CORNCRAKE

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ENGLISH LITERATURE

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shieldmaiden

Editor-in-Chief

> Fantasy is escapist, and that is its glory. If a soldier is imprisoned by the enemy, don't we consider it his duty to escape?... If we value the freedom of mind and soul, if we're partisans of liberty, then it's our plain duty to escape, and to take as many people with us as we can!
> JRR Tolkein

Earl the Dragon Slayer

Edward White

THE FIRST CHAPTER
The Statue

It was the most boring day of Earl's life. He was in school and school was always boring. He wasn't allowed to do anything fun during the lessons, he did doodle on his paper which was fun but he wasn't technically allowed to do that. Playing in the school ground during lunch wasn't fun either, he wanted to play games with action and wooden swords. But his teachers said violence was bad and that included play-violence and he had been told if he brought his wooden sword to school again, they would burn it.

They had already written notes to his parents telling them they should get rid of his wooden sword as it would encourage him "[...] into a lifestyle of violence, into habits of hurting others, into militant-thinking and into aggressive, competitive and self-destructive ways".

Earl didn't exactly know what "militant" meant but he guessed it was a bad thing. He had managed to throw away all those notes before his parents managed to see them, but he had stopped taking his wooden sword to school.

The only games he could play were sports such as football and cricket. But the teachers had insisted that these games should be non-competitive and instead be cooperative; the school staff said that games with winners or losers were "mean" and games where everyone won were much "nicer". But they were also more boring as a result, only the girls and the sissy boys wanted to play them.

It was nearly the weekend though and Earl was in his last lesson, history. When this was over, he could go home and do what he wanted to do and read what he wanted to read. The history lessons here didn't seem to match the history books back at his house and he much preferred the books at home.

His teacher was talking about one of the biggest battles that had taken place on the continent. The Second Siege of Durmonte's Castle but for some reason his teacher Mister Smidgen didn't want to talk about the interesting parts of the battle. Like how the attackers managed to scale the wall by tricking the small number of defenders or how when the attackers were about to seize victory, they were attacked in the rear by the relief force.

No, Mister Smidgen was only talking about the effects the battle had on trade relations between the countries involved after the war had ended.

Boring.

"Despite attempts by Ambassador Kurderwiez, the nation did not want to lower the embargoes on the importation of orange tomatoes..." Mister Smidgen droned on, "...thus relations became fraught and difficult according to the diarist Frauden Dirk, who was a scribe for an accounting guild at the time. But we shall talk about those in detail next week. Now on your tables should be colour-in drawings of the different ambassadorial uniforms of the countries mentioned. Colour them in and answer the questions related to the exportation of radishes."

Earl had already finished colouring those drawings. He had been barely listening and was now playing with his dark hair and rubbing his brown eyes to try and stay awake.

"While you are colouring those in, I shall answer any questions you may have about the Second Siege of Durmonte's Castle," Mister Smidgen said.

Earl raised his hand.

"Yes Worthington," Mister Smidgen sighed.

"Mister Smidgen," said Earl, "since we were talking about the Battle of Durmonte's Castle..."

"We prefer the term tragedy," Mister Smidgen listlessly interrupted, "the noun "battle" is too neutral a term for the horrible death which happened on that day."

"...why didn't we look at the leaders of the armies?" Earl asked, ignoring Smidgen. "I mean, why didn't we talk about how Marque Jacque de Nichy single-handedly killed fifty men by himself holding a key gateway into the keep? And why didn't we look at how Count Karl von Froudenhoffer fooled the defenders that his men had left the camp and then attacked suddenly? Or how people fled at the sight of Sir Rackington, a man who had killed a dragon?"

Smidgen sighed again.

"These things are not as important as the economic, socio-political, cultural, agrarian, hygienic and trade-relational changes which happened after the tragedy and the war closed," he said. "Have you been reading antiquated history books, Worthington?"

Earl didn't know exactly why but he didn't feel like answering this question.

"I thought so," said Smidgen picking up a pen and a piece of paper, "listen Worthington. I know the things you have read in those history books are exciting but real history is more..."

He paused.

"I am trying to think of the word," he said.

"Boring?" Earl suggested.

"No definitely not!" said Smidgen with a bit of emotion, "more... complex and intricate. The history books you are reading are full of... falsehoods. It is unlikely Marque Jacque de Nichy managed to kill fifty warriors by himself. Since he was on the winning side and very few people could write in those days, he probably embellished his achievements in the tragedy to further his political standing. It certainly helped him marry the daughter of King Julianus."

He took a breath.

"As for Count Froundenhoffer, celebrating intelligence which caused tragedy is not good. And as for Sir Rackington, whilst a man of... many accomplishments, you should know better Worthington. Dragons do not exist."

With that Mister Smidgen clearly decided he'd had done enough and began writing on the piece of paper he'd picked up. Earl guessed that he was writing a note to his parents probably warning them to get rid of his grandfather's history books which were kept in the study. Earl decided he'd have to get his hands on this note too before his parents saw it.

Earl completed the questions with the least necessary effort and waited for the school clock to ring four o'clock, so he could go home. The clock was only happy to oblige Earl after so long and soon he was walking out of the school gates and down the paved road of the village.

It was a bright sunny day, the kind which appear in April and warm everyone up for summer. And on days like this, the sun brought special attention to the white marble statue in the middle of the paved village square; the statue every villager would pass at least once during the day. It showed a mighty knight wearing full armour, face hidden by his great helm and in his hands a tall great sword stabbed into the pedestal below him. The warrior was standing with one foot on the pedestal but the other was resting on two severed, scaly dragon wings.

It was a statue Earl had read much about (outside of school). It was a statue commemorating Sir George of Greenley. The books said that Sir George was a formidable warrior in his age and had come to this village to kill a dragon which held dominion over the inhabitants and the surrounding land. A fierce battle took place lasting two days and two nights and when dawn broke on the third day Sir George defeated the dragon.

He sliced off its wings and three of its four limbs. But before he could deliver the deathblow, the evil lizard managed to burrow its way deep into the earth and thus escaped Sir George.

Despite not being truly defeated, the dragon did not return and the village was freed from its tyrannical rule. Sir George went on to accomplish other great deeds and embark on other heroic adventures. Before he left the village however, he told the people that the dragon would return and when it did, he would also, to kill it once and for all.

Thus, it was said that Sir George was not dead but merely sleeping, waiting for the day the village was threatened by its old nemesis once more, and on that day, he would awake and finish their battle.

Or at least that was what had been said.

It had been over three hundred years since the battle between George and the dragon (or "the supposed and almost certainly fictitious" battle had happened, according to Earl's teachers) and

no one took the legend seriously anymore. Earl had read some of the history books in his school and he had observed a clear progression of opinion. From his grandfather's books back home, he saw that historians had taken the legend seriously. Then from the ones at school he saw that historians had started to take it less seriously but had still
enjoyed the tale and then (as the books got newer and newer) they had started to dislike the story but had admired the statue. But now Earl was noticing in the adults around him a further development: the opinion that the statue was bad.

According to modern historians, Sir George represented ideals which were "inappropriate for these enlightened times" and the statue celebrated those backward ideas. Earl didn't know whether the ideas or "ideologies" as his teachers called them, were bad or not but to him it seemed clear that the statue was only celebrating Sir George's defeat of the dragon which had lorded over his ancestors. Nevertheless, the village was considering a vote on whether to demolish the statue. Earl looked at the statue as he always did while walking back to his house at the end of the street on the edge of the village. He always felt better when he looked at it, somehow his spirits were always lifted when he saw it and he felt some inner power stir inside him. He didn't know what caused it precisely, was it the sword and armour? Or the pose of the man who had triumphed over a monster and freed a realm from darkness? Or could it have been just the skill of the sculptor in crafting this image? Could it have been a combination of all of these?

Earl did not know.

He opened the door to his house. Earl's home was at the end of the village and next to the large open fields where sheep and cattle were allowed to roam and eat freely. There were no fences or walls as the sheep and cattle were so tame one could just call them by name and they would come. At any rate, both the sheep and the cows didn't like to leave the apple orchard which Earl's mother and father tended. The shade and the luscious grass were too much for the livestock to resist.

Earl walked through the old red door and saw his mother and father sitting in the lounge deep in conversation.

"...it seems clear we should get rid of it," his father said.

"I agree," his mother replied, "it must be filling our children's heads with so many bad and violent ideas."

"Yes," Earl's father nodded seriously, "it... hey son! How was school?"

"It was fun," Earl lied, he had learnt that sharing his honest opinion about school was unwise, "what are you talking about?"

"That horrid statue," his mother replied.

Earl felt a pit open in his stomach.

"Yes that," his father said, lighting his pipe, "it shouldn't be in the village. I was telling your mother about the vote on the statue."

Earl couldn't believe it. He had known that the village had been discussing the statue along with othermatters every Friday evening, but he had never thought there would be a vote on the issue.

"I was just saying that I shall be casting my vote for destroying the thing," his father said, taking a puff from his pipe.

Earl felt his heart beat faster. This couldn't happen. He imagined the statue and two strong men wielding hammers smashing it to pieces. He shivered at
the thought.

"Are you alright dear," his mother asked, leaning forwards, "I hope you haven't caught a cold."

Earl knew he needed to say something.

"You can't destroy the statue!" he blurted.

His parents were shocked.

"What do you mean?" his mother asked.

Earl knew it was too late to back down now. "It's... it's a work of art!" he said. "It celebrates the moment Sir George defeated the dragon which ruled our village in the past!"

"Art can be bad," Earl's father replied, "and that statue is bad art. Do not get me wrong son. Peter Bromley was an excellent sculptor and the statue is an elegant example of what you can do with marble. However, it does not and cannot be celebrating the defeat of a dragon. Dragons don't exist. What it does celebrate is violence and death. You understand the statue is almost certainly a metaphor for something. Probably a metaphor for some rival Sir George killed. A person or perhaps even a group of people lost to the records of history. Regardless, the statue is almost certainly a celebration of the death of innocents."

"You don't know that!" said Earl, exasperated, "nothing I've read suggests that Sir George killed anyone except those who deserved it!"

His father's pipe twitched slightly in his mouth. "We know that dragons don't exist so my explanation is the most likely," he said, firmly, "besides, history is written by the victors. All those things the history books say about the victims of Sir George are likely untrue or exaggerated."

"And," his voice got darker, "don't you dare say ever again that anyone or anything deserves to die. Because I'll tell you something son. Even if dragons were real, I'm sure none of them would deserve death by the sword."
Earl opened his mouth but his father raised his hand.

"Now we shall discuss this no further," his father said, leaning back into his seat, "I shall be voting for its removal and my mind is fixed on that. There is nothing more to be said or added on the subject."

Earl's mother nodded approvingly and said to him. "We know how you feel about the statue and those stories your grandfather used to read to you, may he rest in peace," she said, "but you must understand, we think this is best for us, you and the village. We're doing this because it is the right thing, not the easy thing."

Earl looked at the kind face of his mother and the resolute face of his father before storming out of the lounge.

As he left, he heard his father say quietly but not quietly enough: "Sometimes, I wish he was more like his sister."

Earl felt his blood boil and marched to the one place which would make him feel better. His grandfather's old study.

The study smelt of musty old books which Earl had come to appreciate over the years. To Earl it was the smell of wisdom and knowledge, two things he associated with his grandfather. There were three wooden bookshelves in the square room, two on either side of the fireplace and one on the left wall. Above the fireplace was an old weapon's plaque which had held two sabres. Earl had asked his grandfather if they were real and he explained they were decorative rather than practical, but he told him he'd used one of the weapons to drive off a wolf trying to attack his grandmother. His grandfather had had a book on swordplay and Earl had read it from cover to cover and had practised everyday hoping that one day he would be skilled enough to use the decorative sabres.

But the blades were now gone. Some years ago, when Earl was younger, the village had held a vote on whether to dispose of all their weapons and the result was a unanimous yes. All the weapons had been taken to the smelter and melted down to produce various things such as candlesticks and farming tools. His grandfather had passed away at this point and so there was no one to stop his parents taking the sabres to the smelter.
Earl moved to one of the most-read books on the nearest shelf. The History of Sir George. There were three books on Sir George in the study and Earl had read them all, but this was his favourite because it contained illustrations of George's adventures.

He turned to the pages describing Sir George's encounter with the dragon and looked at the black and white illustration beside the main text. It showed Sir George bringing his sword in a downward cut towards the wings of the dragon which was snarling at him with all its fang-like teeth.

Earl wondered whether what his father had said had some truth to it. Was this all a metaphor? If the dragon had been asked about this, wouldn't it have said that Sir George was the villain? Did the dragon deserve this?
He shook his head. He didn't know what to think anymore and

he didn't know what to trust. In one sentence, his teachers told him not to believe anything he read but in the next would tell him to trust the books they gave him. Did he trust his grandfather's books or did he trust his school's?

These questions continued to plague his mind throughout the rest of the day and he couldn't get rid of them, even when he went outside and started practising cuts and thrusts with his wooden sword. But there was one thing he was decided on and there was no changing his mind about it.
He didn't want the statue to be destroyed.

THE SECOND CHAPTER
The Return of the Knight

School ended early. This was nice for two reasons. The first was because it meant less school and the second was because it was a Friday which meant the weekend was even longer.

Earl should have been happier but his spirit was still low. The statue of Sir George was always on his mind. The vote was two days away now and he knew how all the adults would cast their ballot.

He walked up to the statue destined for destruction. Normally, it inspired him but now it depressed him. The stone knight was strong and resolute, a figure of might and courage. A man who had fought a dragon and won so that three hundred years later, the descendants of those he saved could come and tear down the statue which grateful villagers had erected in his honour.

Earl stood still before it. He felt he should say something. Apologize to Sir George for what the villagers were going to do to his statue but he knew this would be silly. Sir George was dead and his parents and teachers were right, he wasn't sleeping. He was only a man and would not be coming back, neither to save his statue nor to save the village from a returning dragon if it existed.

Earl sighed and moved to walk by it but stopped upon seeing something move. He turned and looked at the face of the statue, the helmeted head was moving forwards. Wait no. It wasn't the head itself but something which looked like the head was coming out of it and moving forwards!

Earl stood transfixed by the strange event. It wasn't just a helmet which was moving out of the statue but the whole armoured body with the sword as well!

This new figure came out of the statue and stood on the edge of the pedestal before jumping onto the ground in front of Earl.

Now that the armoured knight was standing in front of him, Earl could better come to grips with what he was seeing. The knight appeared to consist of cloud or white mist, although there was no wind in the air that day, wisps of white matter were flying and blowing off the warrior into nothing like smoke.

There was silence in the square as Earl stared up at the tall and intimidating wisp of Sir George.

Earl was so shocked and stunned by what he was seeing, he didn't even have the mental control to wonder whether he was asleep or not.

Finally, the figure spoke. "I have come to fulfil mine oath," his voice was strong but not loud necessarily, "Heaven hath granted my awakening to aid this land to battle the returning worm. Folk!" He shouted. "Warriors, knights and soldiers come hither! Much is there to prepare! Soon the great worm will return!"

His voice seemed to echo around the village, which was impossible because there was nowhere for a voice to echo. Earl would have thought anyone within a mile's distance would have heard it. But as he looked around the village, even though people were chatting to their neighbours and walking about doing various jobs, no one was responding to George's commands. Although George was still wearing his great helm, he seemed to be looking around in confusion.

"What is this!?" he cried. "Can none heareth my voice?"

He looked at Earl.

"Lad," he said, "dost thou see and hear me?"
Earl could only manage a nod.

"Why do these village folks not?" George asked in surprise.

Earl swallowed. "I don't know," he said.

"What is thy name?"

"Earl."

"Earl, art thou true in thy words?" asked George seriously.

Earl nodded.

"Then swiftly," George said, "find the warriors of the village! Tell them that the worm returns! Every fighter must be ready. Thou shalt be my tongue to thy folk."

"We don't have any warriors."

Sir George went silent.

"Or weapons." Earl added.

George bent down so his helmed head was eye-level with Earl.

"Dost thou speak true?" he asked.

"I swear," said Earl.

George did not move.

"How can this be!" he finally exclaimed. "I told thy fathers to be ready for the worm's return. Have ye not kept any weapons?"

"No," Earl explained, "no one believes you slew a dragon. They think that your whole history is fiction. There is even going to be a vote in two days to destroy your statue."

Again, George was silent. He turned and looked around at the village and then back to Earl.

"Tis clear," he said, finally, "if thou art the only one who can see me, then thou shalt have to slay the worm."

Earl was shocked. He felt his heart rate increase. "Me?" Earl said. "I can't slay a dragon! I'm too young!"

"There are no others," George said, "tis not ideal but thou shalt do."
"But…" said Earl, "why can't you do it? You're here now."

Sir George sighed.

"If but I were able," he said, "heaven allowed my return hence yet not to slay the worm but to find he who shall. My charge is to guide and I shall be thy guide."

Earl felt a panic-stricken sweat break out on his forehead. The knight couldn't be serious. He was too small, too young and much too inexperienced to be tasked with killing worms and dragons. He needed to find an excuse to escape this responsibility.

"You could probably find someone elsewhere," he said, "maybe in the next town or village…"

"I must not waste time," George replied, "he will be here soon. Thou art this land's last hope."

Earl didn't like the idea that he was the village's "last hope" because if he was, he knew there wasn't much hope at all!
"But…" he said, thinking, "I now know you're real but how do I know the dragon is real? I mean I can see you, but I've never seen a dragon outside of the history and story books. How do I know you're telling the truth about this worm?"

The knight was dumbfounded by Earl's absurd question. Earl knew it was absurd, but it was the type of question his teachers had taught him to ask when he was reading books and he was willing to try anything to escape the responsibility of slaying a dragon.

Sir George looked at him long and hard for maybe ten seconds before speaking again.

"Earl," he said, "I exist. Thou hast said so thyself. Thusly, I shall ask thee a question: for what purpose would men such as myself exist if worms and dragons were fiction? And why would I be allowed to waken from my slumber if there were no threat to be thwarted?"
Earl tried to think of an answer. He thought he might be able to answer his first question with any number of retorts he had received from Mister Smidgen but as to the second he could not think of any worthy response. He felt his body start to shake.

"I don't have a sword," he said.

"What dost thou have?" George asked.

"I have a wooden sword," said Earl.

"Then take that,' George replied, "and I will take thee to a place where swords are forged."

THE THIRD CHAPTER
East Oak Wood

Earl went home with Sir George following behind him. No one was around to see either of them enter the house. Earl collected a knapsack and gathered cheese, bread and water for the journey. George had told him it would take until the evening for them to arrive at the village on the other side of the forest where the smith was to be found.

After he had packed food and water, Earl went to his room and pulled his wooden sword from under the bed. It was a simple thing he had made himself; he wasn't sure what use it would be on the journey but Sir George had told him to take it.

Earl's house was on the east end of the village. Beyond the orchard and the fields where the cattle roamed was the forest, East Oak Wood or just East Oak to the villagers. He had been told it was mostly a forest of oak trees but Earl had never been allowed the wood itself. It was considered a dangerous area while Spinney Wood on the other side of the village was considered safe.

Earl's parents never told him why East Oak was dangerous, only that he should never enter it because entry was strictly forbidden by village law. From where he was standing, however, the forest didn't look more or less dangerous than Spinney Wood and he couldn't see why it should be illegal to enter it.

As Earl walked across the grazed fields, wooden sword in hand, bag hanging from his back with the ghostly Sir George beside him, he couldn't help but dwell on how wild this situation was. This was the last thing he would have predicted if he were asked yesterday what was going to happen today. The events unfolding currently were surreal but he had already pinched himself enough times to know he wasn't dreaming. He had ceased being frightened however, his fright had turned into excitement. For the moment, he could forget that he was supposed to kill an ancient worm upon his return to the village and instead enjoy the journey. He was eager to see the inside of East Oak and to find this forge to acquire an actual sword, it had been years since he had seen a real weapon.

If George could detect Earl's excitement, he didn't say anything.

"What is this forge and who is the blacksmith?" Earl asked as they drew closer to the trees.

"It is in a village and the blacksmith is an old friend," said George, "I shall tell thee more when we get there. For the moment, keep an eye for danger. If thou hast spoken true, then there may be danger within these trees."

Earl nodded and gripped his wooden sword tighter. What could be in the woods? He wondered. Bears? Wolves? Other dragons? His parents and neighbours had never been specific. Although if what his grandfather had said was true about the wolf who attacked his grandmother, then canine beasts probably dwelt within the woods.

If any wolves appear, I'll climb a tree, Earl thought to himself, and if they try climbing up, I'll poke them in the eye with my sword. He played several scenarios involving the appearance of wolves in his mind, creating plans to deal with every possible predicament. His thoughts were interrupted however upon entering East Oak properly.

True to its name, the forest was comprised of ancient, large oaks. Their branches stretched far and wide and created a canopy which almost completely hid the sky. However, the canopy did not block the sun but instead filtered the light through its leaves, tinting it a light green. The ground beneath the trees was covered with luscious grass that had never seen grazing animals, beautiful flowers flourished in the sunlight and large mushrooms along with thick moss covered fallen branches and tree trunks. Birds sang sweetly in the branches above while butterflies, bees, and insects buzzed and hummed around and above the flowers.

East Oak was more than pretty, it was beautiful. And it was more than mesmerising, it was captivating. The memory of Spinney Wood with its small trees, lonely flowers and crushed plant life, vanished from Earl's mind. He realized that until now he had never entered a forest or wood before in his life and he now knew what he had missed for years. He stood spellbound for some seconds, scanning the woods around him soaking in the environment, its sounds, its colours and its shapes. He slowly moved forwards, still captivated by the beauty… no, beauty didn't capture East Oak's magnificence… exquisiteness was probably the more apt word. But in truth, Earl couldn't find any one word or list of words which could describe the scene and ambiance around him.

"Do you know any words to describe this?" he asked Sir George.

George looked at him and then at the wood around them. "Some things cannot be expressed with words alone," he said finally.

Earl noticed a dirt path as he walked further through the grass. It was small and twisted and wound its way through the grass and between the trees. Maybe it was a route used by rabbits, he didn't know. It looked big enough for him though.

"That is the path thou must follow," said Sir George, pointing. Earl walked onto the path. He didn't know whether it was the fact he was on a quest or because he was in an enchanting forest or a mixture of these things, but stepping onto the path, he felt his excitement change into what he could only imagine was joy.

He giggled, then he chuckled and then he began running up the path laughing all the way. He ran following the path through patches of red mushrooms, past trees and over fallen oaks, deeper and deeper into the wood. Normally, this kind of running would have made Earl tired, he couldn't seem to gather energy to run home from school (even though it was maybe only five stone-throws away) but here, it was as if he were drawing from an unlimited pool of liveliness.

On and on he ran, his legs strangely enjoying the exertion. How long he might have kept running, I do not know, however, he slowed down upon noticing subtle changes in the wood's atmosphere and then stopped abruptly upon turning round a strangely large alder tree flanked by natural rows of bushes.

It was almost as if he was looking into a different wood but Earl knew this was part of East Oak. Yet how different it was! The areas he had run through were green and bright but this region was damp and brown. The ground was not covered with green grass or colourful flowers but instead smothered and choked with water. Earl had never seen a bog in his life but he knew this was one. The path cut through and around the large ponds of stagnant, muddy, brown water, where there were no pools there was nothing but soaked brown mud.

