lover's desertion had left her disgraced—that she had brought shame upon all who belonged to her. Incited by the poor girl's misery, Morris and my father put into effect an audacious design which they had privately had long in hand. We were back again at Fairburn—all but Stanley Carew, who was away about a new horse for our covered cart—not camping in the plantation, as of old, for fear of Sir Wentworth, but upon the common hard by. On a certain morning, neither my father nor uncle went forth as usual, but sat at home smoking and watching at the opening of the tent. Not long after breakfast, there appeared a wayfarer in the distance, whose form showed gigantic in the summer haze.

"That must be a big fellow, little sister," said I, drawing her attention to it. She was sitting huddled up, as usual, in front of the fire; but no sooner had she caught sight of the object in question, than she ran with a cry to her father's knee, and besought him to save her from Massingberd Heath. Ah, even then, at that last moment, if father or uncle had but consulted me, or let me into their plans, I should not have my little sister's shuddering face before me as now, the large eyes wild, the full lips pale with terror. He had beaten her, poor darling, even before the scene that was coming; but she had even more reason than she knew for fear. This man came

striding on to the entrance of the tent, and stood there looking at its inmates with a withering scowl. 'Why don't you speak,' said he, 'you vagabonds! For what is it that you have dared to send for me?'

"My father pointed towards Sinnamenta—'Is not that cause enough, Massingberd Heath?'

"'No,' retorted the ruffian coolly. 'What is she to me? The drab has come to her thieving friends again, it seems—the more fool she; for there was more than one who had a fancy for her in town, and would have taken her off my hands.'

"My father's fingers mechanically sought the knife which lay beside his half-finished basket; but my uncle Morris stood up between him and the speaker, and thus replied:—

"Massingberd Heath, I sent for you to tell you something which concerns both us and you. Many months ago, you came to us, uninvited and unwelcome, and elected to be a gipsy like ourselves. This makes you smile very scornfully; yet if you did not mean the thing you said, you lied. However, we believed you. You were admitted into what, however wretched and debased it may seem to you, was our home, and all we had to offer you was at your service. You fell in love with that poor girl yonder, and she did not tremble at your voice, as now, but trusted to your honour. It is true, your position in the world was high, and hers was what you saw it to be. Still you wooed her, and not she you; that is so, and you know it. Do not slander her, sir, lest presently you should be sorry for it. Again and again, then, you demanded her hand in marriage—such marriage, that is, as prevails among our people—not so ceremonious, indeed, as with the rest of the world, but not less binding. This we would not grant, because we disbelieved your protestations on your honour and before your God; and disbelieved them, as it has turned out, with reason. Then we fled from you and your false solicitations to the north, hundreds of miles away; even thither you followed us, or else accidentally fell in with us; I know not which. You renewed your offers and your oaths. We found, all worthless as you are, that the poor girl loved you still, and, yielding to your repeated importunity, we suffered her to become your wife.'

"'Wife!' repeated the renegade contemptuously. 'Do you suppose, then, that I valued your gipsy mummeries at a pin's head? You might as well attempt to tie these wrists of mine with the gossamer from yonder furze.'

"'We knew that, Massingberd Heath, although the girl did not know it; she trusted you, although your every word was false.'

"'She is fool enough for anything,' returned the other brutally. 'But I know all this. Have you dared to bring me here merely to repeat so stale a story?'

"'A story with an ending that you have yet to learn,' pursued my uncle sternly. You were wedded by no gipsy mummeries, as you call them; you took Sinnamenta Liversedge, in the presence of many persons, solemnly to wife.'

"'Ay, and I might take her sister there, and marry her to-day after the same fashion, and no law could say me "nay."'

"'Yes, *here*, Massingberd Heath; but not at Kirk-Yetholm.'

"'And why not?' inquired the ruffian, with a mocking laugh, that had, however, something shrill and wavering in it.

"'Because Kirk-Yetholm is over the Border, and, by the laws of Scotland, my niece Sinnamenta is your wife, proud man, and nothing but death can dissever the bond!'

"An awful silence succeeded my uncle's words. Massingberd Heath turned livid, and twice in vain essayed to speak; he was well nigh strangled by passion.

"'I thank heaven, Rachel,' murmured my little sister, 'that I am not that shame to thee and to my race which I thought myself to be.'

"'You shall have but little to thank heaven for, girl, if this be true,' cried her husband hoarse with concentrated rage; 'somebody shall pay for this.'

"'It *is* true,' quoth my father, 'and you feel it to be so. Nothing remains, then, but to make the best of it. We do not seek anything at your hands, nor—'

"'Only the right of camping undisturbed about Fairburn,' interposed my uncle Morris, who was of a grasping disposition, and had planned the whole matter, I fear, not without an eye to the advantage of his tribe. 'You wouldn't treat your wife's family as trespassers.'

"'Certainly not,' returned Massingberd Heath, with bitterness; 'they shall be most welcome. I should be extremely sorry if they were to leave my neighbourhood just yet. In the meantime, however, I want my wife—my Wife. Come along with me, my pretty one.'

"He looked like a wild beast, within springing distance of his prey.

"'Oh, father, uncle, defend me!' cried the miserable girl. 'What have you done to bring this man's vengeance upon me?'

"'Ay, you are right there!' answered her husband, in a voice that froze my veins. 'That is still left for me—vengeance. Come along, I say; I hunger until it shall begin.'

"'Massingberd Heath,' cried I, throwing myself at his feet, 'for God's sake have mercy upon her; it is not her fault. She knew no more than you of all these things. Look how ill and pale she is—you above all men should have pity on her wretched condition. Oh leave her with us, leave my little sister here, and neither she nor we will ever trouble you, ever come near you. It shall be just the same as though you had never set eyes upon us; it shall indeed! Oh, you would not, *could* not surely be cruel to such a one as she.'

"I pointed to her as she stood clinging to her father's arm as much for support as in appeal, so beautiful, so pitiful, so weak; a spectacle to move a heart of stone.

"'Could I not be cruel,' returned he, with a grating laugh, 'ay, to even such a one as she? Ask *her* —ask *her*.'

"There was no occasion to put the question; you saw the answer in her shrinking form, her trembling limbs: his every word fell upon her like a blow.

"'She has not yet known, however, what I can be to my *Wife*,' continued he. 'Come, my pretty one, come.'

"'She shall not,' cried my father, vehemently; 'it shall never be in his power to hurt her.'

"'What! and I her husband?' exclaimed the other, mockingly. 'Both one until death us do part! Not come?'

"'He will kill her,' murmured my father; 'her blood will be on my head.'

"'Are you coming, wife?' cried Massingberd Heath, in a terrible voice; he stepped forward, and grasped her slender wrist with fingers of steel. Morris and my father rushed forward, but the man had swung her behind him, placing himself between her and them, and at the same instant he had taken from his pocket a life-preserver—he carries it to this day—armed with which he was a match for five such men. 'And now,' cried he, 'what man shall stop me from doing what I will with my own?"'

"'I!' exclaimed a sudden voice, and with the word some dark mass launched itself so violently against the throat of Massingberd Heath that the giant toppled and fell; upon his huge breast, knife in hand, knelt Stanley Carew, his eyes gleaming with hate, his lithe body working like a panther's. He was not hesitating, not he, he was only drinking in a delicious draught of revenge, before he struck.

"'Strike!' cried I, 'strike hard and quick, Carew!' But while the blade was in air, Morris and my father plucked him backwards, and suffered his intended victim to rise, although despoiled of his weapon.

"'No, Carew; that will never do,' quoth Morris. 'We should have the whole country upon us in an hour, and they would hang us altogether.'

"'Carew is that man's name, is it?' exclaimed Massingberd Heath. 'I will not forget it, be sure. You shall all pay for this, trust me; but he, and *this one*, more than all. Come away, wife, come away.'

"'Yes, she must go, Carew,' interposed my uncle, checking a furious movement of the young man's. 'He knows all now, and has a right to what he demands.'

"'Ay, but if he lays one finger upon her,' cried the passionate gipsy, 'if he dares to harm her even by a word, and I hear of it, as sure as I see the sun this day, I will know what is the colour of his life-blood. You may take her away across the seas, but I will follow you; you may surround yourself with precautions, but I will come at you; you may go day and night in mail, but this knife shall find your heart out.'

"Massingberd Heath nodded contempuously, without speaking; and striding from the tent, signed to Sinnamenta to follow him, which she did, moaning and weeping, and casting backward, ever and anon, pitiful glances upon the home and friends she had exchanged for such an evil lot. I never saw my little sister more."

As if the remembrance of this sad scene had utterly overcome her, Rachel Liversedge hid her face in her hands, and wept until the tears welled through her tanned and shrivelled fingers.

"I am indeed distressed," said I, "to have caused you so much pain. I will not make you sad by telling me more."