Earl knew instinctively he would sink if he stepped into this mud. There were trees growing in the water-clogged earth but they were miserable-looking. They were tall but thin, their leaves were brown as if it were autumn rather than late spring. There was a white haze in the air which grew thicker and thicker the more Earl looked across the swampy expanse and he realized he could neither see the end of the marsh nor the road.

There was no vibrancy in the air. No insects, not even flies were to be seen in this desolate bog. Birds seemed to have avoided this part of the forest, the only noise was that of a chilly breeze whistling between the sorry trees.

Earl felt his previous happy state disappear. He looked around, hoping to see another path which would take him around or away from the bog but he could see not see much beyond the thick vibrant trees of the rest of the forest. He turned to Sir George who was floating next to him.

"Do I have to go through here?" he asked, he hoped Sir George would say no.

"Alas yes," said George, "this is the swiftest route to the forge. And there is no other path that know."

Earl looked back into the marsh. He gave a nervous sigh and began to continue slowly up the path. The bog ahead unnerved

him and he didn't trust it for one minute.

While the rest of the earth was soaked by the water, the path was dry and unlike the rest of the mud pristinely clean. Indeed, the path was on raised earth above the marshland and so Earl felt quite sure that he would not get wet. Although he did have to take care with his steps, he almost slipped off the path and into the muddy earth.

The haze didn't get thicker as Earl travelled but it didn't get thinner either. So he didn't know how far he was from the end of the marshes. Time itself seemed to operate differently in this area of the forest, he had to have been travelling through the swamp for maybe half an hour but it felt like he had been in there for half a day.

Earl was starting to get hungry but he didn't dare stop to eat, he had a suspicion that the marshy woodland was dangerous and he wanted to get out as soon as possible. The whole place was unhappy. The trees seemed to groan around him and the whistling wind seemed eager to escape the swamp and move into the surrounding vibrant woods.

The path continued winding and twisting through the mud, water and trees until it split into a fork. While the main path continued straight and appeared to head out of the marsh, the second one turned sharply to the left and headed further into the swampland before ending in a pond.

The choice was obvious.

Earl moved up the straight pathway and then stopped.

A strange noise was coming from the path up ahead. It sounded like a cross between a snigger, a cackle and a rasp.

"As I thought," Sir George said.

"What?" Earl said, tightening his grip on his wooden sword.

There were three short figures shuffling towards them through the mist and Earl could feel the hair on the back of his neck stand on end. Still the horrid sniggers and cackles pierced the air.

"Bog-dwelling things," said Sir George, "frigglewumps. Keep thy wits about thee."

The creatures emerged from the cloak of the mist about twenty yards away. The frigglewumps, as Sir George called them, were ugly things. They had long marrow-like noses which hung over their mouths, almost hiding their small but sharp teeth which their lips seemed unable to conceal. Their skin was pebble-grey in colour and very toad-like, the frigglewumps seemed to be coated in warts and other bulbus skin-deformities. Their legs were similar to that of a frog and they shuffled on them rather awkwardly, their hands however were very human except for the long claw-like nails on their fingers. Each frigglewump was equal in height to the other and they were all maybe half a head shorter than Earl. They were wearing black hoods and ragged brown clothes which had clearly never been washed.

"Stranger," the middle one rasped, "why are you here?"

"Show not fear," Sir George said, "they are but the weakest of their kind. They are no threat."

Earl nodded to Sir George, confusing the three frigglewumps who couldn't see the ghostly knight.

"None of your business!" Earl snapped at the toady monsters.

The frigglewumps shuffled back a little, obviously taken aback by his response. Earl felt most confident all of a sudden.

Then the middle swamp-dweller spoke again. "That may be true, man-child," he said, "but none go through these woods without paying homage to the Marsh Queen. What gifts have you brought?"

"Give them nought," Sir George advised, "these foul things will take thy generosity for gullibility and think thee weak."

Earl heeded the old knight's words. "I haven't brought her anything and I'm not going to give you anything," he said.

Again, the frigglewumps shuffled back and their faces made that expression everyone makes when their plans do not go accordingly. Earl felt affirmed and powerful, he had never seen anyone treat him with such fear and respect.

Then the expression on their faces changed to that of one who has been insulted.

"In that case," said the one on the left with a high shaky voice, "we shall give you to the Marsh Queen as a gift!"

Then they all began hopping towards him rather like frogs, and Earl took a step back.

"Do not retreat!" Sir George commanded. "They are cowardly wretches and shall not fight hard. Ready thy stick and strike whoever comes close!"

Earl pointed his wooden sword at the frigglewumps hopping towards him but they did not stop, in fact, they didn't seem the least bit frightened.

Their movements were a blur to Earl's eyes and so he could not focus on their bodies particularly well but one aspect of the frigglewumps caught his attention. He hadn't noticed them while they were standing still but he could see them now. Their eyes. Their eyes were bright orange and contained nothing but small black pupils which were filled with an awful eagerness.

After seeing those battle-hungry eyes, Earl's courage failed him.

He turned and began to run back up the pathway he had come.

"No!" Sir George cried.

Earl heard the frigglewumps laugh behind him. "See! See!" One of them shrieked. "Coward! Coward! He is no fighter! Get him! Get him!"

Laughter erupted around the marsh, bouncing off the trees and the ponds in such a way that it was impossible for Earl to be sure where the cackles were coming from. Then a dozen or so frigglewumps jumped on either side of the path he was running on and attacked him. They were half the size of the three frigglewumps who had blocked his path but what they lacked in strength, they made up for in pluck and number.

They punched him with their little arms and kicked him with their larger frog legs. They couldn't reach his head but it didn't matter because Earl's whole body was jostled around in such a manner that he couldn't make heads or tails of anything. The individual frigglewumps seemed to blend into one horrifying swarm of amalgamated faces and one continuous stream of horrendous cackles. The blows seemed endless and the whole experience was similar to being in the sea and pounded by small but never-ceasing waves.

Earl cried in terror and began swinging his wooden sword around him to knock the frigglewumps out of his way so he could continue running down the path. Techniques he had been copying from his grandfather's book on swordplay were thrown out of the window and he swung wildly. He didn't know how many he was hitting or where he was hitting them but he could feel his sword splintering from the impacts.

Then one of the frigglewumps grabbed the sword as he positioned it for a downward strike and wrenched it out of his hand. This ruined Earl's balance and one of the frigglewumps took advantage and kicked him in the stomach, he fell to the ground and next thing he knew the creatures were tying him with coarse rope.

The Ballad of the Alleyway

William Riverdale

The sun was hot, and the sun was white
On a burning day in May,
When my friend and I, on his scooter ride
Went out in the blistering day.

Our classes done, and our masters won,
Still two bachelors with theses due,
Sought the printing place where he proudly said,
“Great copies for a hundred few!”

He drove his steed and onto the street
We charged the highway road;
Dust and dirt and heat did beat,
Yet on and on we rode.

But then we came to a junction where
We found us a new situation:
What we sought was the opposite lane,
But merging was out of the question.

No way through and long way round,
We felt it was all for moot,
When my friend took a look around
And spied a different route.

An alley that beckoned, and our eyes did draw—
This road that I’d never seen,
And just for a second I swear I saw
It glow a golden-green.

Inside the alley, on we rallied,
But little did we know;
This avenue, where some fairy dallied,
A lovelier world would show.

Time and space from history sundered,
No longer were we in May;
“How can this be?”— and my soul thundered,
“Because God had walked this way!”

“The hallowed Haunter down heaven under
“Had taken to this road,
“And even though the world was plundered,
“Its beauty was restored.”

“Therefore and forevermore,
“From this mortal world it went.
“It flew up high to heaven’s door
“And seldom did descend.”

Later on, with our printing done,
We came back the path we took.
But the alley was wrong, its magic gone;
It looked like any other nook.

I hope again and constant pray:
Tomorrow, or on some other day;
Be it March, April, or the month of May,
That we’ll find the alleyway.
Once more before the world turns grey
That we’ll find the alleyway.

Songs from Yesterday or Tomorrow

By S.F.

The following texts, six poems containing 44 lines in total, have been faithfully transcribed from a manuscript codex of mysterious date and provenance. It appears to have been unearthed sometime in the 1970s in Pittenweem, a quaint Scottish seaside resort, in the attic of a handsome 17 th century townhouse formerly owned by the Revd Dr John MacDonald Burgess, BD MA DD, of Govan (Glasgow), before resurfacing at a Sotheby's auction in 2020, on which occasion it was purchased by an anonymous American collector. The manuscript was encased (for protection? for display?) in a now sorely battered metal box or capsule. Attempts to date the box based on radiocarbon and thermoluminescence analyses have proved both contradictory and self-contradictory. Metallurgical examination has been similarly inconclusive. Dating the manuscript itself has, initial optimism notwithstanding, turned out to be no less problematic. The present editor has, however, established that the leaves on which the text is inscribed are of the finest uterine vellum, though the identification of the species of beast involved has at present not progressed beyond the unspecifically ovine. As for the linguistic forms characteristic of the verses in question, they pile lexical, morphological and syntactical mystery upon mystery, corresponding to no geographically or chronologically definable variety of English hitherto known to scholarship. An initial tentative classification as aberrant or eccentric Middle Scots turns out to be untenable. Can influences on certain vowels of Middle Low German or Middle Dutch be discerned? Why are a number of grammatical and orthographical forms redolent of High German? What are we to make of the several hapax legomena, or the profoundly inconsistent use of the characters yogh (ȝ) and thorn (þ)? And how to explain the veritable hodge-podge of parallel forms the texts exhibit? Questions upon questions. So many locks awaiting their professorial key.

Songis fram yesterday or Tomorwen

Tha Wandrer

Thu liivst thin Ham
an thu art gan
Thu farst tha Wereld thru
Tha mickle Tuunes thru
Till no mor canst thu gan

Than cumst thu bac
And cnawest Ham
Quhar thin Folk ar erthed-in
An Dayes thru mayest thu
Ek in Erþe Sing

Sparrowe

Ylost is min littla sparrwe
Ylost is min little brid
Ylost is min littla sparrwe
Ond I knaw nat hwar e is hid

Hwar find ik min littla sparrwe
Hwar find ik min littla brid
    Thu findest his lich yfrosan
    In tha erth hwar hit is hid

Tha dodan Ruddocan

Gan gan the Ruddocan
In Snaw lik Stans
tha littla Lichan liien

So ferlicly
Wi stotrin Han
I lay em onder Land

Wintraspring

Stans ar glawan iis
In tha frost an Son
An nu min Herte liepth
Lik smackede drom

Nwe lif is erly com
to min neshan iien
An ut tha Erthe gron
Fingares griien

Domesdaye

Min hert is a fethere
Gan forlorn
Hitheranthithere
Thurh tha storm

Min gods lien lange
Under gras
Ond hwat ich singe
Sing ich last

Licht

Tha ratten delven in tha lich
An in tha Offal-cann
Bot myn iien follwen staran licht
Whar Ratten ne maȝen gan

Ballad For a Good Host

Fry up some onions in a pan
And stew them in a pot.
Stir in a well browned loin of beef
And serve it while it's hot.
Let laughing guests dine at your mess
While laughing is in style.
Pour wine in cut-glass goblets there,
And pass a songful while.
We need not let our hearthfires dim;
They promise to reward
With kinship warm and nights well lived
And Godly treasures, stored.
Keep feather pillows fluffed for those
Dear allies in your home,
Unfurl your fragrant, folded quilts
For countrymen of Rome.

Michael Mapp is an author from Mississippi. He specializes in historical fiction and formal poetry.

Find his other work at monsoontelegraph.substack

Monsoon Telegraph publishes stories and poetry about colonialism, the British Empire, adventure, Orientalism, etc. Like an exotic adventure fiction mag with more literary aims.
If you are interested in seeing your work featured just reach out to Michael.

Connect with him on X at @99mapp

His published work appears as the 2nd place winner in Antelope Hill's 2024 fiction contest Thinking About Rome.

Roses of Shadow

Chapter 1: The Martlemas

Luke Gilfedder

Gorals in the Polish Carpathians By Aleksander Kotsis

Luke Gilfedder is a writer from Manchester. He has worked as a playwright with scripts produced at The Royal Exchange Manchester, the Lyric Hammersmith, and in London's West End. He has recently completed a PhD on the life and work of modernist writer Wyndham Lewis.

His fiction has been published in the Decadent Serpent and The Brazen Head magazines and he regularly contributes essays on The Miskatonian and the Lewisletter journal.

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It was Blōtmōnaþ—sacrifice month. The sky hung low and smoky, the wind sharp, the gaunt trees shedding their last burnt offerings of autumn leaves. A pale boy threaded the black cart tracks that lined the red-mudded camp, weaving between ragged tents, skipping over broth pots and sticks, ducking under branches laden with spancels and lanterns. All around him, tasselled bells dangled from painted wagons, their tatty chimes mingling with the squeals of pigs being slaughtered and flensed into brine tubs for winter. The boy darted on, the camp coming alive with drunken shouting and whooping, dogs barking and howling, zithers zithering, women singing, girls dukkering, and the anvil ringing of a gypsy blacksmith pounding horseshoes with a hammer, shaking his greasy hair while grunting and fleering.

"Father Quintus!" the boy cried. "I must speak to Father Quintus!"

He tripped over the blacksmith's cart, scattering its load of waxen apples and plums into the mud. A hand seized him as he stumbled forward, yanking him back and shoving him to the ground.

"Oi! Watch where you're going, you little chuzhoy. Pick them up!"

The smith pinned him down with his boot, a deadly aroma of home-brewed pálinka pouring from his mouth. The boy writhed like a trampled snake in the ash and dung, kicked himself free, sprang to his feet, reached inside his habit, and whipped out a churi. He made a warning thrust with the blade, just as a voice boomed, basso profundo:

"MIRO!"

A wagon door slammed, and out strode a great tun of a man, his Tyrolean-hatted silhouette backlit by campfire light. He shouldered his way toward the pair, chest up and out, making as much noise as he could extract from his weight, his stagger, and the size of his sabots. In front of him, as by a miracle of deference, a way cleared itself.

"Dosta! The two of you!"

He planted himself between them, colossus-wise, with black eyes blazing above a saffron-bearded grin. His gold teeth glinted in the firelight, his big red face wrinkled like a roasted applejohn. He dug into his hide waistcoat and tossed a forint at the smith.

"Here—go stuff yourself with hay."

The blacksmith grouched something, salvaged what he could from his spoiled woodland loot, and trudged off toward the vardos. The seven-footer rounded on the boy, looming over him like Welles's Falstaff, rotund but ruthless.

"Now, give me that knife, Miro."

"It's only a peg-knife, Mister Terek."

"That's right, my boy. But the emphasis in law here is on knife, not peg."

"Law? Here? Whose law?"

"My law."

Terek's eyes narrowed within their mesh of leathery wrinkles. But straightaway he smiled, unfurrowed his patriarchal mossy eyebrows, and tousled Miro's dirt-crusted hair.

"I'll look after it for you. Go on—oh, and tell the Abbot he needn't worry; I'll keep everything under the rose." He tap-tapped his vinous nose. "Old Quinny'll know what I mean."

Miro glanced up with questioning eyes at the enormous figure—a museum specimen of that race of provincial Chaliapins of which so many had once arisen throughout Russia. Old Terek even had the same kind of face as Chaliapin—part Scottish coachman, part magnate from the days of Catherine the Great. A smile passed over that big face like a soundless storm.

"Go on!" He gave Miro a push with one of his shovel-like hands. "Be off with you. Never keep the Archiabbas waiting."

Terek turned his hulking back to the wagons as a heavy murmur, like the roll of ritual drums, rumbled from the distant Carpathians, shaking the atmosphere. Rage cooling and fear heating, Miro brushed mud off his hempen habit and hastened towards the abbey, weaving like a scalded dog along the wheel ruts of the wains. Just ahead, a slender pillar of crimson smoke wriggled above the trees, whose stark shadows wavered across the twilit camp like supplicating arms. The wood fumes drifted through the branches, and Miro caught sight of a pig turning on a spit above an open firepit. Children in dark knots crouched around the wild flame, playing knucklebones with slices of a sow's womb. Like a lowly equivalent of Proust's madeleine, the whiff of roasted flesh brought Miro back to the Hortobágy pigstickings of his youth, when his mother would slather drippings from szalonna over homemade rye bread. But that was before—

Brrrrroooommm… barraboom!

That sounded nearer, just over the river. The children stared up—not at the sound, but at Miro, watching him run with their swarthy eyes slit and white teeth flashing. Heavy, awkward crows burst from the ruffled trees, cawing as they winged their way up the detached mass of Mount Pannoniae. Miro's eyes flew up with them, following the dark sweep of the wooded hillside. There, at the peak—sharply set off in black against a golden-red stripe of sunset—stood the Gothic bazilika of St. Márton's. Bombardments had diminished its eyrie-like towers, but the Arch Abbey remained the very bastion of Magyar romance—a royal throne perched above the Pannonian plain, its walls growing out of rocks, rocks built into walls, foundations and aedificia merged as one. Miro gazed a moment at the medieval fortress—more castle than church—which seemed as embowered by ruins and rocks as the nest of a wild eagle. Beyond its cairn of walls towered high crumbling acres of masonry, pocked with fiery windows set, at this sunset hour, not in dull-grey stone but in a glorious house of burnished gold. Twilight flowed down the red canals of the roof tiles, and Miro pictured turret and tower astir for the vesper hour, the monks leaving each dusky cell for the chapel—but where would he find Father Quintus, come the toll of the summoning bell?

"Chuzhoy!" came a girl's hushed whisper. "Mummy, it's him, the outsider."

Miro looked down from his daydreaming to the duskening camp. A pockmarked woman, big-boned as a herdsman, stared back at him; the child's blouse she wore was much too small and stretched tightly over her breasts. Glancing away, Miro scurried on between the ragged tents, mutterings and murmurings trailing him like the rustle of dead leaves. Chuzhoy, chuzhoy.

He darted past the carters playing cards in the light of a fire's wavering spire, drinking wine from broken cups. Their children dashed hither and thither through the dancing shade like urchins in a twilit slum, little scarlet jackets and leather skullcaps of orphanage-cut glinting in the sun's smoky rays. By another fire sat an old woman wrapped in shawls; she turned upon Miro a countenance like that of Sebastiano's Lazarus. Beside her, a bald old man with a face like a wrinkled walnut performed prodigies on his cimbalom, while a fiddler, perched beltless on a box in a peasant shirt and tall fur hat, fiddled away at some ancient quadrille, as at a shtetl wedding.

Pulling his hood forward, Miro hurried toward the embankment of Mount Pannoniae, down whose bronzing bracken slopes the cart tracks flowed like shadowy hair. He glanced up again at the abbey, outlined against a thundercloud and lit by the gaudy sunset, its numerous buttresses finned at the top like the biretta of a Roman priest. Usually seen through a haze of mist, the abbey's battlemented and spired silhouette looked as sharp tonight as if cut with an engraving knife.

Starkest of all was the brick donjon, rising like a mutilated finger from among the fists of knuckled masonry, its Baroque cap catching the dying gold of the setting sun—a gold now debased to copper and decaying lead along the abbey's lichened roof.

"Ah, Romalen!" the girls cried, "Ah, Chawalen!"

Behind Miro, the music grew wilder and fiercer. Looking over his shoulder, he saw gypsy girls with flashing eyes, their dark hair streaming behind them as they whirled madly in ancient dances—so many firebrands from Belgrade, tornadoes from Bucharest, and hurricanes from Bratislava. A blonde ponytail flashed among

the crowd, and suddenly there was Leila, her earrings catching and loosing the fire of the sun; but then she was gone, vanished like the golden smoke of incense. Heart bowed down, Miro clambered up the embankment and began his ascent toward the abbey.

Like a terrace cut into the oaken mountainside, the road rose sheer from the plain, zigzagging above the smoke of the campfires and the clamorous throng of fiddle, dance, and song. Murmurous oaks shot their branches in a sombre tunnel over Miro's head, but at the first bend, the track opened onto a sweeping vista of the Danube burning in the sunset, and, away across the prairie, the broken knife-blade profile of Mount Bakony, with the great sweep of the Transdanubian mountains running eastward from it along the puszta. An explosion of light, like a photographer's flash bomb, lit up the terrain, so that for a moment the plain was made of nothing but wet steel.

Feeling the cold settle in his gut, Miro hastened up the great stairsteps—the raw fault blocks of the mountains; making—the leaves dark as old pennies beneath the arcaded avenue of oaks. Overhead, the abbey's turrets, like great charcoal sketches, gradually exposed their structure. Stone after red stone glowered through the latticed branches: great lancet windows yawned, shields and scrolls and ancient mottoes loomed melancholy in their ruin, and chimneys soared everywhere out of machicolations. A few hundred metres further, the road curved under the bulk of Saint Benedict's chapel. Its northern face stood on the plateau of the abbey, while these southern walls seemed to grow straight out of the steep mountainside—a jutting precipice to which, from Miro's vantage below, the cliff seemed to extend, reaching up toward the heavens, the sandstone at the peak becoming both tower and keep.

Snakewise, the road rose higher into the chill shade of the forest, and looking down, Miro saw the whole camp scattered in the shadow of that towering bazilika—a shadow uncompromising and stark for all its theatricality. It stretched as far as the Danube's bend, where the last tattered tents lay clumped like mushrooms after an autumn rain. The campfires smouldered, their smoke mingling with the fog that lingered at the waists of the trees like a sash. Miro saw lean goats tethered in the grass behind the tents, a tame bear, and dogs dragging entrails from the sacrifices into the woods. A haze rose from the embering fires, bringing peace to the same air that the slaughter of the hogs had earlier stricken.

As Miro watched, the last rays of the swollen red sun broke through the topmost beams of a derelict barn, beneath which sat the old gypsy in his white peasant shirt and Wallach trousers, playing an ancient Romani ditty. The lancing rays struck the mist hanging on the giant oaks, and suddenly there stood Terek, a giant himself, with his ruddy beard and eyes like caves, singing in accompaniment to the poor old crazy tune. Terek was a simple carter, unlike his divine prototype, Chaliapin, but his voice resounded just as boundlessly, just as fatally, filling Miro's soul with the sweetness of self-destruction and gypsy oblivion.

Oh, how can you leave your house and land,
How can you leave your money,
How can you leave your rich young lord,
To be a gypsy's bonnie?

It was like a stage setting from Rachmaninoff, Miro thought: Terek in his stormily flowered waistcoat and Tyrolean hat, the ramshackle byre, the radiant bovine eyes glittering in the twilight, the melting rings of firelight flickering on the Danube… A breezy darkness swept over the sand of the riverbanks, and Terek's mournful bass seemed to carry out across the plain to those distant mountains where the mists of night were forming. It was as if there had never been a war on earth. And yet the front of the Atlantean West was only twenty versts from the abbey, just beyond that amphitheatrical wall of mountains. Miro could hear the rumble of the Eurasianists' thermobaric bombs—like blows upon a gigantic Byzantine gong. Behind the dark-blue peaks, the giant flashes of explosions backlit the mountains with an unnatural brightness, like the hectic radiance that sheet lightning suddenly gives to the limbs of trees at midnight. Still farther off, towards Bratislava, Anglofuturist SCIURUS-V missiles soared up like fireworks, great balls of fire licking at the early stars—rocket after rocket proffering tinsel-star bouquets to the uncaring Carpathian skies, the lines of their stalks momentarily incised in fleeting red upon the heavens before bursting into flowers.

Bang—crash! Boom-bang!

One wayward rocket struck a fighter jet; it spiralled and exploded in the purple twilight, cascading in a rain of golden hair over the snow-hooded Mount Bakony.

Terek's betyár ballad died mid-note, and Miro turned away, not wanting to witness the inevitable retaliation from the Eurasianists' heavy artillery. For retaliate, the Tsarevich's forces always did. As Miro knew too well.

He climbed the last stretch of road as it twined and narrowed under the bronchial branches, and in a sudden lull between explosions, heard the contrapuntal toll of the bazilika's summoning bell—Gregorian even in its melody. The red-gold glittering of the wood's roof rolled away as Miro gained the hilltop, and suddenly the abbey stood clear above him, spread almost to the sky like a seascape of stormy roofage—a dark ivied jumble scored at various heights by tall ogival windows. Twilight poured over the sandstone like a heavy Balaton wine, and the leaded panes drank in the crimson flood like draughts of blood. Miro's gaze travelled from the red marble columns of the Porta Speciosa to the outside staircases going heaven knows where—perhaps to heaven. If those wild steps came from the dreams of Piranesi, then in its bulk and form the bazilika resembled the more earthly forms of Monte Cassino or the Abbazia di Santa Scolastica, which—Miro recalled from his history books—once stood on the Italian peninsula. Yet the abbey's inaccessible position on this islanded hill made it more noble even than those, and more capable of inspiring fear in the traveller who approached it from the compassing plains. Many such a traveller said—as King James once remarked of Lochwood Tower, that Reiver fortress built in the midst of a quaking bog—that whoever constructed the abbey must have been a thief in his heart. But it was not so, Miro would tell them: the abbey had been built by Prince Géza and his son, Stephen I of Hungary, a man as beloved in peace as he was respected in war; a man who defended the frontiers from foreign invasions and shielded the first Magyar Christians from pagan chieftains. The present usurpers of his inheritance—the monks—no more resembled His Apostolic Majesty than the night-prowling owl resembles a falcon, because she builds on the same rock.

Kraa! Kraa!

Miro looked up to see the turrets suck in an ashy cortex of crows. Feeling suddenly exposed, he ducked beneath the red-limestone arch of the Porta Speciosa, its steps cracked and moss-grown. Out of the tail of his eye, he glimpsed helicopters gyrating in squalls over the plain, their lights scouring the camp. The sun had all but sunk behind the mountains; soon, the copters moved off, fading like a ragged procession of storks into the fiery gore of the horizon. The Bakony snows shone for a moment's space, retaining the dying crimson of the rose. Then, all fell into shadow.

Miro rapped on the black oak door, praying he was not too late with the message he had for Father Quintus. He waited, but no burly friar came to bid him welcome, no lay brother rushed out to hold his donkey—not that he had a donkey. For although it was Martlemas Eve, a silence hung heavy in the air like a threat. He was about to knock again when some concealed intercom crackled:

"Who's there?"

"Miro."

"Miro who?"

"Jus—just Miro. Father Quintus's apprentice."

"Apprentice…" The voice grew icicles. "Oh, yesss. The illuminator."

There came a dry click, and the door creaked open, as if

moved by phantom slaves. A chill wind breathed from the cloisters within, whipping up eddies of dead leaves and old bulletins. Miro picked one up. “ALL HOPE ABANDONED,” it read, Dantesquely.

Miro crumpled it in his fist, glanced back at the darkening plain, shuddered, and stepped into the abbey.

Khor Virap Monastery in the Ararat Valley Armenia

The Vampyre; A Tale

By John William Polidori

Vampire
Edvard Munch
Original Title: Vampyr
Date: 1895
Media: oil, canvas
Location: Munch Museum, Oslo, Norway
Dimensions: 91 x 109 cm

EXTRACT OF A LETTER FROM GENEVA.

"I breathe freely in the neighbourhood of this lake; the ground upon which I tread has been subdued from the earliest ages; the principal objects which immediately strike my eye, bring to my recollection scenes, in which man acted the hero and was the chief object of interest. Not to look back to earlier times of battles and sieges, here is the bust of Rousseau—here is a house with an inscription denoting that the Genevan philosopher first drew breath under its roof. A little out of the town is Ferney, the residence of Voltaire; where that wonderful, though certainly in many respects contemptible, character, received, like the hermits of old, the visits of pilgrims, not only from his own nation, but from the farthest boundaries of Europe. Here too is Bonnet's abode, and, a few steps beyond, the house of that astonishing woman Madame de Stael: perhaps the first of her sex, who has really proved its often claimed equality with, the nobler man. We have before had women who have written interesting novels and poems, in which their tact at observing drawing-room characters has availed them; but never since the days of Heloise have those faculties which are peculiar to man, been developed as the possible inheritance of woman. Though even here, as in the case of Heloise, our sex have not been backward in alledging the existence of an Abeilard in the person of M. Schlegel as the inspirer of her works. But to proceed: upon the same side of the lake, Gibbon, Bonnivard, Bradshaw, and others mark, as it were, the stages for our progress; whilst upon the other side there is one house, built by Diodati, the friend of Milton, which has contained within its walls, for several months, that poet whom we have so often read together, and who—if human passions remain the same, and human feelings, like chords, on being swept by nature's impulses shall vibrate as before—will be placed by posterity in the first rank of our English Poets. You must have heard, or the Third Canto of Childe Harold will have informed you, that Lord Byron resided many months in this neighbourhood. I went with some friends a few days ago, after having seen Ferney, to view this mansion. I trod the floors with the same feelings of awe and respect as we did, together, those of Shakespeare's dwelling at Stratford. I sat down in a chair of the saloon, and satisfied myself that I was resting on what he had made his constant seat. I found a servant there who had lived with him; she, however, gave me but little information. She pointed out his bed-chamber upon the same level as the saloon and dining-room, and informed me that he retired to rest at three, got up at two, and employed himself a long time over his toilette; that he never went to sleep without a pair of pistols and a dagger by his side, and that he never ate animal food. He apparently spent some part of every day upon the lake in an English boat. There is a balcony from the saloon which looks upon the lake and the mountain Jura; and I imagine, that it must have been hence, he contemplated the storm so magnificently described in the Third Canto; for you have from here a most extensive view of all the points he has therein depicted. I can fancy him like the scathed pine, whilst all around was sunk to repose, still waking to observe, what gave but a weak image of the storms which had desolated his own breast.

The sky is changed!—and such a change; Oh, night!
And storm and darkness, ye are wond'rous strong,
Yet lovely in your strength, as is the light
Of a dark eye in woman! Far along
From peak to peak, the rattling crags among,
Leaps the lire thunder! Not from one lone cloud,
But every mountain now hath found a tongue,
And Jura answers thro' her misty shroud,
Back to the joyous Alps who call to her aloud!
And this is in the night:—Most glorious night!
Thou wer't not sent for slumber! let me be
A sharer in thy far and fierce delight,—
A portion of the tempest and of me!
How the lit lake shines a phosphoric sea,
And the big rain comet dancing to the earth!
And now again 'tis black,—and now the glee
Of the loud hills shakes with its mountain mirth,
As if they did rejoice o'er a young; earthquake's birth,
Now where the swift Rhine cleaves his way between
Heights which appear, as lovers who have parted
In haste, whose mining depths so intervene,
That they can meet no more, tho' broken hearted;
Tho' in their souls which thus each other thwarted,
Love was the very root of the fond rage
Which blighted their life's bloom, and then departed—
Itself expired, but leaving; them an age
Of years all winter—war within themselves to wage.

I went down to the little port, if I may use the expression, wherein his vessel used to lay, and conversed with the cottager, who had the care of it. You may smile, but I have my pleasure in thus helping my personification of the individual I admire, by attaining to the knowledge of those circumstances which were daily around him. I have made numerous enquiries in the town concerning him, but can learn nothing. He only went into society there once, when M. Pictet took him to the house of a lady to spend the evening. They say he is a very singular man, and seem to think him very uncivil. Amongst other things they relate, that having invited M. Pictet and Bonstetten to dinner, he went on the lake to Chillon, leaving a gentleman who travelled with him to receive them and make his apologies. Another evening, being invited to the house of Lady D—— H——, he promised to attend, but upon approaching the windows of her ladyship's villa, and perceiving the room to be full of company, he set down his friend, desiring him to plead his excuse, and immediately returned home. This will serve as a contradiction to the report which you tell me is current in England, of his having been avoided by his countrymen on the continent. The case happens to be directly the reverse, as he has been generally sought by them, though on most occasions, apparently without success. It is said, indeed, that upon paying his first visit at Coppet, following the servant who had announced his name, he was surprised to meet a lady carried out fainting; but before he had been seated many minutes, the same lady, who had been so affected at the sound of his name, returned and conversed with him a considerable time—such is female curiosity and affectation! He visited Coppet frequently, and of course associated there with several of his countrymen, who evinced no reluctance to meet him whom his enemies alone would represent as an outcast. Though I have been so unsuccessful in this town, I have been more fortunate in my enquiries elsewhere. There is a society three or four miles from Geneva, the centre of which is the Countess of Breuss, a Russian lady, well acquainted with the agrémens de la Société, and who has collected them round herself at her mansion. It was chiefly here, I find, that the gentleman who travelled with Lord Byron, as physician, sought for society. He used almost every day to cross the lake by himself, in one of their flat-bottomed boats, and return after passing the evening with his friends, about eleven or twelve at night, often whilst the storms were raging in the circling summits of the mountains around. As he became intimate, from long acquaintance, with several of the families in this neighbourhood, I have gathered from their accounts some excellent traits of his lordship's character, which I will relate to you at some future opportunity. I must, however, free him from one imputation attached to him—of having in his house two sisters as the partakers of his revels. This is, like many other charges which have been brought against his lordship, entirely destitute of truth. His only companion was the physician I have already mentioned. The report originated from the following circumstance: Mr. Percy Bysshe Shelly, a gentleman well known for extravagance of doctrine, and for his daring, in their profession, even to sign himself with the title of ATHeos in the Album at Chamouny, having taken a house below, in which he resided with Miss M. W. Godwin and Miss Clermont, (the

daughters of the celebrated Mr. Godwin) they were frequently visitors at Diodati, and were often seen upon the lake with his Lordship, which gave rise to the report, the truth of which is here positively denied.

Among other things which the lady, from whom I procured these anecdotes, related to me, she mentioned the outline of a ghost story by Lord Byron. It appears that one evening Lord B., Mr. P. B. Shelly, the two ladies and the gentleman before alluded to, after having perused a German work, which was entitled Phantasmagoriana, began relating ghost stories; when his lordship having recited the beginning of Christabel, then unpublished, the whole took so strong a hold of Mr. Shelly's mind, that he suddenly started up and ran out of the room. The physician and Lord Byron followed, and discovered him leaning against a mantle-piece, with cold drops of perspiration trickling down his face. After having given him something to refresh him, upon enquiring into the cause of his alarm, they found that his wild imagination having pictured to him the bosom of one of the ladies with eyes (which was reported of a lady in the neighbourhood where he lived) he was obliged to leave the room in order to destroy the impression. It was afterwards proposed, in the course of conversation, that each of the company present should write a tale depending upon some supernatural agency, which was undertaken by Lord B., the physician, and Miss M. W. Godwin.

[1] My friend, the lady above referred to, had in her possession the outline of each of these stories; I obtained them as a great favour, and herewith forward them to you, as I was assured you would feel as much curiosity as myself, to peruse the ebauches of so great a genius, and those immediately under his influence."

[1] Since published under the title of "Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus."

THE VAMPYRE. INTRODUCTION.

THE superstition upon which this tale is founded is very general in the East. Among the Arabians it appears to be common: it did not, however, extend itself to the Greeks until after the establishment of Christianity; and it has only assumed its present form since the division of the Latin and Greek churches; at which time, the idea becoming prevalent, that a Latin body could not corrupt if buried in their territory, it gradually increased, and formed the subject of many wonderful stories, still extant, of the dead rising from their graves, and feeding upon the blood of the young and beautiful. In the West it spread, with some slight variation, all over Hungary, Poland, Austria, and Lorraine, where the belief existed, that vampyres nightly imbibed a certain portion of the blood of their victims, who became emaciated, lost their strength, and speedily died of consumptions; whilst these human blood-suckers fattened—and their veins became distended to such a state of repletion, as to cause the blood to flow from all the passages of their bodies, and even from the very pores of their skins.

In the London Journal, of March, 1732, is a curious, and, of course, credible account of a particular case of vampyrism, which is stated to have occurred at Madreyga, in Hungary. It appears, that upon an examination of the commander-in-chief and magistrates of the place, they positively and unanimously affirmed, that, about five years before, a certain Heyduke, named Arnold Paul, had been heard to say, that, at Cassovia, on the frontiers of the Turkish Servia, he had been tormented by a vampyre, but had found a way to rid himself of the evil, by eating some of the earth out of the vampyre's grave, and rubbing himself with his blood. This precaution, however, did not prevent him from becoming a vampyre[2] himself; for, about twenty or thirty days after his death and burial, many persons complained of having been tormented by him, and a deposition was made, that four persons had been deprived of life by his attacks. To prevent further mischief, the inhabitants having consulted their Hadagni,[3] took up the body, and found it (as is supposed to be usual in cases of vampyrism) fresh, and entirely free from corruption, and emitting at the mouth, nose, and ears, pure and florid blood. Proof having been thus obtained, they resorted to the accustomed remedy. A stake was driven entirely through the heart and body of Arnold Paul, at which he is reported to have cried out as dreadfully as if he had been alive. This done, they cut off his head, burned his body, and threw the ashes into his grave. The same measures were adopted with the corses of those persons who had previously died from vampyrism, lest they should, in their turn, become agents upon others who survived them.

[2] The universal belief is, that a person sucked by a vampyre becomes a vampyre himself, and sucks in his turn.

[3] Chief bailiff.

This monstrous rodomontade is here related, because it seems better adapted to illustrate the subject of the present observations than any other instance which could be adduced. In many parts of Greece it is considered as a sort of punishment after death, for some heinous crime committed whilst in existence, that the deceased is not only doomed to vampyrise, but compelled to confine his infernal visitations solely to those beings he loved most while upon earth—those to whom he was bound by ties of kindred and affection.—A supposition alluded to in the "Giaour."

But first on earth, as Vampyre sent,
Thy corse shall from its tomb be rent;
Then ghastly haunt the native place,
And suck the blood of all thy race;
There from thy daughter, sister, wife,
At midnight drain the stream of life;
Yet loathe the banquet which perforce
Must feed thy livid living corse,
Thy victims, ere they yet expire,
Shall know the demon for their sire;
As cursing thee, thou cursing them,
Thy flowers are withered on the stem.
But one that for thy crime must fall,
The youngest, best beloved of all,
Shall bless thee with a father's name—
That word shall wrap thy heart in flame!
Yet thou must end thy task and mark
Her cheek's last tinge—her eye's last spark,
And the last glassy glance must view
Which freezes o'er its lifeless blue;
Then with unhallowed hand shall tear
The tresses of her yellow hair,
Of which, in life a lock when shorn
Affection's fondest pledge was worn—
But now is borne away by thee
Memorial of thine agony!
Yet with thine own best blood shall drip;
Thy gnashing tooth, and haggard lip;
Then stalking to thy sullen grave,
Go—and with Gouls and Afrits rave,
Till these in horror shrink away
From spectre more accursed than they.

Mr. Southey has also introduced in his wild but beautiful poem of "Thalaba," the vampyre corse of the Arabian maid Oneiza, who is represented as having returned from the grave for the purpose of tormenting him she best loved whilst in existence. But this cannot be supposed to have resulted from the sinfulness of her life, she being pourtrayed throughout the whole of the tale as a complete type of purity and innocence. The veracious Tournefort gives a long account in his travels of several astonishing cases of vampyrism, to which he pretends to have been an eyewitness; and Calmet, in his great work upon this subject, besides a variety of anecdotes, and traditionary narratives illustrative of its effects, has put forth some learned dissertations, tending to prove it to be a classical, as well as

barbarian error.

Many curious and interesting notices on this singularly horrible superstition might be added; though the present may suffice for the limits of a note, necessarily devoted to explanation, and which may now be concluded by merely remarking, that though the term Vampyre is the one in most general acceptation, there are several others synonymous with it, made use of in various parts of the world: as Vroucolocha, Vardoulacha, Goul, Broucoloka, &c.

THE VAMPYRE.

IT happened that in the midst of the dissipations attendant upon a London winter, there appeared at the various parties of the leaders of the ton a nobleman, more remarkable for his singularities, than his rank. He gazed upon the mirth around him, as if he could not participate therein. Apparently, the light laughter of the fair only attracted his attention, that he might by a look quell it, and throw fear into those breasts where thoughtlessness reigned. Those who felt this sensation of awe, could not explain whence it arose: some attributed it to the dead grey eye, which, fixing upon the object's face, did not seem to penetrate, and at one glance to pierce through to the inward workings of the heart; but fell upon the cheek with a leaden ray that weighed upon the skin it could not pass. His peculiarities caused him to be invited to every house; all wished to see him, and those who had been accustomed to violent excitement, and now felt the weight of ennui, were pleased at having something in their presence capable of engaging their attention. In spite of the deadly hue of his face, which never gained a warmer tint, either from the blush of modesty, or from the strong emotion of passion, though its form and outline were beautiful, many of the female hunters after notoriety attempted to win his attentions, and gain, at least, some marks of what they might term affection: Lady Mercer, who had been the mockery of every monster shewn in drawing-rooms since her marriage, threw herself in his way, and did all but put on the dress of a mountebank, to attract his notice:—though in vain:—when she stood before him, though his eyes were apparently fixed upon her's, still it seemed as if they were unperceived;—even her unappalled impudence was baffled, and she left the field. But though the common adultress could not influence even the guidance of his eyes, it was not that the female sex was indifferent to him: yet such was the apparent caution with which he spoke to the virtuous wife and innocent daughter, that few knew he ever addressed himself to females. He had, however, the reputation of a winning tongue; and whether it was that it even overcame the dread of his singular character, or that they were moved by his apparent hatred of vice, he was as often among those females who form the boast of their sex from their domestic virtues, as among those who sully it by their vices. About the same time, there came to London a young gentleman of the name of Aubrey: he was an orphan left with an only sister in the possession of great wealth, by parents who died while he was yet in childhood. Left also to himself by guardians, who thought it their duty merely to take care of his fortune, while they relinquished the more important charge of his mind to the care of mercenary subalterns, he cultivated more his imagination than his judgment. He had, hence, that high romantic feeling of honour and candour, which daily ruins so many milliners' apprentices. He believed all to sympathise with virtue, and thought that vice was thrown in by Providence merely for the picturesque effect of the scene, as we see in romances: he thought that the misery of a cottage merely consisted in the vesting of clothes, which were as warm, but which were better adapted to the painter's eye by their irregular folds and various coloured patches. He thought, in fine, that the dreams of poets were the realities of life. He was handsome, frank, and rich: for these reasons, upon his entering into the gay circles, many mothers surrounded him, striving which should describe with least truth their languishing or romping favourites: the daughters at the same time, by their brightening countenances when he approached, and by their sparkling eyes, when he opened his lips, soon led him into false notions of his talents and his merit. Attached as he was to the romance of his solitary hours, he was startled at finding, that, except in the tallow and wax candles that flickered, not from the presence of a ghost, but from want of snuffing, there was no foundation in real life for any of that congeries of pleasing pictures and descriptions contained in those volumes, from which he had formed his study. Finding, however, some compensation in his gratified vanity, he was about to relinquish his dreams, when the extraordinary being we have above described, crossed him in his career.

He watched him; and the very impossibility of forming an idea of the character of a man entirely absorbed in himself, who gave few other signs of his observation of external objects, than the tacit assent to their existence, implied by the avoidance of their contact: allowing his imagination to picture every thing that flattered its propensity to extravagant ideas, he soon formed this object into the hero of a romance, and determined to observe the offspring of his fancy, rather than the person before him. He became acquainted with him, paid him attentions, and so far advanced upon his notice, that his presence was always recognised. He gradually learnt that Lord Ruthven's affairs were embarrassed, and soon found, from the notes of preparation in —— Street, that he was about to travel. Desirous of gaining some information respecting this singular character, who, till now, had only whetted his curiosity, he hinted to his guardians, that it was time for him to perform the tour, which for many generations has been thought necessary to enable the young to take some rapid steps in the career of vice towards putting themselves upon an equality with the aged, and not allowing them to appear as if fallen from the skies, whenever scandalous intrigues are mentioned as the subjects of pleasantry or of praise, according to the degree of skill shewn in carrying them on. They consented: and Aubrey immediately mentioning his intentions to Lord Ruthven, was surprised to receive from him a proposal to join him. Flattered by such a mark of esteem from him, who, apparently, had nothing in common with other men, he gladly accepted it, and in a few days they had passed the circling waters. Hitherto, Aubrey had had no opportunity of studying Lord Ruthven's character, and now he found, that, though many more of his actions were exposed to his view, the results offered different conclusions from the apparent motives to his conduct. His companion was profuse in his liberality;—the idle, the vagabond, and the beggar, received from his hand more than enough to relieve their immediate wants. But Aubrey could not avoid remarking, that it was not upon the virtuous, reduced to indigence by the misfortunes attendant even upon virtue, that he bestowed his alms;—these were sent from the door with hardly suppressed sneers; but when the profligate came to ask something, not to relieve his wants, but to allow him to wallow in his lust, or to sink him still deeper in his iniquity, he was sent away with rich charity. This was, however, attributed by him to the greater importunity of the vicious, which generally prevails over the retiring bashfulness of the virtuous indigent. There was one circumstance about the charity of his Lordship, which was still more impressed upon his mind: all those upon whom it was bestowed, inevitably found that there was a curse upon it, for they were all either led to the scaffold, or sunk to the lowest and the most abject misery. At Brussels and other towns through which they passed, Aubrey was surprized at the apparent eagerness with which his companion sought for the centres of all fashionable vice; there he entered into all the spirit of the faro table: he betted, and always gambled with success, except where the known sharper was his antagonist, and then he lost even more than he gained; but it was always with the same unchanging face, with which he generally watched the society around: it was not, however, so when he encountered the rash youthful novice, or the luckless father of a numerous family; then his very wish seemed fortune's law—this apparent abstractedness of mind was laid aside, and his eyes sparkled with more fire than that of the cat whilst dallying with the half-dead mouse. In every town, he

left the formerly affluent youth, torn from the circle he adorned, cursing, in the solitude of a dungeon, the fate that had drawn him within the reach of this fiend; whilst many a father sat frantic, amidst the speaking looks of mute hungry children, without a single farthing of his late immense wealth, wherewith to buy even sufficient to satisfy their present craving. Yet he took no money from the gambling table; but immediately lost, to the ruiner of many, the last gilder he had just snatched from the convulsive grasp of the innocent: this might but be the result of a certain degree of knowledge, which was not, however, capable of combating the cunning of the more experienced. Aubrey often wished to represent this to his friend, and beg him to resign that charity and pleasure which proved the ruin of all, and did not tend to his own profit;—but he delayed it—for each day he hoped his friend would give him some opportunity of speaking frankly and openly to him; however, this never occurred. Lord Ruthven in his carriage, and amidst the various wild and rich scenes of nature, was always the same: his eye spoke less than his lip; and though Aubrey was near the object of his curiosity, he obtained no greater gratification from it than the constant excitement of vainly wishing to break that mystery, which to his exalted imagination began to assume the appearance of something supernatural.