"Nay, my boy, since I have begun it, let me finish with it; I shall think of it all the same, and it is better to speak than think. That very night Stanley Carew was arrested upon the charge of stealing the horse which he had bought in open market, and ridden home just in time to play the part I have described. In the days I speak of, forty pound was given as a reward to those who gave such evidence as produced a capital conviction, and many a gipsy perished innocently in consequence of that wicked ordinance. It is possible that this accusation was made by one of those who made a practice of earning blood-money; but I am positively certain the false witness was set on by Massingberd Heath, even if that man did not originate the charge. It was pressed against poor Carew very harshly; and although the farmer of whom he bought the animal came honestly forward, and swore to its being the same which he had sold the prisoner, his evidence was rejected on account of some slight mistake in the description. You must have heard tell of that awful execution long ago at Crittenden jail, when the wretched victim to perjury and revenge

uttered these terrible words: 'O God, if thou dost not deliver me, I will not believe there is a God.' That unhappy man was Stanley Carew. My father and uncle were pitilessly persecuted and imprisoned, and died before their time. These wrists have worn fetters, this back has suffered stripes; nor did the vengeance of our enemy cease even with one generation. One of my boys is beyond seas, and another within stone walls; yet I know that the hate of Sir Massingberd Heath is not yet slaked."

"But what became of your little sister, poor Sinnamenta?"

"I know not what she suffered immediately after she was taken from us; Heaven only knows: her husband carried her a great way off out of our ken. But this I have heard, that when he told her of the death of Stanley Carew she fell down like one dead, and presently being delivered of a son, the infant died after a few hours; the mother lived—a maniac. Yes, Massingberd Heath, you did not kill my little sister, after all; yonder she lives, but recks not whether you are kind or cruel; she drinks no more the bitter cup of love's betrayal."

"She is surely not at Fairburn," asked I, "is she?"

"What else should keep us here, boy, to be harried by keepers, to be vexed by constables and justices? What else should keep me here in a place that tortures me with memories of my youth and of loving faces that have crumbled into dust? What else but the hope of one day seeing my little sister yet, and the vengeance of Heaven upon him who has worked her ruin!" The old woman rose up as she spoke, and looked menacingly towards Fairburn Hall. "I could almost exclaim with poor Carew," cried she, "that if Massingberd Heath escape some awful end, there is no Avenger on high. I am old, but I shall see it, yes, I shall see it before I die."

If there had been more to tell, which fortunately there was not, I do not think Rachel Liversedge could have spoken further; her emotion far more than her exertions, had reduced her strength so far, that though she uttered the last words energetically enough, I had had for some time a difficulty in hearing what she said.

"I thank you for listening to the tediousness of an ancient dame so long," murmured she: "if you were not a good boy, and half a gipsy, you would never have been so patient. I have told you all this to put you on your guard: it is no secret, but still you may not have heard it. Distrust, despise, detest Massingberd Heath; and warn his nephew, if you be his friend, not to venture again within his uncle's reach."

"I will, I will!" cried I; "and I thank you in his name," I held out my hand, and she turned it over in her own.

"An honest palm," quoth she, "without a stain. There is one unlucky cross about it, Peter, that is all. You must not fret for that."

I mounted my horse amid cordial "good-byes" from the gipsies, who had been pursuing their usual avocations during the above recital, as though nothing was more common than that the head of the family should have a secret of two hours long to communicate to a strange young gentleman; and throwing a shilling to the boy who had shown me the way, I took my leave.

It was not till I left the plantation far behind me, and had ridden at speed for some distance on the open road, that I was able to shake off the sombre feelings that oppressed me, and to meet Mrs. Myrtle's welcome to the rectory with an answering smile.

CHAPTER XVI.

I DO SIR MASSINGBERD A LITTLE FAVOUR.

Upon my return to Fairburn, I became the object of immense curiosity and attraction. I was stared at in the rector's pew at church, and, in my solitary rides, whithersoever I went, as the repository of the great secret of the disruption between Sir Massingberd and his nephew. It was even whispered that I was the prime mover of the young man's rebellion, and had planned the very manner of his escape upon Panther, including the accident. At all events, I knew all that had happened, which nobody else knew, except my tutor himself. Now Mr. Long was as close as wax. Many an invitation had Mrs. Myrtle obtained of late to take a dish of tea upon grounds which her hosts had since stigmatized as false pretences. As the housekeeper and confidential servant of the rector, she had been asked by Mrs. Arabel of the Grange Farm to take evening refreshment with her in a friendly way; also by Mrs. Remnants, who kept that extensive emporium in the village which supplied snuff to the aged of both sexes (though not gratuitously), becoming cambrics to the young, and lollipops to those who had not yet reached that period of life wherein outward adornment is preferred to inward gratification; also by the exciseman's wife; nay, there was not anybody's wife in Fairburn, having the wherewithal to make a tea-table alluring, and being in a sufficiently high position in life to venture upon the step, who did not invite Mrs. Myrtle to visit her, and proceed to treat her like a refractory pump; they poured a little down, in hopes to be more than remunerated for the outlay. But, alas, although the dear good lady was willing enough, being indeed a gossip born, she had nothing to tell them. She was not equal to the task of Invention, and of facts, even to trade upon in tea and toast, she had absolutely none.