They soon arrived at Rome, and Aubrey for a time lost sight of his companion; he left him in daily attendance upon the morning circle of an Italian countess, whilst he went in search of the memorials of another almost deserted city. Whilst he was thus engaged, letters arrived from England, which he opened with eager impatience; the first was from his sister, breathing nothing but affection; the others were from his guardians, the latter astonished him; if it had before entered into his imagination that there was an evil power resident in his companion, these seemed to give him sufficient reason for the belief. His guardians insisted upon his immediately leaving his friend, and urged, that his character was dreadfully vicious, for that the possession of irresistible powers of seduction, rendered his licentious habits more dangerous to society. It had been discovered, that his contempt for the adultress had not originated in hatred of her character; but that he had required, to enhance his gratification, that his victim, the partner of his guilt, should be hurled from the pinnacle of unsullied virtue, down to the lowest abyss of infamy and degradation: in fine, that all those females whom he had sought, apparently on account of their virtue, had, since his departure, thrown even the mask aside, and had not scrupled to expose the whole deformity of their vices to the public gaze.

Aubrey determined upon leaving one, whose character had not yet shown a single bright point on which to rest the eye. He resolved to invent some plausible pretext for abandoning him altogether, purposing, in the mean while, to watch him more closely, and to let no slight circumstances pass by unnoticed. He entered into the same circle, and soon perceived, that his Lordship was endeavouring to work upon the inexperience of the daughter of the lady whose house he chiefly frequented. In Italy, it is seldom that an unmarried female is met with in society; he was therefore obliged to carry on his plans in secret; but Aubrey's eye followed him in all his windings, and soon discovered that an assignation had been appointed, which would most likely end in the ruin of an innocent, though thoughtless girl. Losing no time, he entered the apartment of Lord Ruthven, and abruptly asked him his intentions with respect to the lady, informing him at the same time that he was aware of his being about to meet her that very night. Lord Ruthven answered, that his intentions were such as he supposed all would have upon such an occasion; and upon being pressed whether he intended to marry her, merely laughed. Aubrey retired; and, immediately writing a note, to say, that from that moment he must decline accompanying his Lordship in the remainder of their proposed tour, he ordered his servant to seek other apartments, and calling upon the mother of the lady, informed her of all he knew, not only with regard to her daughter, but also concerning the character of his Lordship. The assignation was prevented. Lord Ruthven next day merely sent his servant to notify his complete assent to a separation; but did not hint any suspicion of his plans having been foiled by Aubrey's interposition.

Having left Rome, Aubrey directed his steps towards Greece, and crossing the Peninsula, soon found himself at Athens. He then fixed his residence in the house of a Greek; and soon occupied himself in tracing the faded records of ancient glory upon monuments that apparently, ashamed of chronicling the deeds of freemen only before slaves, had hidden themselves beneath the sheltering soil or many coloured lichen. Under the same roof as himself, existed a being, so beautiful and delicate, that she might have formed the model for a painter wishing to pourtray on canvass the promised hope of the faithful in Mahomet's paradise, save that her eyes spoke too much mind for any one to think she could belong to those who had no souls. As she danced upon the plain, or tripped along the mountain's side, one would have thought the gazelle a poor type of her beauties; for who would have exchanged her eye, apparently the eye of animated nature, for that sleepy luxurious look of the animal suited but to the taste of an epicure. The light step of Ianthe often accompanied Aubrey in his search after antiquities, and often would the unconscious girl, engaged in the pursuit of a Kashmere butterfly, show the whole beauty of her form, floating as it were upon the wind, to the eager gaze of him, who forgot the letters he had just decyphered upon an almost effaced tablet, in the contemplation of her sylph-like figure. Often would her tresses falling, as she flitted around, exhibit in the sun's ray such delicately brilliant and swiftly fading hues, it might well excuse the forgetfulness of the antiquary, who let escape from his mind the very object he had before thought of vital importance to the proper interpretation of a passage in Pausanias. But why attempt to describe charms which all feel, but none can appreciate?—It was innocence, youth, and beauty, unaffected by crowded drawing-rooms and stifling balls. Whilst he drew those remains of which he wished to preserve a memorial for his future hours, she would stand by, and watch the magic effects of his pencil, in tracing the scenes of her native place; she would then describe to him the circling dance upon the open plain, would paint, to him in all the glowing colours of youthful memory, the marriage pomp she remembered viewing in her infancy; and then, turning to subjects that had evidently made a greater impression upon her mind, would tell him all the supernatural tales of her nurse. Her earnestness and apparent belief of what she narrated, excited the interest even of Aubrey; and often as she told him the tale of the living vampyre, who had passed years amidst his friends, and dearest ties, forced every year, by feeding upon the life of a lovely female to prolong his existence for the ensuing months, his blood would run cold, whilst he attempted to laugh her out of such idle and horrible fantasies; but Ianthe cited to him the names of old men, who had at last detected one living among themselves, after several of their near relatives and children had been found marked with the stamp of the fiend's appetite; and when she found him so incredulous, she begged of him to believe her, for it had been, remarked, that those who had dared to question their existence, always had some proof given, which obliged them, with grief and heartbreaking, to confess it was true. She detailed to him the traditional appearance of these monsters, and his horror was increased, by hearing a pretty accurate description of Lord Ruthven; he, however, still persisted in persuading her, that there could be no truth in her fears, though at the same time he wondered at the many coincidences which had all tended to excite a belief in the supernatural power of Lord Ruthven.

Aubrey began to attach himself more and more to Ianthe; her innocence, so contrasted with all the affected virtues of the women among whom he had sought for his vision of romance, won his heart; and while he ridiculed the idea of a young man of English habits, marrying an uneducated Greek girl, still he found himself more and more attached to the almost fairy form before him. He would tear himself at times from her, and, forming a

John Everett Millais

John Everett Millais was an English painter and illustrator born on 8 June 1829 in Southampton. He was a child prodigy who became the youngest student ever to enter the Royal Academy Schools at the age of eleven. In 1848, he co-founded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood with Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Holman Hunt, advocating for a return to the rich detail, vibrant colors, and complex compositions of art before Raphael. His early works, such as Christ in the House of His Parents and Ophelia, were celebrated for their meticulous detail and naturalism.

In 1855 he shifted from the highly detailed Pre-Raphaelite style to a broader, more spontaneous technique to meet financial demands from supporting a growing family of eight children. He became one of the most successful portrait painters of the Victorian era, known for works like Twins (1876) and portraits of prominent figures such as Alfred, Lord Tennyson and William Ewart Gladstone.

In 1885, Millais was made the first English artist to receive a hereditary baronetcy. He was elected President of the Royal Academy in 1896, shortly before his death on 13 August 1896 from throat cancer, a condition exacerbated by his long-term pipe smoking.

The Piper
Genre: genre painting
Media: oil, canvas
Location: Private Collection

P.25: The Royalist
Genre: genre painting
Media: oil, canvas
Location: Private Collection

P. 27: Dew Drenched Furze
Date: 1890
Media: oil, canvas
Location: Private Collection

The Matyr of the Solway
John Everett Millais
Date: 1871
Media: oil, canvas
Location: Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK
Dimensions: 56.5 x 60.3 cm

plan for some antiquarian research, he would depart, determined not to return until his object was attained; but he always found it impossible to fix his attention upon the ruins around him, whilst in his mind he retained an image that seemed alone the rightful possessor of his thoughts. Ianthe was unconscious of his love, and was ever the same frank infantile being he had first known. She always seemed to part from him with reluctance; but it was because she had no longer any one with whom she could visit her favourite haunts, whilst her guardian was occupied in sketching or uncovering some fragment which had yet escaped the destructive hand of time. She had appealed to her parents on the subject of Vampyres, and they both, with several present, affirmed their existence, pale with horror at the very name. Soon after, Aubrey determined to proceed upon one of his excursions, which was to detain him for a few hours; when they heard the name of the place, they all at once begged of him not to return at night, as he must necessarily pass through a wood, where no Greek would ever remain, after the day had closed, upon any consideration. They described it as the resort of the vampyres in their nocturnal orgies, and denounced the most heavy evils as impending upon him who dared to cross their path. Aubrey made light of their representations, and tried to laugh them out of the idea; but when he saw them shudder at his daring thus to mock a superior, infernal power, the very name of which apparently made their blood freeze, he was silent.

Next morning Aubrey set off upon his excursion unattended; he was surprised to observe the melancholy face of his host, and was concerned to find that his words, mocking the belief of those horrible fiends, had inspired them with such terror. When he was about to depart, Ianthe came to the side of his horse, and earnestly begged of him to return, ere night allowed the power of these beings to be put in action;—he promised. He was, however, so occupied in his research, that he did not perceive that day-light would soon end, and that in the horizon there was one of those specks which, in the warmer climates, so rapidly gather into a tremendous mass, and pour all their rage upon the devoted country.—He at last, however, mounted his horse, determined to make up by speed for his delay: but it was too late. Twilight, in these southern climates, is almost unknown; immediately the sun sets, night begins: and ere he had advanced far, the power of the storm was above—its echoing thunders had scarcely an interval of rest—its thick heavy rain forced its way through the canopying foliage, whilst the blue forked lightning seemed to fall and radiate at his very feet. Suddenly his horse took fright, and he was carried with dreadful rapidity through the entangled forest. The animal at last, through fatigue, stopped, and he found, by the glare of lightning, that he was in the neighbourhood of a hovel that hardly lifted itself up from the masses of dead leaves and brushwood which surrounded it. Dismounting, he approached, hoping to find some one to guide him to the town, or at least trusting to obtain shelter from the pelting of the storm. As he approached, the thunders, for a moment silent, allowed him to hear the dreadful shrieks of a woman mingling with the stifled, exultant mockery of a laugh, continued in one almost unbroken sound;—he was startled: but, roused by the thunder which again rolled over his head, he, with a sudden effort, forced open the door of the hut. He found himself in utter darkness: the sound, however, guided him. He was apparently unperceived; for, though he called, still the sounds continued, and no notice was taken of him. He found himself in contact with some one, whom he immediately seized; when a voice cried, "Again baffled!" to which a loud laugh succeeded; and he felt himself grappled by one whose strength seemed superhuman: determined to sell his life as dearly as he could, he struggled; but it was in vain: he was lifted from his feet and hurled with enormous force against the ground:—his enemy threw himself upon him, and kneeling upon his breast, had placed his hands upon his throat—when the glare of many torches penetrating through the hole that gave light in the day, disturbed him;—he instantly rose, and, leaving his prey, rushed through the door, and in a moment the crashing of the branches, as he broke through the wood, was no longer heard.

The storm was now still; and Aubrey, incapable of moving, was soon heard by those without. They entered; the light of their torches fell upon the mud walls, and the thatch loaded on every individual straw with heavy flakes of soot. At the desire of Aubrey they searched for her who had attracted him by her cries; he was again left in darkness; but what was his horror, when the light of the torches once more burst upon him, to perceive the airy form of his fair conductress brought in a lifeless corse. He shut his eyes, hoping that it was but a vision arising from his disturbed imagination; but he again saw the same form, when he unclosed them, stretched by his side. There was no colour upon her cheek, not even upon her lip; yet there was a stillness about her face that seemed almost as attaching as the life that once dwelt there:—upon her neck and breast was blood, and upon her throat were the marks of teeth having opened the vein:—to this the men pointed, crying, simultaneously struck with horror, "A Vampyre! a Vampyre!" A litter was quickly formed, and Aubrey was laid by the side of her who had lately been to him the object of so many bright and fairy visions, now fallen with the flower of life that had died within her. He knew not what his thoughts were—his mind was benumbed and seemed to shun reflection, and take refuge in vacancy—he held almost unconsciously in his hand a naked dagger of a particular construction, which had been found in the hut. They were soon met by different parties who had been engaged in the search of her whom a mother had missed. Their lamentable cries, as they approached the city, forewarned the parents of some dreadful catastrophe. —To describe their grief would be impossible; but when they ascertained the cause of their child's death, they looked at Aubrey, and pointed to the corse. They were inconsolable; both died broken-hearted.

Aubrey being put to bed was seized with a most violent fever, and was often delirious; in these intervals he would call upon Lord Ruthven and upon Ianthe—by some unaccountable combination he seemed to beg of his former companion to spare the being he loved. At other times he would imprecate maledictions upon his head, and curse him as her destroyer. Lord Ruthven, chanced at this time to arrive at Athens, and, from whatever motive, upon hearing of the state of Aubrey, immediately placed himself in the same house, and became his constant attendant. When the latter recovered from his delirium, he was horrified and startled at the sight of him whose image he had now combined with that of a Vampyre; but Lord Ruthven, by his kind words, implying almost repentance for the fault that had caused their separation, and still more by the attention, anxiety, and care which he showed, soon reconciled him to his presence. His lordship seemed quite changed; he no longer appeared that apathetic being who had so astonished Aubrey; but as soon as his convalescence began to be rapid, he again gradually retired into the same state of mind, and Aubrey perceived no difference from the former man, except that at times he was surprised to meet his gaze fixed intently upon him, with a smile of malicious exultation playing upon his lips: he knew not why, but this smile haunted him. During the last stage of the invalid's recovery, Lord Ruthven was apparently engaged in watching the tideless waves raised by the cooling breeze, or in marking the progress of those orbs, circling, like our world, the moveless sun;—indeed, he appeared to wish to avoid the eyes of all.

Aubrey's mind, by this shock, was much weakened, and that elasticity of spirit which had once so distinguished him now seemed to have fled for ever. He was now as much a lover of solitude and silence as Lord Ruthven; but much as he wished for solitude, his mind could not find it in the neighbourhood of Athens; if he sought it amidst the ruins he had formerly frequented, Ianthe's form stood by his side—if he sought it in the woods, her light step would appear wandering amidst the underwood, in quest of the modest violet; then suddenly turning round, would show, to his wild imagination, her pale face and wounded throat, with a meek smile upon her lips. He determined to fly scenes, every feature of which created such bitter associations in his mind. He proposed to Lord Ruthven, to whom he held himself bound by the tender care he had taken of

him during his illness, that they should visit those parts of Greece neither had yet seen. They travelled in every direction, and sought every spot to which a recollection could be attached: but though they thus hastened from place to place, yet they seemed not to heed what they gazed upon. They heard much of robbers, but they gradually began to slight these reports, which they imagined were only the invention of individuals, whose interest it was to excite the generosity of those whom they defended from pretended dangers. In consequence of thus neglecting the advice of the inhabitants, on one occasion they travelled with only a few guards, more to serve as guides than as a defence. Upon entering, however, a narrow defile, at the bottom of which was the bed of a torrent, with large masses of rock brought down from the neighbouring precipices, they had reason to repent their negligence; for scarcely were the whole of the party engaged in the narrow pass, when they were startled by the whistling of bullets close to their heads, and by the echoed report of several guns. In an instant their guards had left them, and, placing themselves behind rocks, had begun to fire in the direction whence the report came. Lord Ruthven and Aubrey, imitating their example, retired for a moment behind the sheltering turn of the defile: but ashamed of being thus detained by a foe, who with insulting shouts bade them advance, and being exposed to unresisting slaughter, if any of the robbers should climb above and take them in the rear, they determined at once to rush forward in search of the enemy. Hardly had they lost the shelter of the rock, when Lord Ruthven received a shot in the shoulder, which brought him to the ground. Aubrey hastened to his assistance; and, no longer heeding the contest or his own peril, was soon surprised by seeing the robbers' faces around him—his guards having, upon Lord Ruthven's being wounded, immediately thrown up their arms and surrendered.

By promises of great reward, Aubrey soon induced them to convey his wounded friend to a neighbouring cabin; and having agreed upon a ransom, he was no more disturbed by their presence—they being content merely to guard the entrance till their comrade should return with the promised sum, for which he had an order. Lord Ruthven's strength rapidly decreased; in two days mortification ensued, and death seemed advancing with hasty steps. His conduct and appearance had not changed; he seemed as unconscious of pain as he had been of the objects about him: but towards the close of the last evening, his mind became apparently uneasy, and his eye often fixed upon Aubrey, who was induced to offer his assistance with more than usual earnestness—"Assist me! you may save me—you may do more than that—I mean not my life, I heed the death of my existence as little as that of the passing day; but you may save my honour, your friend's honour."—"How? tell me how? I would do any thing," replied Aubrey.—"I need but little—my life ebbs apace—I cannot explain the whole—but if you would conceal all you know of me, my honour were free from stain in the world's mouth—and if my death were unknown for some time in England—I—I—but life."—"It shall not be known."—"Swear!" cried the dying man, raising himself with exultant violence, "Swear by all your soul reveres, by all your nature fears, swear that, for a year and a day you will not impart your knowledge of my crimes or death to any living being in any way, whatever may happen, or whatever you may see. "—His eyes seemed bursting from their sockets: "I swear!" said Aubrey; he sunk laughing upon his pillow, and breathed no more.

Aubrey retired to rest, but did not sleep; the many circumstances attending his acquaintance with this man rose upon his mind, and he knew not why; when he remembered his oath a cold shivering came over him, as if from the presentiment of something horrible awaiting him. Rising early in the morning, he was about to enter the hovel in which he had left the corpse, when a robber met him, and informed him that it was no longer there, having been conveyed by himself and comrades, upon his retiring, to the pinnacle of a neighbouring mount, according to a promise they had given his lordship, that it should be exposed to the first cold ray of the moon that rose after his death. Aubrey astonished, and taking several of the men, determined to go and bury it upon the spot where it lay. But, when he had mounted to the summit he found no trace of either the corpse or the clothes, though the robbers swore they pointed out the identical rock on which they had laid the body. For a time his mind was bewildered in conjectures, but he at last returned, convinced that they had buried the corpse for the sake of the clothes.

Weary of a country in which he had met with such terrible misfortunes, and in which all apparently conspired to heighten that superstitious melancholy that had seized upon his mind, he resolved to leave it, and soon arrived at Smyrna. While waiting for a vessel to convey him to Otranto, or to Naples, he occupied himself in arranging those effects he had with him belonging to Lord Ruthven. Amongst other things there was a case containing several weapons of offence, more or less adapted to ensure the death of the victim. There were several daggers and ataghans. Whilst turning them over, and examining their curious forms, what was his surprise at finding a sheath apparently ornamented in the same style as the dagger discovered in the fatal hut—he shuddered—hastening to gain further proof, he found the weapon, and his horror may be imagined when he discovered that it fitted, though peculiarly shaped, the sheath he held in his hand. His eyes seemed to need no further certainty—they seemed gazing to be bound to the dagger; yet still he wished to disbelieve; but the particular form, the same varying tints upon the haft and sheath were alike in splendour on both, and left no room for doubt; there were also drops of blood on each.

He left Smyrna, and on his way home, at Rome, his first inquiries were concerning the lady he had attempted to snatch from Lord Ruthven's seductive arts. Her parents were in distress, their fortune ruined, and she had not been heard of since the departure of his lordship. Aubrey's mind became almost broken under so many repeated horrors; he was afraid that this lady had fallen a victim to the destroyer of Ianthe. He became morose and silent; and his only occupation consisted in urging the speed of the postilions, as if he were going to save the life of some one he held dear. He arrived at Calais; a breeze, which seemed obedient to his will, soon wafted him to the English shores; and he hastened to the mansion of his fathers, and there, for a moment, appeared to lose, in the embraces and caresses of his sister, all memory of the past. If she before, by her infantine caresses, had gained his affection, now that the woman began to appear, she was still more attaching as a companion.

Miss Aubrey had not that winning grace which gains the gaze and applause of the drawing-room assemblies. There was none of that light brilliancy which only exists in the heated atmosphere of a crowded apartment. Her blue eye was never lit up by the levity of the mind beneath. There was a melancholy charm about it which did not seem to arise from misfortune, but from some feeling within, that appeared to indicate a soul conscious of a brighter realm. Her step was not that light footing, which strays where'er a butterfly or a colour may attract—it was sedate and pensive. When alone, her face was never brightened by the smile of joy; but when her brother breathed to her his affection, and would in her presence forget those griefs she knew destroyed his rest, who would have exchanged her smile for that of the voluptuary? It seemed as if those eyes,—that face were then playing in the light of their own native sphere. She was yet only eighteen, and had not been presented to the world, it having been thought by her guardians more fit that her presentation should be delayed until her brother's return from the continent, when he might be her protector. It was now, therefore, resolved that the next drawing-room, which was fast approaching, should be the epoch of her entry into the "busy scene." Aubrey would rather have remained in the mansion of his fathers, and fed upon the melancholy which overpowered him. He could not feel interest about the frivolities of fashionable strangers, when his mind had been so torn by the events he had witnessed; but he determined to sacrifice his own comfort to the protection of his sister. They soon arrived in town, and prepared for the next day, which had been announced as a drawing-room.

The crowd was excessive—a drawing-room had not been held for a long time, and all who were anxious to bask in the smile of royalty, hastened thither. Aubrey was there with his sister. While he was standing in a corner by himself, heedless of all around him, engaged in the remembrance that the first time he had seen Lord Ruthven was in that very place—he felt himself suddenly seized by the arm, and a voice he recognized too well, sounded in his ear—"Remember your oath." He had hardly courage to turn, fearful of seeing a spectre that would blast him, when he perceived, at a little distance, the same figure which had attracted his notice on this spot upon his first entry into society. He gazed till his limbs almost refusing to bear their weight, he was obliged to take the arm of a friend, and forcing a passage through the crowd, he threw himself into his carriage, and was driven home. He paced the room with hurried steps, and fixed his hands upon his head, as if he were afraid his thoughts were bursting from his brain. Lord Ruthven again before him—circumstances started up in dreadful array—the dagger—his oath.—He roused himself, he could not believe it possible—the dead rise again!—He thought his imagination had conjured up the image his mind was resting upon. It was impossible that it could be real—he determined, therefore, to go again into society; for though he attempted to ask concerning Lord Ruthven, the name hung upon his lips, and he could not succeed in gaining information. He went a few nights after with his sister to the assembly of a near relation. Leaving her under the protection of a matron, he retired into a recess, and there gave himself up to his own devouring thoughts. Perceiving, at last, that many were leaving, he roused himself, and entering another room, found his sister surrounded by several, apparently in earnest conversation; he attempted to pass and get near her, when one, whom he requested to move, turned round, and revealed to him those features he most abhorred. He sprang forward, seized his sister's arm, and, with hurried step, forced her towards the street: at the door he found himself impeded by the crowd of servants who were waiting for their lords; and while he was engaged in passing them, he again heard that voice whisper close to him—"Remember your oath!"—He did not dare to turn, but, hurrying his sister, soon reached home.