Conceive, then, how every face was turned interrogatively towards Master Meredith—no, *Mr.* Meredith, now that the object of everybody was to please him. How the dames dropped courtesies, and hoped my honour was well; and my honour's friend too, Mr. Marmaduke, he was well too, they trusted—Heaven bless him; and he was staying away from Fairburn a good bit, was he not? and how did has uncle like that, who had always kept him at home so strict?—and was it true that he was residing with Mr. Harvey Gerard? well, dear me, and how odd that was; an atheist and a democrat, people did say; but there, there were some again as spoke well of him.

Sedate Mr. Arabel, set on, without doubt, by his inquisitive lady, even waylaid me in a narrow lane, and insisted upon my looking in at the farm, and partaking of casual hospitality. "Ye'll just have three drars and a spet," said he (meaning by that farm of expression a few whiffs of a pipe), "and take a glass of ale;" and when I declined the first offer upon the ground of not being a smoker, and the second on the plea that it was only eleven o'clock, A.M., and consequently rather early for ale, he confessed that his missus was a-waiting for me with a bottle of cowslip wine, and a seed-cake of her own making. It was rather difficult to escape from hospitable snares of this kind, but I revealed as little as possible without giving absolute offence. On the other hand, I received some information, the details of which had not been confided to me by Mr. Long.

"Well, sir," remarked Mrs. Arabel, after I had told her all I meant to tell, which was not much, "and it's no wonder as Mr. Marmaduke *should* have run away, I'm sure."

"My good lady," observed I, "pray, be particular; I never said he ran away; I said his horse ran away."

"Yes, of course, sir," responded the mistress of the Grange, winking in a manner that made me quite uncomfortable; "you are very right to say that, Mr. Meredith, very right. But Sir Massingberd's opinion is, that it was all planned from first to last, only he says you nearly overdid it."

"Ah, indeed," said I; "how was that?"

"Well, it seems Sir Massingberd was quite deceived about that horse he bought for his nephew; instead of being quiet, and fit for the lad, it was a perfect demon; and it was sheer madness of you young gentlemen to go racing in order to make it run away; then, to arrange with Mr. Gerard all beforehand; well, I must say I shouldn't have thought that either of you would have had the depth."

"Thank you, Mrs. Arabel," said I, laughing; "I am sorry you entertained so low an idea of our intelligence."

"Well, sir," returned the farmer's wife, with an air of excessive candour, "my husband, you see, he often has said to me, says he, 'That young squire Marmaduke, I'm darned if he ain't little better than a fool; he don't know what shot to use for rabbits, that he don't; I never saw his equal for ignorance. And as for that lad from the Ingies—that was you, you know, sir—well, of all the young fellows turned of seventeen as I ever saw, he's the'—"

Here Mrs. Arabel crimsoned, and stopped short, as if she had been very nearly betrayed into saying something which was not entirely complimentary.

"Pray, go on, my dear madam," said I; "'of all the young fellows turned of seventeen whom he had ever seen, I was the'—"

"Well, sir, he'd just the same opinion of you as he had of Master Marmaduke; but, for my part, I always said, that although you might neither on you know so much as you ought to, and though you might seem, as it were—"

"Ay, you always stood our friend, and said we were not such fools as we looked; did you?"

"Just so," replied Mrs. Arabel, simply; "and so you see it has turned out. If Mr. Marmaduke can only live elsewhere till something happens to Sir Massingberd—although, indeed, he looks as if nothing ever could hurt him—his life will doubtless be much pleasanter than at the Hall; it is no place for a young gentleman like him, sure*ly*, although, indeed, things are better there than they were. The dark-eyed foreigneering-looking young person, although, indeed, she was old enough to know better; well, *she's* gone."

"So I have heard," said I drily.

"Yes, she went away in a whirlwind, *she* did," continued Mrs. Arabel, reflectively.

"Dear me," replied I, "I never heard that."

"Ah, indeed, I daresay not; why, you see, Mr. Long was a little mixed up in it. Perhaps he thought it better not to tell you. Take another glass of cowslip wine, sir; it has been more than ten years in bottle; and the cake is as good a cake as you will put teeth into in all Midshire, though I say it as shouldn't say it. Well; the thing happened in this way, you see. The foreigneering female, she used to throw things at folks; dishes, plates, whatever came first to hand, whenever she was in her tantrums. Mr. Gilmore he had his head opened with a slop-basin, so that you could lay your finger in it; and Oliver Bradford, I believe she fired a gun at him, charged with swan-shot. However, at times, she was quite otherwise, crying and submissive as a child. They said it was Religion up at the Hall; but they knows nothing about that; how should they? It was hysterics, I daresay, and serve her right too. Well, who should come here, the very Sunday after Mr.