Aubrey became almost distracted. If before his mind had been absorbed by one subject, how much more completely was it engrossed, now that the certainty of the monster's living again pressed upon his thoughts. His sister's attentions were now unheeded, and it was in vain that she intreated him to explain to her what had caused his abrupt conduct. He only uttered a few words, and those terrified her. The more he thought, the more he was bewildered. His oath startled him;—was he then to allow this monster to roam, bearing ruin upon his breath, amidst all he held dear, and not avert its progress? His very sister might have been touched by him. But even if he were to break his oath, and disclose his suspicions, who would believe him? He thought of employing his own hand to free the world from such a wretch; but death, he remembered, had been already mocked. For days he remained in this state; shut up in his room, he saw no one, and ate only when his sister came, who, with eyes streaming with tears, besought him, for her sake, to support nature. At last, no longer capable of bearing stillness and solitude, he left his house, roamed from street to street, anxious to fly that image which haunted him. His dress became neglected, and he wandered, as often exposed to the noon-day sun as to the midnight damps. He was no longer to be recognized; at first he returned with the evening to the house; but at last he laid him down to rest wherever fatigue overtook him. His sister, anxious for his safety, employed people to follow him; but they were soon distanced by him who fled from a pursuer swifter than any—from thought. His conduct, however, suddenly changed. Struck with the idea that he left by his absence the whole of his friends, with a fiend amongst them, of whose presence they were unconscious, he determined to enter again into society, and watch him closely, anxious to forewarn, in spite of his oath, all whom Lord Ruthven approached with intimacy. But when he entered into a room, his haggard and suspicious looks were so striking, his inward shudderings so visible, that his sister was at last obliged to beg of him to abstain from seeking, for her sake, a society which affected him so strongly. When, however, remonstrance proved unavailing, the guardians thought proper to interpose, and, fearing that his mind was becoming alienated, they thought it high time to resume again that trust which had been before imposed upon them by Aubrey's parents.

Desirous of saving him from the injuries and sufferings he had daily encountered in his wanderings, and of preventing him from exposing to the general eye those marks of what they considered folly, they engaged a physician to reside in the house, and take constant care of him. He hardly appeared to notice it, so completely was his mind absorbed by one terrible subject. His incoherence became at last so great, that he was confined to his chamber. There he would often lie for days, incapable of being roused. He had become emaciated, his eyes had attained a glassy lustre;—the only sign of affection and recollection remaining displayed itself upon the entry of his sister; then he would sometimes start, and, seizing her hands, with looks that severely afflicted her, he would desire her not to touch him. "Oh, do not touch him—if your love for me is aught, do not go near him!" When, however, she inquired to whom he referred, his only answer was, "True! true!" and again he sank into a state, whence not even she could rouse him. This lasted many months: gradually, however, as the year was passing, his incoherences became less frequent, and his mind threw off a portion of its gloom, whilst his guardians observed, that several times in the day he would count upon his fingers a definite number, and then smile.

The time had nearly elapsed, when, upon the last day of the year, one of his guardians entering his room, began to converse with his physician upon the melancholy circumstance of Aubrey's being in so awful a situation, when his sister was going next day to be married. Instantly Aubrey's attention was attracted; he asked anxiously to whom. Glad of this mark of returning intellect, of which they feared he had been deprived, they mentioned the name of the Earl of Marsden. Thinking this was a young Earl whom he had met with in society, Aubrey seemed pleased, and astonished them still more by his expressing his intention to be present at the nuptials, and desiring to see his sister. They answered not, but in a few minutes his sister was with him. He was apparently again capable of being affected by the influence of her lovely smile; for he pressed her to his breast, and kissed her cheek, wet with tears, flowing at the thought of her brother's being once more alive to the feelings of affection. He began to speak with all his wonted warmth, and to congratulate her upon her marriage with a person so distinguished for rank and every accomplishment; when he suddenly perceived a locket upon her breast; opening it, what was his surprise at beholding the features of the monster who had so long influenced his life. He seized the portrait in a paroxysm of rage, and trampled it under foot. Upon her asking him why he thus destroyed the resemblance of her future husband, he looked as if he did not understand her—then seizing her hands, and gazing on her with a frantic expression of countenance, he bade her swear that she would never wed this monster, for he—— But he could not advance—it seemed as if that voice again bade him remember his oath—he turned suddenly round, thinking Lord Ruthven was near him but saw no one. In the meantime the guardians and physician, who had heard the whole, and thought this was but a return of his disorder, entered, and forcing him from Miss Aubrey, desired her to leave him. He fell upon his knees to them, he implored, he begged of them to delay but for one day. They, attributing this to the insanity they imagined had taken possession of his mind, endeavoured to pacify him, and retired.

Lord Ruthven had called the morning after the drawing-room, and had been refused with every one else. When he heard of Aubrey's ill health, he readily understood himself to be the cause of it; but when he learned that he was deemed insane, his exultation and pleasure could hardly be concealed from those

among whom he had gained this information. He hastened to the house of his former companion, and, by constant attendance, and the pretence of great affection for the brother and interest in his fate, he gradually won the ear of Miss Aubrey. Who could resist his power? His tongue had dangers and toils to recount—could speak of himself as of an individual having no sympathy with any being on the crowded earth, save with her to whom he addressed himself;—could tell how, since he knew her, his existence, had begun to seem worthy of preservation, if it were merely that he might listen to her soothing accents;—in fine, he knew so well how to use the serpent's art, or such was the will of fate, that he gained her affections. The title of the elder branch falling at length to him, he obtained an important embassy, which served as an excuse for hastening the marriage, (in spite of her brother's deranged state,) which was to take place the very day before his departure for the continent.

Aubrey, when he was left by the physician and his guardians, attempted to bribe the servants, but in vain. He asked for pen and paper; it was given him; he wrote a letter to his sister, conjuring her, as she valued her own happiness, her own honour, and the honour of those now in the grave, who once held her in their arms as their hope and the hope of their house, to delay but for a few hours that marriage, on which he denounced the most heavy curses. The servants promised they would deliver it; but giving it to the physician, he thought it better not to harass any more the mind of Miss Aubrey by, what he considered, the ravings of a maniac. Night passed on without rest to the busy inmates of the house; and Aubrey heard, with a horror that may more easily be conceived than described, the notes of busy preparation. Morning came, and the sound of carriages broke upon his ear. Aubrey grew almost frantic. The curiosity of the servants at last overcame their vigilance, they gradually stole away, leaving him in the custody of an helpless old woman. He seized the opportunity, with one bound was out of the room, and in a moment found himself in the apartment where all were nearly assembled. Lord Ruthven was the first to perceive him: he immediately approached, and, taking his arm by force, hurried him from the room, speechless with rage. When on the staircase, Lord Ruthven whispered in his ear—"Remember your oath, and know, if not my bride to day, your sister is dishonoured. Women are frail!" So saying, he pushed him towards his attendants, who, roused by the old woman, had come in search of him. Aubrey could no longer support himself; his rage not finding vent, had broken a blood-vessel, and he was conveyed to bed. This was not mentioned to his sister, who was not present when he entered, as the physician was afraid of agitating her. The marriage was solemnized, and the bride and bridegroom left London.

Aubrey's weakness increased; the effusion of blood produced symptoms of the near approach of death. He desired his sister's guardians might be called, and when the midnight hour had struck, he related composedly what the reader has perused—he died immediately after.

The guardians hastened to protect Miss Aubrey; but when they arrived, it was too late. Lord Ruthven had disappeared, and Aubrey's sister had glutted the thirst of a VAMPYRE!

EXTRACT OF A LETTER, CONTAINING AN ACCOUNT OF LORD BYRON'S RESIDENCE IN THE ISLAND OF MITYLENE.

"The world was all before him, where to choose his place of rest, and Providence his guide."

IN Sailing through the Grecian Archipelago, on board one of his Majesty's vessels, in the year 1812, we put into the harbour of Mitylene, in the island of that name. The beauty of this place, and the certain supply of cattle and vegetables always to be had there, induce many British vessels to visit it—both men of war and merchantmen; and though it lies rather out of the track for ships bound to Smyrna, its bounties amply repay for the deviation of a voyage. We landed; as usual, at the bottom of the bay, and whilst the men were employed in watering, and the purser bargaining for cattle with the natives, the clergyman and myself took a ramble to the cave called Homer's School, and other places, where we had been before. On the brow of Mount Ida (a small monticule so named) we met with and engaged a young Greek as our guide, who told us he had come from Scio with an English lord, who left the island four days previous to our arrival in his felucca. "He engaged me as a pilot," said the Greek, "and would have taken me with him; but I did not choose to quit Mitylene, where I am likely to get married. He was an odd, but a very good man. The cottage over the hill, facing the river, belongs to him, and he has left an old man in charge of it: he gave Dominick, the wine-trader, six hundred zechines for it, (about L250 English currency,) and has resided there about fourteen months, though not constantly; for he sails in his felucca very often to the different islands."

This account excited our curiosity very much, and we lost no time in hastening to the house where our countryman had resided. We were kindly received by an old man, who conducted us over the mansion. It consisted of four apartments on the ground-floor—an entrance hall, a drawing-room, a sitting parlour, and a bed-room, with a spacious closet annexed. They were all simply decorated: plain green-stained walls, marble tables on either side, a large myrtle in the centre, and a small fountain beneath, which could be made to play through the branches by moving a spring fixed in the side of a small bronze Venus in a leaning posture; a large couch or sofa completed the furniture. In the hall stood half a dozen English cane chairs, and an empty book-case: there were no mirrors, nor a single painting. The bedchamber had merely a large mattress spread on the floor, with two stuffed cotton quilts and a pillow—the common bed throughout Greece. In the sitting-room we observed a marble recess, formerly, the old man told us, filled with books and papers, which were then in a large seaman's chest in the closet: it was open, but we did not think ourselves justified in examining the contents. On the tablet of the recess lay Voltaire's, Shakspeare's, Boileau's, and Rousseau's works complete; Volney's Ruins of Empires; Zimmerman, in the German language; Klopstock's Messiah; Kotzebue's novels; Schiller's play of the Robbers; Milton's Paradise Lost, an Italian edition, printed at Parma in 1810; several small pamphlets from the Greek press at Constantinople, much torn, but no English book of any description. Most of these books were filled with marginal notes, written with a pencil, in Italian and Latin. The Messiah was literally scribbled all over, and marked with slips of paper, on which also were remarks.

The old man said: "The lord had been reading these books the evening before he sailed, and forgot to place them with the others; but," said he, "there they must lie until his return; for he is so particular, that were I to move one thing without orders, he would frown upon me for a week together; he is otherways very good. I once did him a service; and I have the produce of this farm for the trouble of taking care of it, except twenty zechines which I pay to an aged Armenian who resides in a small cottage in the wood, and whom the lord brought here from Adrianople; I don't know for what reason."

The appearance of the house externally was pleasing. The portico in front was fifty paces long and fourteen broad, and the fluted marble pillars with black plinths and fret-work cornices, (as it is now customary in Grecian architecture,) were considerably higher than the roof. The roof, surrounded by a light stone balustrade, was covered by a fine Turkey carpet, beneath an awning of strong coarse linen. Most of the house-tops are thus furnished, as upon them the Greeks pass their evenings in smoking, drinking light wines, such as "lachryma christi," eating fruit, and enjoying the evening breeze.

On the left hand as we entered the house, a small streamlet glided away, grapes, oranges and limes were clustering together on its borders, and under the shade of two large myrtle bushes, a marble seat with an ornamental wooden back was placed, on which we were told, the lord passed many of his evenings and nights till twelve o'clock, reading, writing, and talking to himself.

"I suppose," said the old man, "praying" for he was very devout, "and always attended our church twice a week, besides Sundays."

The view from this seat was what may be termed "a bird's-eye view." A line of rich vineyards led the eye to Mount Calcla, covered with olive and myrtle trees in bloom, and on the summit of which an ancient Greek temple appeared in majestic decay. A small stream issuing from the ruins descended in broken cascades, until it was lost in the woods near the mountain's base. The sea smooth as glass, and an horizon unshadowed by a single cloud, terminates the view in front; and a little on the left, through a vista of lofty chesnut and palm-trees, several small islands were distinctly observed, studding the light blue wave with spots of emerald green. I seldom enjoyed a view more than I did this; but our enquiries were fruitless as to the name of the person who had resided in this romantic solitude: none knew his name but Dominick, his banker, who had gone to Candia. "The Armenian," said our conductor, "could tell, but I am sure he will not,"—"And cannot you tell, old friend?" said I—"If I can," said he, "I dare not." We had not time to visit the Armenian, but on our return to the town we learnt several particulars of the isolated lord. He had portioned eight young girls when he was last upon the island, and even danced with them at the nuptial feast. He gave a cow to one man, horses to others, and cotton and silk to the girls who live by weaving these articles. He also bought a new boat for a fisherman who had lost his own in a gale, and he often gave Greek Testaments to the poor children. In short, he appeared to us, from all we collected, to have been a very eccentric and benevolent character. One circumstance we learnt, which our old friend at the cottage thought proper not to disclose. He had a most beautiful daughter, with whom the lord was often seen walking on the sea-shore, and he had bought her a piano-forte, and taught her himself the use of it.

Such was the information with which we departed from the peaceful isle of Mitylene; our imaginations all on the rack, guessing who this rambler in Greece could be. He had money it was evident: he had philanthropy of disposition, and all those eccentricities which mark peculiar genius. Arrived at Palermo, all our doubts were dispelled. Falling in company with Mr. FOSTER, the architect, a pupil of WYATT'S, who had been travelling in Egypt and Greece, "The individual," said he, "about whom you are so anxious, is Lord Byron; I met him in my travels on the island of Tenedos, and I also visited him at Mitylene." We had never then heard of his lordship's fame, as we had been some years from home; but "Childe Harolde" being put into our hands we recognized the recluse of Calcla in every page. Deeply did we regret not having been more curious in our researches at the cottage, but we consoled ourselves with the idea of returning to Mitylene on some future day; but to me that day will never return. I make this statement, believing it not quite uninteresting, and in justice to his lordship's good name, which has been grossly slandered. He has been described as of an unfeeling disposition, averse to associating with human nature, or contributing in any way to sooth its sorrows, or add to its pleasures. The fact is directly the reverse, as may be plainly gathered from these little anecdotes. All the finer feelings of the heart, so elegantly depicted in his lordship's poems, seem to have their seat in his bosom. Tenderness, sympathy, and charity appear to guide all his actions: and his courting the repose of solitude is an additional reason for marking him as a being on whose heart Religion hath set her seal, and over whose head Benevolence hath thrown her mantle. No man can read the preceding pleasing "traits" without feeling proud of him as a countryman. With respect to his loves or pleasures, I do not assume a right to give an opinion. Reports are ever to be received with caution, particularly when directed against man's moral integrity; and he who dares justify himself before that awful tribunal where all must appear, alone may censure the errors of a fellow-mortal. Lord Byron's character is worthy of his genius. To do good in secret, and shun the world's applause, is the surest testimony of a virtuous heart and self-approving conscience.

Isabella; or, The Pot of Basil

John Keats

Fair Isabel, poor simple Isabel!
Lorenzo, a young palmer in Love's eye!
They could not in the self-same mansion dwell
Without some stir of heart, some malady;
They could not sit at meals but feel how well
It soothed each to be the other by;
They could not, sure, beneath the same roof sleep
But to each other dream, and nightly weep.

With every morn their love grew tenderer,
With every eve deeper and tenderer still;
He might not in house, field, or garden stir,
But her full shape would all his seeing fill;
And his continual voice was pleasanter
To her, than noise of trees or hidden rill;
Her lute-string gave an echo of his name,
She spoilt her half-done broidery with the same.

He knew whose gentle hand was at the latch,
Before the door had given her to his eyes;
And from her chamber-window he would catch
Her beauty farther than the falcon spies;
And constant as her vespers would he watch,
Because her face was turn'd to the same skies;
And with sick longing all the night outwear,
To hear her morning-step upon the stair.

A whole long month of May in this sad plight
Made their cheeks paler by the break of June:
"To-morrow will I bow to my delight,
To-morrow will I ask my lady's boon. " —
"O may I never see another night,
Lorenzo, if thy lips breathe not love's tune. " —
So spake they to their pillows; but, alas,
Honeyless days and days did he let pass;

Until sweet Isabella's untouch'd cheek
Fell sick within the rose's just domain,
Fell thin as a young mother's, who doth seek
By every lull to cool her infant's pain:
"How ill she is, " said he, " I may not speak,
And yet I will, and tell my love all plain:
If looks speak love-laws, I will drink her tears,
And at the least 'twill startle off her cares."

So said he one fair morning, and all day
His heart beat awfully against his side;
And to his heart he inwardly did pray
For power to speak; but still the ruddy tide
Stifled his voice, and puls'd resolve away —
Fever'd his high conceit of such a bride,
Yet brought him to the meekness of a child:
Alas! when passion is both meek and wild!

Isabella - John Everett Millais

So once more he had wak'd and anguished
A dreary night of love and misery,
If Isabel's quick eye had not been wed
To every symbol on his forehead high;
She saw it waxing very pale and dead,
And straight all flush'd; so, lisped tenderly,
"Lorenzo! " — here she ceas'd her timid quest,
But in her tone and look he read the rest.

"O Isabella, I can half perceive
That I may speak my grief into thine ear;
If thou didst ever any thing believe,
Believe how I love thee, believe how near
My soul is to its doom: I would not grieve
Thy hand by unwelcome pressing, would not fear
Thine eyes by gazing; but I cannot live
Another night, and not my passion shrive.

"Love! thou art leading me from wintry cold,
Lady! thou leadest me to summer clime,
And I must taste the blossoms that unfold
In its ripe warmth this gracious morning time."
So said, his erewhile timid lips grew bold,
And poesied with hers in dewy rhyme:
Great bliss was with them, and great happiness
Grew, like a lusty flower in June's caress.

Parting they seem'd to tread upon the air,
Twin roses by the zephyr blown apart
Only to meet again more close, and share
The inward fragrance of each other's heart.
She, to her chamber gone, a ditty fair
Sang, of delicious love and honey'd dart;
He with light steps went up a western hill,
And bade the sun farewell, and joy'd his fill.

All close they met again, before the dusk
Had taken from the stars its pleasant veil,
All close they met, all eves, before the dusk
Had taken from the stars its pleasant veil
Close in a bower of hyacinth and musk,
Unknown of any, free from whispering tale.
Ah! better had it been for ever so,
Than idle ears should pleasure in their woe.

Were they unhappy then? — It cannot be —
Too many tears for lovers have been shed,
Too many sighs give we to them in fee,
Too much of pity after they are dead,
Too many doleful stories do we see,
Whose matter in bright gold were best be read;
Except in such a page where Theseus' spouse
Over the pathless waves towards him bows.

But, for the general award of love,
The little sweet doth kill much bitterness;
Though Dido silent is in under-grove,
And Isabella's was a great distress,
Though young Lorenzo in warm Indian clove
Was not embalm'd, this truth is not the less —
Even bees, the little almsmen of spring-bowers,
Know there is richest juice in poison-flowers.

With her two brothers this fair lady dwelt,
Enriched from ancestral merchandize,
And for them many a weary hand did swelt
In torched mines and noisy factories,
And many once proud-quiver'd loins did melt
In blood from stinging whip; — with hollow eyes
Many all day in dazzling river stood,
To take the rich-ored driftings of the flood.

For them the Ceylon diver held his breath,
And went all naked to the hungry shark;
For them his ears gush'd blood; for them in death
The seal on the cold ice with piteous bark
Lay full of darts; for them alone did seethe
A thousand men in troubles wide and dark:
Half-ignorant, they turn'd an easy wheel,
That set sharp racks at work, to pinch and peel.

Why were they proud? Because their marble founts
Gush'd with more pride than do a wretch's tears? —
Why were they proud? Because fair orange-mounts
Were of more soft ascent than lazar stairs? —
Why were they proud? Because red-lin'd accounts
Were richer than the songs of Grecian years? —
Why were they proud? again we ask aloud,
Why in the name of Glory were they proud?

Yet were these Florentines as self-retired
In hungry pride and gainful cowardice,
As two close Hebrews in that land inspired,
Paled in and vineyarded from beggar-spies;
The hawks of ship-mast forests — the untired
And pannier'd mules for ducats and old lies — .
Quick cat's-paws on the generous stray-away, —
Great wits in Spanish, Tuscan, and Malay.

How was it these same ledger-men could spy
Fair Isabella in her downy nest?
How could they find out in Lorenzo's eye
A straying from his toil? Hot Egypt's pest
Into their vision covetous and sly!
How could these money-bags see east and west? —
Yet so they did — and every dealer fair
Must see behind, as doth the hunted hare.

O eloquent and famed Boccaccio!
Of thee we now should ask forgiving boon,
And of thy spicy myrtles as they blow,
And of thy roses amorous of the moon,
And of thy lilies, that do paler grow
Now they can no more hear thy ghittern's tune,
For venturing syllables that ill beseem
The quiet glooms of such a piteous theme.

Grant thou a pardon here, and then the tale
Shall move on soberly, as it is meet;
There is no other crime, no mad assail
To make old prose in modern rhyme more sweet:
But it is done — succeed the verse or fail —
To honour thee, and thy gone spirit greet;
To stead thee as a verse in English tongue,
An echo of thee in the north-wind sung.

It was a vision. — In the drowsy gloom,
The dull of midnight, at her couch's foot
Lorenzo stood, and wept: the forest tomb
Had marr'd his glossy hair which once could shoot
Lustre into the sun, and put cold doom
Upon his lips, and taken the soft lute
From his lorn voice, and past his loamed ears
Had made a miry channel for his tears.

Strange sound it was, when the pale shadow spake;
For there was striving, in its piteous tongue,
To speak as when on earth it was awake,
And Isabella on its music hung:
Languor there was in it, and tremulous shake,
As in a palsied Druid's harp unstrung;
And through it moan'd a ghostly under-song,
Like hoarse night-gusts sepulchral briars among.

Its eyes, though wild, were still all dewy bright
With love, and kept all phantom fear aloof
From the poor girl by magic of their light,
The while it did unthread the horrid woof
Of the late darken'd time, — the murderous spite
Of pride and avarice, — the dark pine roof
In the forest, — and the sodden turfed dell,
Where, without any word, from stabs he fell.

Saying moreover, "Isabel, my sweet!
Red whortle-berries droop above my head,
And a large flint-stone weighs upon my feet;
Around me beeches and high chestnuts shed
Their leaves and prickly nuts; a sheep-fold bleat
Comes from beyond the river to my bed:
Go, shed one tear upon my heather-bloom,
And it shall comfort me within the tomb.

"I am a shadow now, alas! alas!
Upon the skirts of Human-nature dwelling
Alone: I chant alone the holy mass,
While little sounds of life are round me knelling,
And glossy bees at noon do fieldward pass,
And many a chapel bell the hour is telling,
Paining me through: those sounds grow strange to me,
And thou art distant in Humanity.

"I know what was, I feel full well what is,
And I should rage, if spirits could go mad;
Though I forget the taste of earthly bliss,
That paleness warms my grave, as though I had
A Seraph chosen from the bright abyss
To be my spouse: thy paleness makes me glad;
Thy beauty grows upon me, and I feel
A greater love through all my essence steal."

The Spirit mourn'd "Adieu!" — dissolv'd, and left
The atom darkness in a slow turmoil;
As when of healthful midnight sleep bereft,
Thinking on rugged hours and fruitless toil,
We put our eyes into a pillowy cleft,
And see the spangly gloom froth up and boil:
It made sad Isabella's eyelids ache,
And in the dawn she started up awake;

"Ha! ha! " said she, " I knew not this hard life,
I thought the worst was simple misery;
I thought some Fate with pleasure or with strife
Portion'd us — happy days, or else to die;
But there is crime — a brother's bloody knife!
Sweet Spirit, thou hast school'd my infancy:
I'll visit thee for this, and kiss thine eyes,
And greet thee morn and even in the skies."

When the full morning came, she had devised
How she might secret to the forest hie;
How she might find the clay, so dearly prized,
And sing to it one latest lullaby;
How her short absence might be unsurmised,
While she the inmost of the dream would try.
Resolv'd, she took with her an aged nurse,
And went into that dismal forest-hearse.

See, as they creep along the river side,
How she doth whisper to that aged Dame,
And, after looking round the champaign wide,
Shows her a knife. — "What feverous hectic flame
"Burns in thee, child? — What good can thee betide,
That thou should'st smile again?" — The evening came,
And they had found Lorenzo's earthy bed;
The flint was there, the berries at his head.

Who hath not loiter'd in a green church-yard,
And let his spirit, like a demon-mole,
Work through the clayey soil and gravel hard,
To see scull, coffin'd bones, and funeral stole;
Pitying each form that hungry Death hath marr'd,
And filling it once more with human soul?
Ah! this is holiday to what was felt
When Isabella by Lorenzo knelt.

She gaz'd into the fresh-thrown mould, as though
One glance did fully all its secrets tell;
Clearly she saw, as other eyes would know
Pale limbs at bottom of a crystal well;
Upon the murderous spot she seem'd to grow,
Like to a native lily of the dell:
Then with her knife, all sudden, she began
To dig more fervently than misers can.

Soon she turn'd up a soiled glove, whereon
Her silk had play'd in purple phantasies,
She kiss'd it with a lip more chill than stone,
And put it in her bosom, where it dries
And freezes utterly unto the bone
Those dainties made to still an infant's cries:
Then 'gan she work again; nor stay'd her care,
But to throw back at times her veiling hair.

That old nurse stood beside her wondering,
Until her heart felt pity to the core
At sight of such a dismal labouring,
And so she kneeled, with her locks all hoar,
And put her lean hands to the horrid thing:
Three hours they labour'd at this travail sore;
At last they felt the kernel of the grave,
And Isabella did not stamp and rave.

Ah! wherefore all this wormy circumstance?
Why linger at the yawning tomb so long?
O for the gentleness of old Romance,
The simple plaining of a minstrel's song!
Fair reader, at the old tale take a glance,
For here, in truth, it doth not well belong
To speak: — O turn thee to the very tale,
And taste the music of that vision pale.

With duller steel than the Persean sword
They cut away no formless monster's head,
But one, whose gentleness did well accord
With death, as life. The ancient harps have said,
Love never dies, but lives, immortal Lord:
If Love impersonate was ever dead,
Pale Isabella kiss'd it, and low moan'd.
'Twas love; cold, — dead indeed, but not dethroned.

In anxious secrecy they took it home,
And then the prize was all for Isabel:
She calm'd its wild hair with a golden comb,
And all around each eye's sepulchral cell
Pointed each fringed lash; the smeared loam
With tears, as chilly as a dripping well,
She drench'd away: — and still she comb'd, and kept
Sighing all day — and still she kiss'd, and wept.

Then in a silken scarf, — sweet with the dews
Of precious flowers pluck'd in Araby,
And divine liquids come with odorous ooze
Through the cold serpent-pipe refreshfully, —
She wrapp'd it up; and for its tomb did choose
A garden-pot, wherein she laid it by,
And cover'd it with mould, and o'er it set
Sweet basil, which her tears kept ever wet.

And she forgot the stars, the moon, and sun,
And she forgot the blue above the trees,
And she forgot the dells where waters run,
And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze;
She had no knowledge when the day was done,
And the new morn she saw not: but in peace
Hung over her sweet basil evermore,
And moisten'd it with tears unto the core.

And so she ever fed it with thin tears,
Whence thick, and green, and beautiful it grew,
So that it smelt more balmy than its peers
Of basil-tufts in Florence; for it drew
Nurture besides, and life, from human fears,
From the fast mouldering head there shut from view:
So that the jewel, safely casketed,
Came forth, and in perfumed leafits spread.

O Melancholy, linger here awhile!
O Music, Music, breathe despondingly!
O Echo, Echo, from some sombre isle,
Unknown, Lethean, sigh to us — O sigh!
Spirits in grief, lift up your heads, and smile;
Lift up your heads, sweet Spirits, heavily,
And make a pale light in your cypress glooms,
Tinting with silver wan your marble tombs.

Moan hither, all ye syllables of woe,
From the deep throat of sad Melpomene!
Through bronzed lyre in tragic order go,
And touch the strings into a mystery;
Sound mournfully upon the winds and low;
For simple Isabel is soon to be
Among the dead: She withers, like a palm
Cut by an Indian for its juicy balm.

O leave the palm to wither by itself;
Let not quick Winter chill its dying hour! —
It may not be — those Baalites of pelf,
Her brethren, noted the continual shower
From her dead eyes; and many a curious elf,
Among her kindred, wonder'd that such dower
Of youth and beauty should be thrown aside
By one mark'd out to be a noble's bride.

And, furthermore, her brethren wonder'd much
Why she sat drooping by the basil green,
And why it flourish'd, as by magic touch;
Greatly they wonder'd what the thing might mean:
They could not surely give belief, that such
A very nothing would have power to wean
Her from her own fair youth, and pleasures gay,
And even remembrance of her love's delay.

Therefore they watch'd a time when they might sift
This hidden whim; and long they watch'd in vain;
For seldom did she go to chapel-shrift,
And seldom felt she any hunger-pain;
And when she left, she hurried back, as swift
As bird on wing to breast its eggs again;
And, patient as a hen-bird, sat her there
Beside her basil, weeping through her hair.

Yet they contriv'd to steal the basil-pot,
And to examine it in secret place:
The thing was vile with green and livid spot,
And yet they knew it was Lorenzo's face:
The guerdon of their murder they had got,
And so left Florence in a moment's space,
Never to turn again. — Away they went,
With blood upon their heads, to banishment.

O Melancholy, turn thine eyes away!
O Music, Music, breathe despondingly!
O Echo, Echo, on some other day,
From isles Lethean, sigh to us — o sigh!
Spirits of grief, sing not you " Well-a-way!"
For Isabel, sweet Isabel, will die;
Will die a death too lone and incomplete,
Now they have ta'en away her basil sweet.

Piteous she look'd on dead and senseless things,
Asking for her lost basil amorously;
And with melodious chuckle in the strings
Of her lorn voice, she oftentimes would cry
After the pilgrim in his wanderings,
To ask him where her basil was; and why
'Twas hid from her: " For cruel 'tis, " said she,
"To steal my basil-pot away from me."

And so she pined, and so she died forlorn,
Imploring for her basil to the last.
No heart was there in Florence but did mourn
In pity of her love, so overcast.
And a sad ditty of this story born
From mouth to mouth through all the country pass'd:
Still is the burthen sung — " O cruelty,
"To steal my basil-pot away from me!"

John William Waterhouse “Isabella; or, The Pot of Basil”

P.36: Isabella and the Pot of Basil John White Alexander

The Wind in the Willows

By Kenneth Grahame

Foreword by Nathan Hood

In 1900, Alastair Grahame, nicknamed mouse because of his small size, was born prematurely. Suffering from health problems throughout his life, his father loved him deeply and told him wonderful bedtime stories. They were tales set in the English countryside, following the adventures of a Toad. There was boating holidays and pleasant excursions on the open road. These nighttime stories were the first beginnings of what would become The Wind in the Willows, written by Kenneth Grahame. Mole, Rat, Toad and Badger: these characters are etched into English country life. Boating on the river, picnics and spending time with friends: a delightful and wholesome life. At the same time, they must wrestle with the challenges of life and modernity. Mr Toad's motor vehicle is more than a wild, dangerous hobby. It represents the threat that disruptive technology can pose the high trust and gentle society that lacks protection.

Over the next year, we will have a chapter of this wonderful story published in the magazine. They tend to fall into two tracks: the adventures of Mr Toad, and those that are a side adventure, exploring a feeling or idea. This first chapter is very much an introduction to the tale, focusing on the friendship and doings of Ratty and Mole.

Chapter I: THE RIVER BANK

The Mole had been working very hard all the morning, spring-cleaning his little home. First with brooms, then with dusters; then on ladders and steps and chairs, with a brush and a pail of whitewash; till he had dust in his throat and eyes, and splashes of whitewash all over his black fur, and an aching back and weary arms. Spring was moving in the air above and in the earth below and around him, penetrating even his dark and lowly little house with its spirit of divine discontent and longing. It was small wonder, then, that he suddenly flung down his brush on the floor, said "Bother!" and "O blow!" and also "Hang spring-cleaning!" and bolted out of the house without even waiting to put on his coat. Something up above was calling him imperiously, and he made for the steep little tunnel which answered in his case to the gravelled carriage-drive owned by animals whose residences are nearer to the sun and air. So he scraped and scratched and scrabbled and scrooged and then he scrooged again and scrabbled and scratched and scraped, working busily with his little paws and muttering to himself, "Up we go! Up we go!" till at last, pop! his snout came out into the sunlight, and he found himself rolling in the warm grass of a great meadow.

"This is fine!" he said to himself. "This is better than whitewashing!" The sunshine struck hot on his fur, soft breezes caressed his heated brow, and after the seclusion of the cellarage he had lived in so long the carol of happy birds fell on his dulled hearing almost like a shout. Jumping off all his four legs at once, in the joy of living and the delight of spring without its cleaning, he pursued his way across the meadow till he reached the hedge on the further side.

"Hold up!" said an elderly rabbit at the gap. "Sixpence for the privilege of passing by the private road!" He was bowled over in an instant by the impatient and contemptuous Mole, who trotted along the side of the hedge chaffing the other rabbits as they peeped hurriedly from their holes to see what the row was about. "Onion-sauce! Onion-sauce!" he remarked jeeringly, and was gone before they could think of a thoroughly satisfactory reply. Then they all started grumbling at each other. "How stupid you are! Why didn't you tell him——" "Well, why didn't you say——" "You might have reminded him——" and so on, in the usual way; but, of course, it was then much too late, as is always the case.

It all seemed too good to be true. Hither and thither through the meadows he rambled busily, along the hedgerows, across the copses, finding everywhere birds building, flowers budding, leaves thrusting—everything happy, and progressive, and occupied. And instead of having an uneasy conscience pricking him and whispering "whitewash!" he somehow could only feel how jolly it was to be the only idle dog among all these busy citizens. After all, the best part of a holiday is perhaps not so much to be resting yourself, as to see all the other fellows busy working.

He thought his happiness was complete when, as he meandered aimlessly along, suddenly he stood by the edge of a full-fed river. Never in his life had he seen a river before—this sleek, sinuous, full-bodied animal, chasing and chuckling, gripping things with a gurgle and leaving them with a laugh, to fling itself on fresh playmates that shook themselves free, and were caught and held again. All was a-shake and a-shiver—glints and gleams and sparkles, rustle and swirl, chatter and bubble. The Mole was bewitched, entranced, fascinated. By the side of the river he trotted as one trots, when very small, by the side of a man who holds one spell-bound by exciting stories; and when tired at last, he sat on the bank, while the river still chattered on to him, a babbling procession of the best stories in the world, sent from the heart of the earth to be told at last to the insatiable sea.

As he sat on the grass and looked across the river, a dark hole in the bank opposite, just above the water's edge, caught his eye, and dreamily he fell to considering what a nice snug dwelling-place it would make for an animal with few wants and fond of a bijou riverside residence, above flood level and remote from noise and dust. As he gazed, something bright and small seemed to twinkle down in the heart of it, vanished, then twinkled once more like a tiny star. But it could hardly be a star in such an unlikely situation; and it was too glittering and small for a glow-worm. Then, as he looked, it winked at him, and so declared itself to be an eye; and a small face began gradually to grow up round it, like a frame round a picture.

A brown little face, with whiskers.

A grave round face, with the same twinkle in its eye that had first attracted his notice.

Small neat ears and thick silky hair.

It was the Water Rat!

Then the two animals stood and regarded each other cautiously.

"Hullo, Mole!" said the Water Rat.

"Hullo, Rat!" said the Mole.

"Would you like to come over?" enquired the Rat presently.

"Oh, its all very well to talk," said the Mole, rather pettishly, he being new to a river and riverside life and its ways.

The Rat said nothing, but stooped and unfastened a rope and hauled on it; then lightly stepped into a little boat which the Mole had not observed. It was painted blue outside and white within, and was just the size for two animals; and the Mole's whole heart went out to it at once, even though he did not yet fully understand its uses.

The Rat sculled smartly across and made fast. Then he held up his forepaw as the Mole stepped gingerly down. "Lean on that!" he said. "Now then, step lively!" and the Mole to his surprise and rapture found himself actually seated in the stern of a real boat.

"This has been a wonderful day!" said he, as the Rat shoved off and took to the sculls again. "Do you know, I've never been in a boat before in all my life."

"What?" cried the Rat, open-mouthed: "Never been in a—you never—well I—what have you been doing, then?"

"Is it so nice as all that?" asked the Mole shyly, though he was quite prepared to believe it as he leant back in his seat and surveyed the cushions, the oars, the rowlocks, and all the fascinating fittings, and felt the boat sway lightly under him.

"Nice? It's the only thing," said the Water Rat solemnly, as he leant forward for his stroke. "Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing—absolute nothing—half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats. Simply messing," he went on dreamily: "messing—about—in—boats; messing——"

"Look ahead, Rat!" cried the Mole suddenly.

It was too late. The boat struck the bank full tilt. The dreamer, the joyous oarsman, lay on his back at the bottom of the boat, his heels in the air.

"—about in boats—or with boats," the Rat went on composedly, picking himself up with a pleasant laugh. "In or out of 'em, it doesn't matter. Nothing seems really to matter, that's

the charm of it. Whether you get away, or whether you don't; whether you arrive at your destination or whether you reach somewhere else, or whether you never get anywhere at all, you're always busy, and you never do anything in particular; and when you've done it there's always something else to do, and you can do it if you like, but you'd much better not. Look here! If you've really nothing else on hand this morning, supposing we drop down the river together, and have a long day of it?"

The Mole waggled his toes from sheer happiness, spread his chest with a sigh of full contentment, and leaned back blissfully into the soft cushions. "What a day I'm having!" he said. "Let us start at once!"

"Hold hard a minute, then!" said the Rat. He looped the painter through a ring in his landing-stage, climbed up into his hole above, and after a short interval reappeared staggering under a fat, wicker luncheon-basket.

"Shove that under your feet," he observed to the Mole, as he passed it down into the boat. Then he untied the painter and took the sculls again.

"What's inside it?" asked the Mole, wriggling with curiosity.

"There's cold chicken inside it," replied the Rat briefly; "coldtonguecoldhamcoldbeefpickledgherkinssaladfrenchrollscressandwichespottedme atgingerbeerlemonadesodawater——"

"O stop, stop," cried the Mole in ecstacies: "This is too much!"

"Do you really think so?" enquired the Rat seriously. "It's only what I always take on these little excursions; and the other animals are always telling me that I'm a mean beast and cut it very fine!"

The Mole never heard a word he was saying. Absorbed in the new life he was entering upon, intoxicated with the sparkle, the ripple, the scents and the sounds and the sunlight, he trailed a paw in the water and dreamed long waking dreams. The Water Rat, like the good little fellow he was, sculled steadily on and forebore to disturb him.

"I like your clothes awfully, old chap," he remarked after some half an hour or so had passed. "I'm going to get a black velvet smoking-suit myself some day, as soon as I can afford it."

"I beg your pardon," said the Mole, pulling himself together with an effort. "You must think me very rude; but all this is so new to me. So—this—is—a—River!"

"The River," corrected the Rat.

"And you really live by the river? What a jolly life!"

"By it and with it and on it and in it," said the Rat. "It's brother and sister to me, and aunts, and company, and food and drink, and (naturally) washing. It's my world, and I don't want any other. What it hasn't got is not worth having, and what it doesn't know is not worth knowing. Lord! the times we've had together! Whether in winter or summer, spring or autumn, it's always got its fun and its excitements. When the floods are on in February, and my cellars and basement are brimming with drink that's no good to me, and the brown water runs by my best bedroom window; or again when it all drops away and, shows patches of mud that smells like plum-cake, and the rushes and weed clog the channels, and I can potter about dry shod over most of the bed of it and find fresh food to eat, and things careless people have dropped out of boats!"

"But isn't it a bit dull at times?" the Mole ventured to ask. "Just you and the river, and no one else to pass a word with?"

"No one else to—well, I mustn't be hard on you," said the Rat with forbearance. "You're new to it, and of course you don't know. The bank is so crowded nowadays that many people are moving away altogether: O no, it isn't what it used to be, at all. Otters, kingfishers, dabchicks, moorhens, all of them about all day long and always wanting you to do something—as if a fellow had no business of his own to attend to!"

"What lies over there?" asked the Mole, waving a paw towards a background of woodland that darkly framed the water-meadows on one side of the river.

"That? O, that's just the Wild Wood," said the Rat shortly. "We don't go there very much, we river-bankers."

"Aren't they—aren't they very nice people in there?" said the Mole, a trifle nervously.

"W-e-ll," replied the Rat, "let me see. The squirrels are all right. And the rabbits—some of 'em, but rabbits are a mixed lot. And then there's Badger, of course. He lives right in the heart of it; wouldn't live anywhere else, either, if you paid him to do it. Dear old Badger! Nobody interferes with him. They'd better not," he added significantly.

"Why, who should interfere with him?" asked the Mole.

"Well, of course—there—are others," explained the Rat in a hesitating sort of way.

"Weasels—and stoats—and foxes—and so on. They're all right in a way—I'm very good friends with them—pass the time of day when we meet, and all that—but they break out sometimes, there's no denying it, and then—well, you can't really trust them, and that's the fact."

The Mole knew well that it is quite against animal-etiquette to dwell on possible trouble ahead, or even to allude to it; so he dropped the subject.

"And beyond the Wild Wood again?" he asked: "Where it's all blue and dim, and one sees what may be hills or perhaps they mayn't, and something like the smoke of towns, or is it only cloud-drift?"

"Beyond the Wild Wood comes the Wide World," said the Rat. "And that's something that doesn't matter, either to you or me. I've never been there, and I'm never going, nor you either, if you've got any sense at all. Don't ever refer to it again, please. Now then! Here's our backwater at last, where we're going to lunch."

Leaving the main stream, they now passed into what seemed at first sight like a little land-locked lake. Green turf sloped down to either edge, brown snaky tree-roots gleamed below the surface of the quiet water, while ahead of them the silvery shoulder and foamy tumble of a weir, arm-in-arm with a restless dripping mill-wheel, that held up in its turn a grey-gabled mill-house, filled the air with a soothing murmur of sound, dull and smothery, yet with little clear voices speaking up cheerfully out of it at intervals. It was so very beautiful that the Mole could only hold up both forepaws and gasp, "O my! O my! O my!"

The Rat brought the boat alongside the bank, made her fast, helped the still awkward Mole safely ashore, and swung out the luncheon-basket. The Mole begged as a favour to be allowed to unpack it all by himself; and the Rat was very pleased to indulge him, and to sprawl at full length on the grass and rest, while his excited friend shook out the table-cloth and spread it, took out all the mysterious packets one by one and arranged their contents in due order, still gasping, "O my! O my!" at each fresh revelation. When all was ready, the Rat said, "Now, pitch in, old fellow!" and the Mole was indeed very glad to obey, for he had started his spring-cleaning at a very early hour that morning, as people will do, and had not paused for bite or sup; and he had been through a very great deal since that distant time which now seemed so many days ago.

"What are you looking at?" said the Rat presently, when the edge of their hunger was somewhat dulled, and the Mole's eyes were able to wander off the table-cloth a little.

"I am looking," said the Mole, "at a streak of bubbles that I see travelling along the surface of the water. That is a thing that strikes me as funny."

"Bubbles? Oho!" said the Rat, and chirruped cheerily in an inviting sort of way.

A broad glistening muzzle showed itself above the edge of the bank, and the Otter hauled himself out and shook the water from his coat.

"Greedy beggars!" he observed, making for the provender. "Why didn't you invite me, Ratty?"

"This was an impromptu affair," explained the Rat. "By the way—my friend Mr. Mole."

"Proud, I'm sure," said the Otter, and the two animals were friends forthwith.

"Such a rumpus everywhere!" continued the Otter. "All the world seems out on the river to-day. I came up this backwater to

try and get a moment's peace, and then stumble upon you fellows!—At least—I beg pardon—I don't exactly mean that, you know."

There was a rustle behind them, proceeding from a hedge wherein last year's leaves still clung thick, and a stripy head, with high shoulders behind it, peered forth on them.

"Come on, old Badger!" shouted the Rat.

The Badger trotted forward a pace or two; then grunted, "H'm! Company," and turned his back and disappeared from view.

"That's just the sort of fellow he is!" observed the disappointed Rat. "Simply hates Society! Now we shan't see any more of him to-day. Well, tell us, who's out on the river?"

"Toad's out, for one," replied the Otter. "In his brand-new wager-boat; new togs, new everything!"

The two animals looked at each other and laughed.

"Once, it was nothing but sailing," said the Rat, "Then he tired of that and took to punting. Nothing would please him but to punt all day and every day, and a nice mess he made of it. Last year it was house-boating, and we all had to go and stay with him in his house-boat, and pretend we liked it. He was going to spend the rest of his life in a house-boat. It's all the same, whatever he takes up; he gets tired of it, and starts on something fresh."
"Such a good fellow, too," remarked the Otter reflectively: "But no stability—especially in a boat!"

From where they sat they could get a glimpse of the main stream across the island that separated them; and just then a wager-boat flashed into view, the rower—a short, stout figure—splashing badly and rolling a good deal, but working his hardest. The Rat stood up and hailed him, but Toad—for it was he—shook his head and settled sternly to his work.

"He'll be out of the boat in a minute if he rolls like that," said the Rat, sitting down again.

"Of course he will," chuckled the Otter. "Did I ever tell you that good story about Toad and the lock-keeper? It happened this way. Toad...."

An errant May-fly swerved unsteadily athwart the current in the intoxicated fashion affected by young bloods of May-flies seeing life. A swirl of water and a "cloop!" and the May-fly was visible no more.

Neither was the Otter.

The Mole looked down. The voice was still in his ears, but the turf whereon he had sprawled was clearly vacant. Not an Otter to be seen, as far as the distant horizon.