Marmaduke had run away, and when Sir Massingberd was like a wild man with rage, and couldn't speak without blaspheming, but one of them Methodee preachers as sometimes hold forth upon our common. Now the foreigneering female was a-walking in the park shrubbery, with one of her hysterical fits upon her, I suppose, and what does she hear through the palings but words as I suppose the poor creature never listened to before; and presently out she comes upon the common, and stands up among all the people, with her great eyes swollen with weeping, and her painted cheeks—and I always said they were painted—daubed and smeared with tears. Carter John, who is very much given to that sort of worship, he was there; and he told me she looked for all the world like the woman in the great picture over the communion-table in Crittenden Church, who is wiping the feet of our Lord with her hair.

"Then the preacher, he bade her repent while there was yet time, and fear nothing but only God. But Sir Massingberd, he came out, and dragged her in from the very preacher's hand, and presently back again he comes with a horse-whip, and swears there shall be no Methodees in his parish, and if he caught the hypocritical ranter—as he called him—within hearing again, he'd split his ears. Now, I don't go with him there," pursued Mrs. Arabel, gravely. "It isn't for us, Mr. Meredith, to say as nobody can't pick up good, unless it's in church; and least of all should such things be said by Sir Massingberd, who lets that beautiful family pew get damp and mouldy, with the fireplace always empty all the winter long, and never puts his nose into it from year's end to year's end. However, what does the foreigneering female do, but declare she would starve herself to death, before she would eat the bread of unrighteousness any longer; and not one morsel of food would she take, though they locked her up, and tried to tempt her with her most favourite dishes. So Sir Massingberd, being at his wits' end, came over to the parson, and begged him to come and persuade the woman to be reasonable, and take some refreshment; and Mr. Long—he at first declined to interfere in such a matter at all, but presently thinking the poor creature might be really penitent, although it came about through a Methodee, and hoping to do her some good, although not in the way Sir Massingberd intended, he accompanied him to the Hall; and what do you think? Why, they found the poor woman was in such earnest, that she had cut off the whole of her beautiful black hair, and there it lay on the carpet, like so much rubbish. So the Squire he swore that he didn't care now whether she starved or not, and turned her out of the house, as I said at first, in a whirlwind. She was very faint and weak; and Mr. Long, who would never exchange a syllable with her before, made Mrs. Myrtle give her a good meal, and gave her some good words himself, and sent her away to her friends—for it seems she had some friends, poor wretch; and this has made Sir Massingberd wilder than ever against the rector, whom he had already accused of aiding and abetting young Mr. Marmaduke in his running away; so that altogether the Squire is ready to make an end of everybody."

This last statement, although a little highly coloured, as Mrs. Arabel's descriptions usually were, was really not far from the truth. It did almost seem as if the baronet was so transported with passion as to be capable of any enormity. What the law permitted him to do in the way of oppression, that, of course, he practised to the uttermost; his morality, never very diffuse, had concentrated itself upon one position—the defence of the game and trespass laws. His keepers were exhorted to increased vigilance; the worst characters in the parish were constituted his spies. Every night, it was now the custom of their lord and master to go the rounds in his own preserves, and visit the outposts, to see that the sentinels did their duty. He employed no Warnings or Trespass Boards in Fairburn Park; his object was not to deter, but to catch the contemners of the sacred rights of property in the very act. The pursuit of his life had become man-hunting. I write that word without any reference to Marmaduke Heath, for, indeed, at that time I thought that Sir Massingberd had given up all hope of recovering possession of his nephew. A considerable period had now elapsed since the young man's convalescence; and yet the baronet had taken no steps to compel his return. He had written, indeed, to Marmaduke a letter of anything but a conciliatory character, and calculated to re-arouse the lad's most morbid fears; but Mr. Harvey Gerard had intercepted the dispatch, and returned it with an answer of his own composition. He had stated briefly the results of the late conference at the Dovecot respecting his young guest; he had reiterated his intention of bringing, in a court of justice, the gravest charges against the baronet, in case of any legal molestation from him; and he had finished with a personal recommendation to that gentleman to rest satisfied with the enjoyment of the allowance that was supposed to go to the maintenance of his nephew. Epistolary communication by hand was rendered impracticable, on the part of the baronet, by the removal of the Dovecot household to town.