But again there was a streak of bubbles on the surface of the river.

The Rat hummed a tune, and the Mole recollected that animal-etiquette forbade any sort of comment on the sudden disappearance of one's friends at any moment, for any reason or no reason whatever.

"Well, well," said the Rat, "I suppose we ought to be moving. I wonder which of us had better pack the luncheon-basket?" He did not speak as if he was frightfully eager for the treat.

"O, please let me," said the Mole. So, of course, the Rat let him. Packing the basket was not quite such pleasant work as unpacking the basket. It never is. But the Mole was bent on enjoying everything, and although just when he had got the basket packed and strapped up tightly he saw a plate staring up at him from the grass, and when the job had been done again the Rat pointed out a fork which anybody ought to have seen, and last of all, behold! the mustard pot, which he had been sitting on without knowing it—still, somehow, the thing got finished at last, without much loss of temper.

The afternoon sun was getting low as the Rat sculled gently homewards in a dreamy mood, murmuring poetry-things over to himself, and not paying much attention to Mole. But the Mole was very full of lunch, and self-satisfaction, and pride, and already quite at home in a boat (so he thought) and was getting a bit restless besides: and presently he said, "Ratty! Please, I want to row, now!"

The Rat shook his head with a smile. "Not yet, my young friend," he said—"wait till you've had a few lessons. It's not so easy as it looks."

The Mole was quiet for a minute or two. But he began to feel more and more jealous of Rat, sculling so strongly and so easily along, and his pride began to whisper that he could do it every bit as well. He jumped up and seized the sculls, so suddenly, that the Rat, who was gazing out over the water and saying more poetry-things to himself, was taken by surprise and fell backwards off his seat with his legs in the air for the second time, while the triumphant Mole took his place and grabbed the sculls with entire confidence.

"Stop it, you silly ass!" cried the Rat, from the bottom of the boat. "You can't do it! You'll have us over!"

The Mole flung his sculls back with a flourish, and made a great dig at the water. He missed the surface altogether, his legs flew up above his head, and he found himself lying on the top of the prostrate Rat. Greatly alarmed, he made a grab at the side of the boat, and the next moment—Sploosh!

Over went the boat, and he found himself struggling in the river.

O my, how cold the water was, and O, how very wet it felt. How it sang in his ears as he went down, down, down! How bright and welcome the sun looked as he rose to the surface coughing and spluttering! How black was his despair when he felt himself sinking again! Then a firm paw gripped him by the back of his neck. It was the Rat, and he was evidently laughing—the Mole could feel him laughing, right down his arm and through his paw, and so into his—the Mole's—neck.

The Rat got hold of a scull and shoved it under the Mole's arm; then he did the same by the other side of him and, swimming behind, propelled the helpless animal to shore, hauled him out, and set him down on the bank, a squashy, pulpy lump of misery.

When the Rat had rubbed him down a bit, and wrung some of the wet out of him, he said, "Now, then, old fellow! Trot up and down the towing-path as hard as you can, till you're warm and dry again, while I dive for the luncheon-basket."

So the dismal Mole, wet without and ashamed within, trotted about till he was fairly dry, while the Rat plunged into the water again, recovered the boat, righted her and made her fast, fetched his floating property to shore by degrees, and finally dived successfully for the luncheon-basket and struggled to land with it.

When all was ready for a start once more, the Mole, limp and dejected, took his seat in the stern of the boat; and as they set off, he said in a low voice, broken with emotion, "Ratty, my generous friend! I am very sorry indeed for my foolish and ungrateful conduct. My heart quite fails me when I think how I might have lost that beautiful luncheon-basket. Indeed, I have been a complete ass, and I know it. Will you overlook it this once and forgive me, and let things go on as before?"

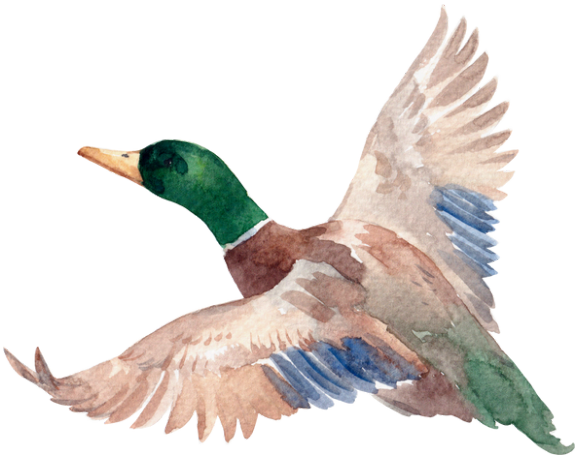
"That's all right, bless you!" responded the Rat cheerily. "What's a little wet to a Water Rat? I'm more in the water than out of it most days. Don't you think any more about it; and, look here! I really think you had better come and stop with me for a little time. It's very plain and rough, you know—not like Toad's house at all—but you haven't seen that yet; still, I can make you comfortable. And I'll teach you to row, and to swim, and you'll soon be as handy on the water as any of us."

The Mole was so touched by his kind manner of speaking that he could find no voice to answer him; and he had to brush away a tear or two with the back of his paw. But the Rat kindly looked in another direction, and presently the Mole's spirits revived again, and he was even able to give some straight back-talk to a couple of moorhens who were sniggering to each other about his bedraggled appearance.

When they got home, the Rat made a bright fire in the parlour, and planted the Mole in an arm-chair in front of it, having fetched down a dressing-gown and slippers for him, and told him river stories till supper-time. Very thrilling stories they were, too, to an earth-dwelling animal like Mole. Stories about weirs, and sudden floods, and leaping pike, and steamers that

flung hard bottles—at least bottles were certainly flung, and from steamers, so presumably by them; and about herons, and how particular they were whom they spoke to; and about adventures down drains, and night-fishings with Otter, or excursions far a-field with Badger. Supper was a most cheerful meal; but very shortly afterwards a terribly sleepy Mole had to be escorted upstairs by his considerate host, to the best bedroom, where he soon laid his head on his pillow in great peace and contentment, knowing that his new-found friend the River was lapping the sill of his window.

This day was only the first of many similar ones for the emancipated Mole, each of them longer and full of interest as the ripening summer moved onward. He learnt to swim and to row, and entered into the joy of running water; and with his ear to the reed-stems he caught, at intervals, something of what the wind went whispering so constantly among them.



ANTHONY GARSTIN'S COURTSHIP

By Hubert Crackanthorpe

A stampede of huddled sheep, wildly scampering over the slaty shingle, emerged from the leaden mist that muffled the fell-top, and a shrill shepherd's whistle broke the damp stillness of the air. And presently a man's figure appeared, following the sheep down the hillside. He halted a moment to whistle curtly to his two dogs, who, laying back their ears, chased the sheep at top speed beyond the brow; then, his hands deep in his pockets, he strode vigorously forward. A streak of white smoke from a toiling train was creeping silently across the distance: the great, grey, desolate undulations of treeless country showed no other sign of life.

The sheep hurried in single file along a tiny track worn threadbare amid the brown, lumpy grass: and, as the man came round the mountain's shoulder, a narrow valley opened out beneath him—a scanty patchwork of green fields, and, here and there, a whitewashed farm, flanked by a dark cluster of sheltering trees.

The man walked with a loose, swinging gait. His figure was spare and angular: he wore a battered, black felt hat and clumsy, iron-bound boots: his clothes were dingy from long exposure to the weather. He had close-set, insignificant eyes, much wrinkled, and stubbly eyebrows streaked with grey. His mouth was close-shaven, and drawn by his abstraction into hard and taciturn lines; beneath his chin bristled an unkempt fringe of sandy-coloured hair.

When he reached the foot of the fell, the twilight was already blurring the distance. The sheep scurried, with a noisy rustling, across a flat, swampy stretch, over-grown with rushes, while the dogs headed them towards a gap in a low, ragged wall built of loosely-heaped boulders. The man swung the gate to after them, and waited, whistling peremptorily, recalling the dogs. A moment later, the animals reappeared, cringing as they crawled through the bars of the gate. He kicked out at them contemptuously, and mounting a stone stile a few yards further up the road, dropped into a narrow lane.

Presently, as he passed a row of lighted windows, he heard a voice call to him. He stopped, and perceived a crooked, white-bearded figure, wearing clerical clothes, standing in the garden gateway.

'Good-evening, Anthony. A raw evening this.'

'Ay, Mr. Blencarn, it is a bit frittish,' he answered. 'I've jest bin gittin' a few lambs off t'fell. I hope ye're keepin' fairly, an' Miss Rosa too.' He spoke briefly, with a loud, spontaneous cordiality.

'Thank ye, Anthony, thank ye. Rosa's down at the church, playing over the hymns for tomorrow. How's Mrs. Garstin?'

'Nicely, thank ye, Mr. Blencarn. She's wonderful active, is mother.'

'Well, good night to ye, Anthony,' said the old man, clicking the gate.

'Good night, Mr. Blencarn,' he called back.

A few minutes later the twinkling lights of the village came in sight, and from within the sombre form of the square-towered church, looming by the roadside, the slow, solemn strains of the organ floated out on the evening air. Anthony lightened his tread: then paused, listening; but, presently, becoming aware that a man stood, listening also, on the bridge some few yards distant, he moved forward again. Slackening his pace, as he approached, he eyed the figure keenly; but the man paid no heed to him, remaining, with his back turned, gazing over the parapet into the dark, gurgling stream.

Anthony trudged along the empty village street, past the gleaming squares of ruddy gold, starting on either side out of the darkness. Now and then he looked furtively backwards. The straight open road lay behind him, glimmering wanly: the organ seemed to have ceased: the figure on the bridge had left the parapet, and appeared to be moving away towards the church. Anthony halted, watching it till it had disappeared into the blackness beneath the churchyard trees. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he left the road, and mounted an upland meadow towards his mother's farm.

It was a bare, oblong house. In front, a whitewashed porch, and a narrow garden-plot, enclosed by a low iron railing, were dimly discernible: behind, the steep fell-side loomed like a monstrous, mysterious curtain hung across the night. He passed round the back into the twilight of a wide yard, cobbled and partially grass-grown, vaguely flanked by the shadowy outlines of long, low farm-buildings. All was wrapped in darkness: somewhere overhead a bat fluttered, darting its puny scream.

Inside, a blazing peat-fire scattered capering shadows across the smooth, stone floor, flickered among the dim rows of hams suspended from the ceiling and on the panelled cupboards of dark, glistening oak. A servant-girl, spreading the cloth for supper, clattered her clogs in and out of the kitchen: old Mrs. Garstin was stooping before the hearth, tremulously turning some girdle-cakes that lay roasting in the embers.

At the sound of Anthony's heavy tread in the passage, she rose, glancing sharply at the clock above the chimney-piece. She was a heavy-built woman, upright, stalwart almost, despite her years. Her face was gaunt and sallow; deep wrinkles accentuated the hardness of her features. She wore a black widow's cap above her iron-grey hair, gold-rimmed spectacles, and a soiled, chequered apron.

'Ye're varra late, Tony,' she remarked querulously.

He unloosened his woollen neckerchief, and when he had hung it methodically with his hat behind the door, answered:

'"Twas terrible thick on t' fell-top, an' them two bitches be that senseless.'

She caught his sleeve, and, through her spectacles, suspiciously scrutinized his face.

'Ye did na meet wi' Rosa Blencarn?'

'Nay, she was in church, hymn-playin', wi' Luke Stock hangin' roond door,' he retorted bitterly, rebuffing her with rough impatience.

She moved away, nodding sententiously to herself. They began supper: neither spoke: Anthony sat slowly stirring his tea, and staring moodily into the flames: the bacon on his plate lay untouched. From time to time his mother, laying down her knife and fork, looked across at him in unconcealed asperity, pursing her wide, ungainly mouth. At last, abruptly setting down her cup, she broke out:

'I wonder ye hav'na mare pride, Tony. For hoo lang are ye goin' t' continue settin' mopin' and broodin' like a seck sheep? Ye'll jest mak yesself ill, an' then I reckon what ye'll prove satisfied. Ay, but I wonder ye hav'na more pride.'

But he made no answer, remaining unmoved, as if he had not heard.

Presently, half to himself, without raising his eyes, he murmured:

'Luke be goin' South, Monday.'

'Well, ye canna tak' oop wi' his leavin's anyways. It hasna coom't that, has it? Ye doan't intend settin' all t' parish a laughin' at ye a second occasion?'

He flushed dully, and bending over his plate, mechanically began his supper.

'Wa dang it,' he broke out a minute later, 'd'ye think I heed the cacklin' o' fifty parishes? Na, not I,' and, with a short, grim laugh, he brought his fist down heavily on the oak table.

'Ye're daft, Tony,' the old woman blurted.

'Daft or na daft, I tell ye this, mother, that I be forty-six year o' age this back-end, and there be some things I will na listen to. Rosa Blencarn's bonny enough for me.'

'Ay, bonny enough—I've na patience wi' ye. Bonny enough—tricked oot in her furbelows, gallivantin' wi' every royster fra Pe'rith. Bonny enough—that be all ye think on. She's bin a proper parson's niece—the giddy, feckless creature, an she'd mak' ye a proper sort o' wife, Tony Garstin, ye great, fond booby.'

She pushed back her chair, and, hurriedly clattering the crockery, began to clear away the supper.

'T' hoose be mine, t' Lord be praised,' she continued in a loud, hard voice, 'an' as long as he spare me, Tony, I'll na see Rosa Blencarn set foot inside it.'

Anthony scowled, without replying, and drew his chair to the

hearth. His mother bustled about the room behind him. After a while she asked:

'Did ye pen t' lambs in t' back field?'

'Na, they're in Hullam bottom,' he answered curtly.

The door closed behind her, and by and by he could hear her moving overhead. Meditatively blinking, he filled his pipe clumsily, and pulling a crumpled newspaper from his pocket, sat on over the smouldering fire, reading and stolidly puffing.

II

The music rolled through the dark, empty church. The last, leaden flicker of daylight glimmered in through the pointed windows, and beyond the level rows of dusky pews, tenanted only by a litter of prayer-books, two guttering candles revealed the organ pipes, and the young girl's swaying figure.

She played vigorously. Once or twice the tune stumbled, and she recovered it impatiently, bending over the key-board, showily flourishing her wrists as she touched the stops. She was bare-headed (her hat and cloak lay beside her on a stool). She had fair, fluffy hair, cut short behind her neck; large, round eyes, heightened by a fringe of dark lashes; rough, ruddy cheeks, and a rosy, full-lipped, unstable mouth. She was dressed quite simply, in a black, close-fitting bodice, a little frayed at the sleeves. Her hands and neck were coarsely fashioned: her comeliness was brawny, literal, unfinished, as it were.

When at last the ponderous chords of the Amen faded slowly into the twilight, flushed, breathing a little quickly, she paused, listening to the stillness of the church. Presently a small boy emerged from behind the organ.

'Good evenin', Miss Rosa', he called, trotting briskly away down the aisle.

'Good night, Robert', she answered, absently.

After a while, with an impatient gesture, as if to shake some importunate thought from her mind, she rose abruptly, pinned on her hat, threw her cloak round her shoulders, blew out the candles, and groped her way through the church, towards the half-open door. As she hurried along the narrow pathway that led across the churchyard, of a sudden, a figure started out of the blackness.

'Who's that?' she cried, in a loud, frightened voice.

A man's uneasy laugh answered her.

'It's only me, Rosa. I didna' think t' scare ye. I've bin waitin' for ye, this hoor past.'

She made no reply, but quickened her pace. He strode on beside her.

'I'm off, Monday, ye know,' he continued. And, as she said nothing, 'Will ye na stop jest a minnit? I'd like t' speak a few words wi' ye before I go, an tomorrow I hev t' git over t' Scarsdale betimes,' he persisted.

'I don't want t' speak wi' ye: I don't want ever to see ye agin. I jest hate the sight o' ye.' She spoke with a vehement, concentrated hoarseness.

'Nay, but ye must listen to me. I will na be put off wi' fratchin speeches.'

And gripping her arm, he forced her to stop.

'Loose me, ye great beast,' she broke out.

'I'll na hould ye, if ye'll jest stand quiet-like. I meant t' speak fair t' ye, Rosa.'

They stood at a bend in the road, face to face quite close together. Behind his burly form stretched the dimness of a grey, ghostly field.

'What is't ye hev to say to me? Hev done wi' it quick,' she said sullenly.

'It be jest this, Rosa,' he began with dogged gravity. 'I want t' tell ye that ef any trouble comes t'ye after I'm gone—ye know t' what I refer—I want t' tell ye that I'm prepared t' act square by ye. I've written out on an envelope my address in London. Luke Stock, care o' Purcell and Co., Smithfield Market, London.'

'Ye're a bad, sinful man. I jest hate t' sight o' ye. I wish ye were dead.'

'Ay, but I reckon what ye'd ha best thought o' that before. Ye've changed yer whistle considerably since Tuesday. Nay, hould on,' he added, as she struggled to push past him. 'Here's t' envelope.' She snatched the paper, and tore it passionately, scattering the fragments on to the road. When she had finished, he burst out angrily:

'Ye cussed, unreasonable fool.'

'Let me pass, ef ye've nought mare t'say,' she cried.

'Nay, I'll na part wi' ye this fashion. Ye can speak soft enough when ye choose.' And seizing her shoulders, he forced her backwards against the wall.

'Ye do look fine, an' na mistake, when ye're jest ablaze wi' ragin',' he laughed bluntly, lowering his face to hers.

'Loose me, loose me, ye great coward,' she gasped, striving to free her arms.

Holding her fast, he expostulated:

'Coom, Rosa, can we na part friends?'

'Part friends, indeed,' she retorted bitterly. 'Friends wi' the likes o' you. What d'ye tak me for? Let me git home, I tell ye. An' please God I'll never set eyes on ye again. I hate t' sight o' ye.'

'Be off wi' ye, then,' he answered, pushing her roughly back into the road. 'Be off wi' ye, ye silly. Ye canna say I hav na spak fair t' ye, an', by goom, ye'll na see me shally-wallyin this fashion agin. Be off wi' ye: ye can jest shift for yerself, since ye canna keep a civil tongue in yer head.'

The girl, catching at her breath, stood as if dazed, watching his retreating figure; then starting forward at a run, disappeared up the hill, into the darkness.

III

Old Mr. Blencarn concluded his husky sermon. The scanty congregation, who had been sitting, stolidly immobile in their stiff, Sunday clothes, shuffled to their feet, and the pewful of school children, in clamorous chorus, intoned the final hymn. Anthony stood near the organ, absently contemplating, while the rude melody resounded through the church, Rosa's deft manipulation of the key-board. The rugged lines of his face were relaxed to a vacant, thoughtful limpness, that aged his expression not a little: now and then, as if for reference, he glanced questioningly at the girl's profile.

A few minutes later the service was over, and the congregation sauntered out down the aisle. A gawky group of men remained loitering by the church door: one of them called to Anthony; but, nodding curtly, he passed on, and strode away down the road, across the grey upland meadows, towards home. As soon as he had breasted the hill, however, and was no longer visible from below, he turned abruptly to the left, along a small, swampy hollow, till he had reached the lane that led down from the fell-side.

He clambered over a rugged, moss-grown wall, and stood, gazing expectantly down the dark, disused roadway; then, after a moment's hesitation, perceiving nobody, seated himself beneath the wall, on a projecting slab of stone.

Overhead hung a sombre, drifting sky. A gusty wind rollicked down from the fell—huge masses of chilly grey, stripped of the last night's mist. A few dead leaves fluttered over the stones, and from off the fell-side there floated the plaintive, quavering rumour of many bleating sheep.

Before long, he caught sight of two figures coming towards him, slowly climbing the hill. He sat awaiting their approach, fidgeting with his sandy beard, and abstractedly grinding the ground beneath his heel. At the brow they halted: plunging his hands deep into his pockets, he strolled sheepishly towards them.

'Ah! good day t' ye, Anthony,' called the old man, in a shrill, breathless voice. '"Tis a long hill, an' my legs are not what they were. Time was when I'd think nought o' a whole day's tramp on t' fells. Ay, I'm gittin' feeble, Anthony, that's what 'tis. And if Rosa here wasn't the great, strong lass she is, I don't know how her old uncle'd manage;' and he turned to the girl with a proud, tremulous smile.

'Will ye tak my arm a bit, Mr. Blencarn? Miss Rosa'll be tired, likely,' Anthony asked.

'Nay, Mr. Garstin, but I can manage nicely,' the girl interrupted sharply.

Anthony looked up at her as she spoke. She wore a straw hat, trimmed with crimson velvet, and a black, fur-edged cape, that seemed to set off mightily the fine whiteness of her neck. Her large, dark eyes were fixed upon him. He shifted his feet uneasily, and dropped his glance.

She linked her uncle's arm in hers, and the three moved slowly forward. Old Mr. Blencarn walked with difficulty, pausing at intervals for breath. Anthony, his eyes bent on the ground, sauntered beside him, clumsily kicking at the cobbles that lay in his path.

When they reached the vicarage gate, the old man asked him to come inside.

'Not jest now, thank ye, Mr. Blencarn. I've that lot o' lambs t' see to before dinner. It's a grand marnin', this,' he added, inconsequently.

'Uncle's bought a nice lot o' Leghorns, Tuesday,' Rosa remarked. Anthony met her gaze; there was a grave, subdued expression on her face this morning, that made her look more of a woman, less of a girl.

'Ay, do ye show him the birds, Rosa. I'd be glad to have his opinion on 'em.'

The old man turned to hobble into the house, and Rosa, as she supported his arm, called back over her shoulder:

'I'll not be a minute, Mr. Garstin.'

Anthony strolled round to the yard behind the house, and waited, watching a flock of glossy-white poultry that strutted, perkily pecking, over the grass-grown cobbles.

'Ay, Miss Rosa, they're a bonny lot,' he remarked, as the girl joined him.

'Are they not?' she rejoined, scattering a handful of corn before her.

The birds scuttled across the yard with greedy, outstretched necks. The two stood, side by side, gazing at them.

'What did he give for 'em?' Anthony asked.

'Fifty-five shillings.'

'Ay,' he assented, nodding absently.

'Was Dr. Sanderson na seein' o' yer father yesterday?' he asked, after a moment.

'He came in t' forenoon. He said he was jest na worse.'

'Ye knaw, Miss Rosa, as I'm still thinkin' on ye,' he began abruptly, without looking up.

'I reckon it ain't much use,' she answered shortly, scattering another handful of corn towards the birds. 'I reckon I'll never marry. I'm jest weary o' bein' courted—'

'I would na weary ye wi' courtin',' he interrupted.

She laughed noisily.

'Ye are a queer customer, an' na mistake.'

'I'm a match for Luke Stock anyway,' he continued fiercely. 'Ye think nought o' taking oop wi' him—about as ranty, wild a young feller as ever stepped.'

The girl reddened, and bit her lip.

'I don't know what you mean, Mr. Garstin. It seems to me ye're might hasty in jumpin' t' conclusions.'

'Mabbe I kin see a thing or two,' he retorted doggedly.

'Luke Stock's gone to London, anyway.'

'Ay, an' a powerful good job too, in t' opinion o' some folks.'