This was a bitter blow to the lord of Fairburn; he knew so well the abject fear which he had inspired in my unhappy friend, that, notwithstanding all that had come and gone yet, he did not doubt that a few words in his own handwriting would bring the truant back, however loath. We are living now in such quiet times, and under the protection of such equal laws, that I am aware my younger readers will have a difficulty in conceiving how one human being, however powerful, could be held in such terror by others. I was aware, from the first, that the present universal security would give my narrative an air of improbability, and I fear that this must increase as it proceeds. I have only to say, that at the period of which I write, there was no poor man in Fairburn parish, however honest, however prudent, who might not have been lodged in jail at the instance of his squire, and would have found it difficult to clear himself; or who might not, on a hint from the same quarter, have been pressed, if he did but give the opportunity, on board a man-of-war. I am likewise certain that had Sir Massingberd ventured upon such a step, he might have recovered possession of his nephew, or at least withdrawn him from his protector, by the strong hand of the law, upon the ground of Mr. Gerard's professing revolutionary principles. In these days of Palmerston and Derby, of Tweedledum and Tweedledee, it is impossible for those

who are not old enough to have witnessed it, to imagine the rancour of political parties half a century ago, or the despotism and flagrant injustice that were sanctioned under the convenient name of Order.

For the haughty baronet to be thus cut off from all intercourse with his victim, was to be foiled indeed. At first, he stung himself well-nigh to frenzy, like a scorpion within its circle of flame; but after a time the white heat of his wrath began apparently to abate. He seemed to have made up his mind to sit down quietly under his defeat, and to content himself with tyrannizing over those who were yet in his power. This comparatively peaceful state of things was looked upon by Mr. Long and myself at first with suspicion, but at last with real satisfaction. When Sir Massingberd sent over five pine-apples and some splendid grapes to the Rectory with his compliments (for the first time within twenty years), we shook our heads, and my tutor addressed the messenger of his bounty in these words; "Tell your master I am exceedingly obliged to him for his kindness. 'Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.'"

"Would you be so good as to write that down, sir?" said the man.

"You may give him the message without the tail," replied the rector, a little discomfited at his own indiscretion, but congratulating himself very much that he had expressed his thoughts so classically.

But when pine-apples and grapes became common presents from the Hall, we began really to think that the stubborn old baronet had come to the conclusion that it was as pleasant to be on good terms with his neighbour as not, and that he was genuinely bent on reconciliation. A soft answer is said to be efficacious to this end, but it is nothing compared to hothouse dainties out of season; and notwithstanding all I knew, and all I suspected, I began to regard Sir Massingberd Heath, not indeed with less contempt and dislike, but with less positive loathing, and certainly with less fear. I had not set foot upon his property since Marmaduke's departure, and the baronet took occasion to stop me as I rode by his gate one day, and remonstrate upon the incivility of such a course of conduct.

"It can do me no damage, young gentleman, that you should take your pleasure in my park, more especially as you are not a sportsman, who would covet my hares and pheasants; and I cannot but think that your omission to do so is a proof of ill-feeling towards me, which I am not conscious of having deserved at your hands."

He spoke stiffly, and without condescension, as a man might speak to an equal, between himself and whom a misunderstanding existed unexplained, but capable of explanation, and, foolish boy as I was, I felt flattered by his behaviour.

If the least notion of making myself out to be a hero had existed in my brain when I began to write these Recollections, it has been dissipated long ago. I have been quite as much surprised during this recital as any of my readers have been, at the contemplation of my own meannesses; if I had known how many and how serious they were to be, perhaps I should have hesitated to recall them; but I commenced with as strong a determination, nothing to extenuate with respect to myself, as to set nothing down in malice with respect to others; and thus I shall proceed to the end.

While, then, matters were on this less antagonistic footing, and when Marmaduke had been away about a year, business happened to take Mr. Long from Fairburn, and I was left a day and a night my own master. He had not been gone an hour when Mrs. Myrtle came into the study, where I was employed at my books, with a letter in her hand; she looked quite pale and frightened, as she said, "Lor', Mr. Peter, if this note ain't from Sir Massingberd hisself for *you*. I feels all of a tremble, so as you might knock me down with a peacock's feather."

"Well," said I, forcing a laugh, "but I am not going to use any such weapon, Mrs. Myrtle. What on earth is there to be afraid of in the squire's handwriting? It can't bite." But I felt in a cold perspiration nevertheless, and my fingers trembled as they undid the missive. It was a polite invitation to dine with the baronet that evening.

"You are not going, sir, I *do* hope!" exclaimed the housekeeper eagerly, as soon as I had acquainted her with the contents of the note. "Why, such a thing hasn't happened for this quarter of a century. He'll poison you, as sure as my name's Martha Myrtle. I never saw you and master eating his pine-apples without a shudder; the rector *was* uncommon ill after one of them, one day."

"Yes, Mrs. Myrtle," said I quietly, "and I have suffered also from the same cause myself; but I don't think the squire was to blame."

"But you ain't a-going, sir; I am sure as master wouldn't like it. Oh, pray, say you ain't a-going."

"Well, then, I won't go, Mrs. Myrtle. The fact is, I feel one of my colds coming on; they generally begin with a lump in my throat; so I shall write to excuse myself."

I really had a lump in my throat; my heart had jumped up and stopped there at the mere notion of a *tête-à-tête* with Sir Massingberd, diversified—no, intensified—by the presence of Grimjaw. I wouldn't have gone through it for a thousand pounds; so I wrote to decline the honour upon the ground of indisposition. I was compelled to keep the house, I said, for the entire day. Half an hour afterwards, another letter arrived from the Hall. Since Sir Massingberd might not enjoy the pleasure of my company at dinner, would I permit him to come over to the Rectory that morning,

and have a few words of conversation with me upon a matter deeply interesting to both of us? There was no getting out of this. If I had gone to bed, on plea of illness, I felt that even that course would have been no protection to me. Sir Massingberd would have forced a dying man to play with him at pitch-and-toss, if so inopportune a game had happened to take his fancy. On the other hand, Mrs. Myrtle's suggestion that I should mount my horse, and ride away after Mr. Long, was really too pusillanimous a proceeding; I therefore wrote back to the baronet a polite falsehood, to the effect that I should be very happy to see him; and in a very few minutes afterwards, I was face to face with Marmaduke's foe.

He came in unushered—Mrs. Myrtle not being equal to such an occasion—filling the doorway with his gigantic form, and well-nigh touching the ceiling of the low-roofed room with his head.

"I am sorry to intrude upon an invalid," said he, "but what I had to say was of a private nature, and I was not sure of finding you alone at any other time."

I bowed, and begged my visitor to be seated.

"It is something," thought I, "that this man is civil at least." For there is this great advantage in being habitually insolent and overbearing, that when one does condescend to behave decently, people appreciate one's good maimers very much.

"I have called upon you," continued the baronet, "with respect to my nephew and your friend, Marmaduke Heath. It is idle to deny that he and I have not been to one another what our mutual relationship should have led us to be. I am naturally a hard man; losses and poverty have doubtless rendered me more morose. Marmaduke, on the other hand, is of an over-sensitive and morbid nature. We did not get on together at all well. There were faults on both sides; it was six of one, and—"

I shook my head.

"Very well, then," resumed Sir Massingberd, with candour, "let us say that it was I who was in the wrong. I have not the patience and gentleness requisite for dealing with a character like him; my temper is arbitrary; I have behaved with but little courtesy even to yourself. You are polite enough to contradict me, but nevertheless it is true. For *that*, however, reparation can be made. I wish that I could as easily make atonement in the other quarter. This, however, I feel is utterly impossible. Things have gone too far. I make no complaint of my nephew's having been encouraged in his rebellious course by one whose duty it was, on the contrary, to reconcile us. I wish to say nothing that could only lead to fruitless discussion, and perhaps a disagreement between you and me; that would be most impolitic on my part, since I come here to solicit your good offices."

"Mine, Sir Massingberd? mine?"

"Yes, I desire your kindly assistance in bringing about a better understanding between Marmaduke and myself."

"Sir," said I, "what you ask is a sheer impossibility. Marmaduke Heath may be wrong in his estimate of your character, but it will remain unchanged to his dying day. I am as certain of this, as that yonder yellowing tree will presently lose its leaves."

"You speak frankly, Mr. Meredith," returned the baronet, calmly, "and I do not respect you less upon that account. It is not, however, as a mediator that I need your assistance; I ask a much less favour than that; I simply wish you to inclose a letter from me to my nephew."

"Sir Massingberd Heath," said I, with some indignation, "you have done me the favour of calling upon me in my tutor's absence, in the expectation of finding me so weak as to be unable to refuse whatever you chose to ask, or so treacherous as to be willing to deceive those who are generously protecting my best friend from one whom he has every cause to fear. I am extremely obliged to you for the compliment;" and with that I laid my hand upon the bell.

"One moment," observed the baronet, quietly, nay, with suavity, though the letter U upon his forehead deepened visibly, and the veins of his great hand, as it rested on the table, grew big with passion; "one moment before you ring. I am sorry you should have taken such a view of my conduct as you have described; you young men are somewhat hasty in the imputation of motive. I am a straightforward, rough fellow, and may have displeased you; but I am not aware that I have done anything to justify you in accusing me of meanness and duplicity. Those persons who have charge of my nephew are, in my judgment, deeply culpable; but I do not wish you to act deceitfully towards them on that account. Matters have come to that pass, however, that I cannot even communicate with my nephew, even though I have that to say which would give him genuine pleasure. This Mr. Harvey Gerard"—his deep voice shook with hatred as he mentioned that name—"has taken upon himself to return my letters to Marmaduke unopened. I know not how to convey to him even such a one as this."

Sir Massingberd threw across to me a folded sheet, directed to his nephew, and motioned that I should open it. It ran as follows:—

"NEPHEW MARMADUKE,—It seems that you are fully determined never again to seek the shelter of my roof; I am given to understand that the time for reconciliation has gone by, and that any attempt to effect it would only cause you annoyance, and make the breach wider between us. If so, so be it. I am an old man now, and I wish my last years to be passed in peace. I wish to make

no allusion to the character of the person with whom you have chosen to reside, further than to express a hope that when I am gone, and it will be your part to exercise the rights of a great land-owner, that you will not employ your influence to subvert the laws and the government. It is as mad in those who possess authority to countenance revolution, as for a man seated on a lofty branch to lop it off with his own hands. I do not say this as your uncle, but merely as one of an ancient race with whom we are both connected, and in whose welfare we should take an equal interest. Mr. Meredith is kind enough to enclose this parting word of advice—the last communication that will probably ever pass between us—from

"MASSINGBERD HEATH.

"P.S.—Burn this when you have read it, lest your friend should get into trouble upon my account."

I read and re-read this strange epistle with great care, before I made any comment upon it. There was nothing, to my mind, objectionable in any of the contents. I had been twice to Harley Street during the summer, and found Marmaduke as morbidly apprehensive as ever of some course of conduct to be adopted by his uncle with reference to regaining the custody of his person; he was haunted still by the shadow of this terrible man. The words I held before me were certainly calculated to reassure him. No news could be more gratifying than this positive resignation of the baronet's claim to be his guardian, this final "good-bye" under Sir Massingberd's own hand. As for the political advice, I thought that very healthy. I was then, as now, a staunch conservative, and although I did not sympathize in the least with the harsh acts of the government in respect to poor, misguided men, not without their wrongs, yet I did think Mr. Gerard's views both visionary and dangerous.

"I trust," observed Sir Massingberd, gravely, "that the sentiments which you are now perusing are in accordance with your own. I am speaking, I believe, to a gentleman, and consequently to a natural friend of order."

I bowed in assent. "There certainly seems nothing in this epistle which Marmaduke might not read," muttered I, musing.

"*Seems?*" cried the baronet. "Why not say *is* at once?"

A sudden idea, gleaned from some romance which I had been lately reading, flashed across my brain. Why did the postscript say, "Burn this when you have read it?" I let my hand, with the letter in it, drop below my knee, so that the missive was held close to the fire.

"There is no writing in lemon-juice, I do assure you," observed Sir Massingberd, quietly; "you will only scorch the paper."

I coloured at the exposure of my suspicions, and in my confusion it did not strike me that the speaker must himself have at least entertained such a project, or he never could have unmasked me so readily. I was a little ashamed of myself, and rather sorry for my incredulity. Sir Massingberd saw this, and pressed his point.

"Since there is nothing concealed, and no harm in what is visible, I do hope you will grant the favour I requested, and inclose that note to my nephew."

"Well, sir," said I, after a little hesitation, "I will inclose it. I give you warning, however, that I shall send a line by the same post to let Mr. Gerard know that I have done so."

"By all means," responded Sir Massingberd. "I am only anxious that my nephew's own eyes should read what I have written. Have you a taper and wax?" asked he, folding up the sheet. "I might as well stamp it with my seal."

I rose and brought what he required from a writing-table. Sir Massingberd sealed the letter, and gave it into my hand.

"Mr. Meredith," said he, rising, "you have done me a great service. I think I have said, that the oftener you make use of my grounds the better I shall be pleased. Did I add that the bowling-green is entirely at your service? I am too stiff in the back to have a game with you myself, but I will give directions to Gilmore to be your antagonist, whenever you may feel inclined."

The baronet took his leave in a stately, but not unfriendly manner. He certainly *was* stiff in the back; but that was his nature. As he smiled, his lip turned upwards, instead of the usual way; but so it always did. Yet I did not feel quite comfortable, as I stood by myself over the fire, balancing Sir Massingberd's "good-bye" to his nephew in my hand, and questioning within myself whether it wouldn't be better to inclose it to Mr. Harvey Gerard, after all. However, in the end I kept my promise.

END OF VOL. I.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LOST SIR MASSINGBERD: A ROMANCE OF REAL LIFE. V. 1/2 ***

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