'Ye're jest jealous,' she exclaimed, with a forced titter. 'Ye're jest jealous o' Luke Stock.'

'Nay, but ye need na fill yer head wi' that nonsense. I'm too deep set on ye t' feel jealousy,' he answered, gravely.

The smile faded from her face, as she murmured:

'I canna mak ye out, Mr. Garstin.'

'Nay, that ye canna. An' I suppose it's natural, considerin' ye're little more than a child, an' I'm a'most old enough to be yer father,' he retorted, with blunt bitterness.

'But ye know yer mother's took that dislike t' me. She'd never abide the sight o' me at Hootsey.'

He remained silent a moment, moodily reflecting.

'She'd jest ha't' git ower it. I see nought in that objection,' he declared.

'Nay, Mr. Garstin, it canna be. Indeed it canna be at all. Ye'd best jest put it right from yer mind, once and for all.'

'I'd jest best put it off my mind, had I? Ye talk like a child!' he burst out scornfully. 'I intend ye t' coom t' love me, an' I will na tak ye till ye do. I'll jest go on waitin' for ye, an', mark my words, my day 'ull coom at last.'

He spoke loudly, in a slow, stubborn voice, and stepped suddenly towards her. With a faint, frightened cry she shrank back into the doorway of the hen-house.

'Ye talk like a prophet. Ye sort o' skeer me.'

He laughed grimly, and paused, reflectively scanning her face. He seemed about to continue in the same strain; but, instead, turned abruptly on his heel, and strode away through the garden gate.

IV

For three hundred years there had been a Garstin at Hootsey: generation after generation had tramped the grey stretch of upland, in the spring-time scattering their flocks over the fell-sides, and, at the 'back-end', on dark, winter afternoons, driving them home again, down the broad bridle-path that led over the 'raise'. They had been a race of few words, 'keeping themselves to themselves', as the phrase goes; beholden to no man, filled with a dogged, churlish pride—an upright, old-fashioned race, stubborn, long-lived, rude in speech, slow of resolve.

Anthony had never seen his father, who had died one night, upon the fell-top, he and his shepherd, engulfed in the great snowstorm of 1849. Folks had said that he was the only Garstin who had failed to make old man's bones.

After his death, Jake Atkinson, from Ribblehead in Yorkshire, had come to live at Hootsey. Jake was a fine farmer, a canny bargainer, and very handy among the sheep, till he took to drink, and roystering every week with the town wenches up at Carlisle. He was a corpulent, deep-voiced, free-handed fellow: when his time came, though he died very hardly, he remained festive and convivial to the last. And for years afterwards, in the valley, his memory lingered: men spoke of him regretfully, recalling his quips, his feats of strength, and his choice breed of Herdwicke rams. But he left behind him a host of debts up at Carlisle, in Penrith, and in almost every market town—debts that he had long ago pretended to have paid with money that belonged to his sister. The widow Garstin sold the twelve Herdwicke rams, and nine acres of land: within six weeks she had cleared off every penny, and for thirteen months, on Sundays, wore her mourning with a mute, forbidding grimness: the bitter thought that, unbeknown to her, Jake had acted dishonestly in money matters, and that he had ended his days in riotous sin, soured her pride, imbued her with a rancorous hostility against all the world. For she was a very proud woman, independent, holding her head high, so folks said, like a Garstin bred and born; and Anthony, although some reckoned him quiet and of little account, came to take after her as he grew into manhood.

She took into her own hands the management of the Hootsey farm, and set the boy to work for her along with the two farm servants. It was twenty-five years now since his uncle Jake's death: there were grey hairs in his sandy beard; but he still worked for his mother, as he had done when a growing lad.

And now that times were grown to be bad (of late years the price of stock had been steadily falling; and the hay harvests had drifted from bad to worse) the widow Garstin no longer kept any labouring men; but lived, she and her son, year in and year out, in a close parsimonious way.

That had been Anthony Garstin's life—a dull, eventless sort of business, the sluggish incrustation of monotonous years. And until Rosa Blencarn had come to keep house for her uncle, he had never thought twice on a woman's face.

The Garstins had always been good church-goers, and Anthony, for years, had acted as churchwarden. It was one summer evening, up at the vicarage, whilst he was checking the offertory account, that he first set eyes upon her. She was fresh back from school at Leeds: she was dressed in a white dress: she

looked, he thought, like a London lady.

She stood by the window, tall and straight and queenly, dreamily gazing out into the summer twilight, whilst he and her uncle sat over their business. When he rose to go, she glanced at him with quick curiosity; he hurried away, muttering a sheepish good night.

The next time that he saw her was in church on Sunday. He watched her shyly, with a hesitating, reverential discretion: her beauty seemed to him wonderful, distant, enigmatic. In the afternoon, young Mrs. Forsyth, from Longscale, dropped in for a cup of tea with his mother, and the two set off gossiping of Rosa Blencarn, speaking of her freely, in tones of acrimonious contempt. For a long while he sat silent, puffing at his pipe; but at last, when his mother concluded with, 'She looks t' me fair stuck-oop, full o' toonish airs an' graces,' despite himself, he burst out: 'Ye're jest wastin' yer breath wi' that cackle. I reckon Miss Blencarn's o' a different clay to us folks.' Young Mrs. Forsyth tittered immoderately, and the next week it was rumoured about the valley that 'Tony Garstin was gone luny over t' parson's niece.'

But of all this he knew nothing—keeping to himself, as was his wont, and being, besides, very busy with the hay harvest—until one day, at dinner-time, Henry Sisson asked if he'd started his courting; Jacob Sowerby cried that Tony'd been too slow in getting to work, for that the girl had been seen spooning in Crosby Shaws with Curbison the auctioneer, and the others (there were half-a-dozen of them lounging round the hay-waggon) burst into a boisterous guffaw. Anthony flushed dully, looking hesitatingly from the one to the other; then slowly put down his beer-can, and of a sudden, seizing Jacob by the neck, swung him heavily on the grass. He fell against the waggon-wheel, and when he rose the blood was streaming from an ugly cut in his forehead. And henceforward Tony Garstin's courtship was the common jest of all the parish.

As yet, however, he had scarcely spoken to her, though twice he had passed her in the lane that led up to the vicarage. She had given him a frank, friendly smile; but he had not found the resolution to do more than lift his hat. He and Henry Sisson stacked the hay in the yard behind the house; there was no further mention made of Rosa Blencarn; but all day long Anthony, as he knelt thatching the rick, brooded over the strange sweetness of her face, and on the fell-top, while he tramped after the ewes over the dry, crackling heather, and as he jogged along the narrow, rickety road, driving his cartload of lambs into the auction mart.

Thus, as the weeks slipped by, he was content with blunt, wistful ruminations upon her indistinct image. Jacob Sowerby's accusation, and several kindred innuendoes let fall by his mother, left him coolly incredulous; the girl still seemed to him altogether distant; but from the first sight of her face he had evolved a stolid, unfaltering conception of her difference from the ruck of her sex.

But one evening, as he passed the vicarage on his way down from the fells, she called to him, and with a childish, confiding familiarity asked for advice concerning the feeding of the poultry. In his eagerness to answer her as best he could, he forgot his customary embarrassment, and grew, for the moment, almost voluble, and quite at his ease in her presence. Directly her flow of questions ceased, however, the returning perception of her rosy, hesitating smile, and of her large, deep eyes looking straight into his face, perturbed him strangely, and, reddening, he remembered the quarrel in the hay-field and the tale of Crosby Shaws.

After this, the poultry became a link between them—a link which he regarded in all seriousness, blindly unconscious that there was aught else to bring them together, only feeling himself in awe of her, because of her schooling, her townish manners, her ladylike mode of dress. And soon, he came to take a sturdy, secret pride in her friendly familiarity towards him. Several times a week he would meet her in the lane, and they would loiter a moment together; she would admire his dogs, though he assured her earnestly that they were but sorry curs; and once, laughing at his staidness, she nick-named him 'Mr. Churchwarden'.

That the girl was not liked in the valley he suspected, curtly attributing her unpopularity to the women's senseless jealousy. Of gossip concerning her he heard no further hint; but instinctively, and partly from that rugged, natural reserve of his, shrank from mentioning her name, even incidentally, to his mother.

Now, on Sunday evenings, he often strolled up to the vicarage, each time quitting his mother with the same awkward affectation of casualness; and, on his return, becoming vaguely conscious of how she refrained from any comment on his absence, and appeared oddly oblivious of the existence of parson Blencarn's niece.

She had always been a sour-tongued woman; but, as the days shortened with the approach of the long winter months, she seemed to him to grow more fretful than ever; at times it was almost as if she bore him some smouldering, sullen resentment. He was of stubborn fibre, however, toughened by long habit of a bleak, unruly climate; he revolved the matter in his mind deliberately, and when, at last, after much plodding thought, it dawned upon him that she resented his acquaintance with Rosa Blencarn, he accepted the solution with an unflinching phlegm, and merely shifted his attitude towards the girl, calculating each day the likelihood of his meeting her, and making, in her presence, persistent efforts to break down, once for all, the barrier of his own timidity. He was a man not to be clumsily driven, still less, so he prided himself, a man to be craftily led.

It was close upon Christmas time before the crisis came. His mother was just home from Penrith market. The spring-cart stood in the yard, the old grey horse was steaming heavily in the still, frosty air.

'I reckon ye've come fast. T' ould horse is over hot,' he remarked bluntly, as he went to the animal's head.

She clambered down hastily, and, coming to his side, began breathlessly:

'Ye ought t' hev coom t' market, Tony. There's bin pretty goin's on in Pe'rith today. I was helpin' Anna Forsyth t' choose six yards o' sheetin' in Dockroy, when we sees Rosa Blencarn coom oot o' t' 'Bell and Bullock' in company we' Curbison and young Joe Smethwick. Smethwick was fair reelin' drunk, and Curbison and t' girl were a-houldin' on to him, to keep him fra fallin'; and then, after a bit, he puts his arm round the girl t' stiddy hisself, and that fashion they goes off, right oop t' public street—'

He continued to unload the packages, and to carry them mechanically one by one into the house. Each time, when he reappeared, she was standing by the steaming horse, busy with her tale.

'An' on t' road hame we passed t' three on' em in Curbison's trap, with Smethwick leein' in t' bottom, singin' maudlin' songs. They were passin' Dunscale village, an't' folks coom runnin' oot o' houses t' see 'em go past—'

He led the cart away towards the stable, leaving her to cry the remainder after him across the yard.

Half-an-hour later he came in for his dinner. During the meal not a word passed between them, and directly he had finished he strode out of the house. About nine o'clock he returned, lit his pipe, and sat down to smoke it over the kitchen fire.

'Where've ye bin, Tony?' she asked.

'Oop t' vicarage, courtin', he retorted defiantly, with his pipe in his mouth.

This was ten months ago; ever since he had been doggedly waiting. That evening he had set his mind on the girl, he intended to have her; and while his mother gibed, as she did now upon every opportunity, his patience remained grimly unflagging. She would remind him that the farm belonged to her, that he would have to wait till her death before he could bring the hussy to Hootsey: he would retort that as soon as the girl would have him, he intended taking a small holding over at Scarsdale. Then she would give way, and for a while piteously upbraid him with her old age, and with the memory of all the

years she and he had spent together, and he would comfort her with a display of brusque, evasive remorse.

But, none the less, on the morrow, his thoughts would return to dwell on the haunting vision of the girl's face, while his own rude, credulous chivalry, kindled by the recollection of her beauty, stifled his misgivings concerning her conduct.

Meanwhile she dallied with him, and amused herself with the younger men. Her old uncle fell ill in the spring, and could scarcely leave the house. She declared that she found life in the valley intolerably dull, that she hated the quiet of the place, that she longed for Leeds, and the exciting bustle of the streets; and in the evenings she wrote long letters to the girl-friends she had left behind there, describing with petulant vivacity her tribe of rustic admirers. At the harvest-time she went back on a fortnight's visit to friends; the evening before her departure she promised Anthony to give him her answer on her return. But, instead, she avoided him, pretended to have promised in jest, and took up with Luke Stock, a cattle-dealer from Wigton.

V

It was three weeks since he had fetched his flock down from the fell.

After dinner he and his mother sat together in the parlour: they had done so every Sunday afternoon, year in and year out, as far back as he could remember.

A row of mahogany chairs, with shiny, horse-hair seats, were ranged round the room. A great collection of agricultural prize-tickets were pinned over the wall; and, on a heavy, highly-polished sideboard stood several silver cups. A heap of gilt-edged shavings filled the unused grate: there were gaudily-tinted roses along the mantelpiece, and, on a small table by the window, beneath a glass-case, a gilt basket filled with imitation flowers. Every object was disposed with a scrupulous precision: the carpet and the red-patterned cloth on the centre table were much faded. The room was spotlessly clean, and wore, in the chilly winter sunlight, a rigid, comfortless air.

Neither spoke, or appeared conscious of the other's presence. Old Mrs. Garstin, wrapped in a woollen shawl, sat knitting: Anthony dozed fitfully on a stiff-backed chair.

Of a sudden, in the distance, a bell started tolling. Anthony rubbed his eyes drowsily, and taking from the table his Sunday hat, strolled out across the dusky fields. Presently, reaching a rude wooden seat, built beside the bridle-path, he sat down and relit his pipe. The air was very still; below him a white filmy mist hung across the valley: the fell-sides, vaguely grouped, resembled hulking masses of sombre shadow; and, as he looked back, three squares of glimmering gold revealed the lighted windows of the square-towered church.

He sat smoking; pondering, with placid and reverential contemplation, on the Mighty Maker of the world—a world majestically and inevitably ordered; a world where, he argued, each object—each fissure in the fells, the winding course of each tumbling stream—possesses its mysterious purport, its inevitable signification....

At the end of the field two rams were fighting; retreating, then running together, and, leaping from the ground, butting head to head and horn to horn. Anthony watched them absently, pursuing his rude meditations.

... And the succession of bad seasons, the slow ruination of the farmers throughout the country, were but punishment meted out for the accumulated wickedness of the world. In the olden time God rained plagues upon the land: nowadays, in His wrath, He spoiled the produce of the earth, which, with His own hands, He had fashioned and bestowed upon men.

He rose and continued his walk along the bridle-path. A multitude of rabbits scuttled up the hill at his approach; and a great cloud of plovers, rising from the rushes, circled overhead, filling the air with a profusion of their querulous cries. All at once he heard a rattling of stones, and perceived a number of small pieces of shingle bounding in front of him down the grassy slope.

A woman's figure was moving among the rocks above him. The next moment, by the trimming of crimson velvet on her hat, he had recognized her. He mounted the slope with springing strides, wondering the while how it was she came to be there, that she was not in church playing the organ at afternoon service.

Before she was aware of his approach, he was beside her.

'I thought ye'd be in church—' he began.

She started: then, gradually regaining her composure, answered, weakly smiling: 'Mr. Jenkinson, the new schoolmaster, wanted to try the organ.'

He came towards her impulsively: she saw the odd flickers in his eyes as she stepped back in dismay.

'Nay, but I will na harm ye,' he said. 'Only I reckon what 'tis a special turn o' Providence, meetin' wi' ye oop here. I reckon what ye'll hev t' give me a square answer noo. Ye canna dilly-dally everlastingly.'

He spoke almost brutally; and she stood, white and gasping, staring at him with large, frightened eyes. The sheep-walk was but a tiny threadlike track: the slope of the shingle on either side was very steep: below them lay the valley; distant, lifeless, all blurred by the evening dusk. She looked about her helplessly for a means of escape.

'Miss Rosa,' he continued, in a husky voice, 'can ye na coom t' think on me? Think ye, I've bin waitin' nigh upon two year for ye. I've watched ye tak oop, first wi' this young fellar, and then wi' that, till soomtimes my heart's fit t' burst. Many a day, oop on t' fell-top, t' thought o' ye's nigh driven me daft, and I've left my shepherdin' jest t' set on a cairn in t' mist, picturin' an' broodin' on yer face. Many an evenin' I've started oop t' vicarage, wi' t' resolution t' speak right oot t' ye; but when it coomed t' point, a sort o' timidity seemed t' hould me back, I was that feared t' displease ye. I knaw I'm na scholar, an' mabbe ye think I'm rough-mannered. I knaw I've spoken sharply to ye once or twice lately. But it's jest because I'm that mad wi' love for ye: I jest canna help myself soomtimes—'

He waited, peering into her face. She could see the beads of sweat above his bristling eyebrows: the damp had settled on his sandy beard: his horny fingers were twitching at the buttons of his black Sunday coat.

She struggled to summon a smile; but her under-lip quivered, and her large dark eyes filled slowly with tears.

And he went on:

'Ye've coom t' mean jest everything to me. Ef ye will na hev me, I care for nought else. I canna speak t' ye in phrases: I'm jest a plain, unscholarly man: I canna wheedle ye, wi' cunnin' after t' fashion o' toon folks. But I can love ye wi' all my might, an' watch over ye, and work for ye better than any one o' em—'

She was crying to herself, silently, while he spoke. He noticed nothing, however: the twilight hid her face from him.

'There's nought against me,' he persisted. 'I'm as good a man as any one on 'em. Ay, as good a man as any one on 'em,' he repeated defiantly, raising his voice.

'It's impossible, Mr. Garstin, it's impossible. Ye've been very kind to me—' she added, in a choking voice.

'Wa dang it, I didna mean t' mak ye cry, lass,' he exclaimed, with a softening of his tone. 'There's nought for ye t' cry ower.'

She sank on to the stones, passionately sobbing in hysterical and defenceless despair. Anthony stood a moment, gazing at her in clumsy perplexity: then, coming close to her, put his hand on her shoulder, and said gently: 'Coom, lass, what's trouble? Ye can trust me.'

She shook her head faintly.

'Ay, but ye can though,' he asserted, firmly. 'Come, what is't?'

Heedless of him, she continued to rock herself to and fro, crooning in her distress: 'Oh! I wish I were dead!... I wish I could die!'

—'Wish ye could die?' he repeated. 'Why, whatever can't be that's troublin' ye like this? There, there, lassie, give ower: it 'ull all coom right, whatever it be—'

'No, no,' she wailed. 'I wish I could die!... I wish I could die!'

Lights were twinkling in the village below; and across the valley darkness was draping the hills. The girl lifted her face from

her hands, and looked up at him with a scared, bewildered expression.

'I must go home: I must be getting home,' she muttered.

'Nay, but there's sommut mighty amiss wi' ye.'

'No, it's nothing... I don't know—I'm not well... I mean it's nothing... it'll pass over... you mustn't think anything of it.'

'Nay, but I canna stand by an see ye in sich trouble.'

'It's nothing, Mr. Garstin, indeed it's nothing,' she repeated.

'Ay, but I canna credit that,' he objected stubbornly.

She sent him a shifting, hunted glance. 'Let me get home... you must let me get home.' She made a tremulous, pitiful attempt at firmness. Eyeing her keenly, he barred her path: she flushed scarlet, and looked hastily away across the valley.

'If ye'll tell me yer distress, mabbe I can help ye.'

'No, no, it's nothing... it's nothing.'

'If ye'll tell me yer distress, mabbe I can help ye,' he repeated, with a solemn, deliberate sternness. She shivered, and looked away again, vaguely, across the valley.

'You can do nothing: there's nought to be done,' she murmured drearily.

'There's a man in this business,' he declared.

'Let me go! Let me go!' she pleaded desperately.

'Who is't that's bin puttin' ye into this distress?' His voice sounded loud and harsh.

'No one, no one. I canna tell ye, Mr. Garstin.... It's no one,' she protested weakly. The white, twisted look on his face frightened her.

'My God!' he burst out, gripping her wrist, 'an' a proper soft fool ye've made o' me. Who is't, I tell ye? Who's t' man?'

'Ye're hurtin' me. Let me go. I canna tell ye.'

'And ye're fond o' him?'

'No, no. He's a wicked, sinful man. I pray God I may never set eyes on him again. I told him so.'

'But ef he's got ye into trouble, he'll hev t' marry ye,' he persisted with a brutal bitterness.

'I will not. I hate him!' she cried fiercely.

'But is he willin' t' marry ye?'

'I don't know ... I don't care ... he said so before he went away ... But I'd kill myself sooner than live with him.'

He let her hands fall and stepped back from her. She could only see his figure, like a sombre cloud, standing before her. The whole fell-side seemed still and dark and lonely. Presently she heard his voice again: 'I reckon what there's one road oot o' yer distress.'

She shook her head drearily. 'There's none. I'm a lost woman.'

'An' ef ye took me instead?' he said eagerly.

'I—I don't understand—'

'Ef ye married me instead of Luke Stock?'

'But that's impossible—the—the—'

'Ay, t' child. I know. But I'll tak t' child as mine.'

She remained silent. After a moment he heard her voice answer in a queer, distant tone: 'You mean that—that ye're ready to marry me, and adopt the child?'

'I do,' he answered doggedly.

'But people—your mother—?'

'Folks 'ull jest know nought about it. It's none o' their business. T' child 'ull pass as mine. Ye'll accept that?'

'Yes,' she answered, in a low, rapid voice.

'Ye'll consent t' hev me, ef I git ye oot o' yer trouble?'

'Yes,' she repeated, in the same tone.

She heard him draw a long breath. 'I said 't was a turn o' Providence, meetin' wi' ye oop here,' he exclaimed, with half-suppressed exultation.

Her teeth began to chatter a little: she felt that he was peering at her, curiously, through the darkness.

'An' noo,' he continued briskly, 'ye'd best be gettin' home. Give me ye're hand, an' I'll stiddy ye ower t' stones.'

He helped her down the bank of shingle, exclaiming: 'By goom, ye're stony cauld.' Once or twice she slipped: he supported her, roughly gripping her knuckles. The stones rolled down the steps, noisily, disappearing into the night.

Presently they struck the turf bridle-path, and, as they descended silently towards the lights of the village, he said gravely: 'I always reckoned what my day 'ud coom.'

She made no reply; and he added grimly:'There'll be terrible work wi' mother over this.'

He accompanied her down the narrow lane that led past her uncle's house. When the lighted windows came in sight he halted. 'Good night, lassie,' he said kindly. 'Do ye give ower distressin' yeself.'

'Good night, Mr. Garstin,' she answered, in the same low, rapid voice in which she had given him her answer up on the fell.

'We're man an' wife plighted now, are we not?' he blurted timidly.

She held her face to his, and he kissed her on the cheek, clumsily.

VI

The next morning the frost had set in. The sky was still clear and glittering: the whitened fields sparkled in the chilly sunlight: here and there, on high, distant peaks, gleamed dainty caps of snow. All the week Anthony was to be busy at the fell-foot, wall-building against the coming of the winter storms: the work was heavy, for he was single-handed, and the stone had to be fetched from off the fell-side. Two or three times a day he led his rickety, lumbering cart along the lane that passed the vicarage gate, pausing on each journey to glance furtively up at the windows. But he saw no sign of Rosa Blencarn; and, indeed, he felt no longing to see her: he was grimly exultant over the remembrance of his wooing of her, and over the knowledge that she was his. There glowed within him a stolid pride in himself: he thought of the others who had courted her, and the means by which he had won her seemed to him a fine stroke of cleverness.

And so he refrained from any mention of the matter; relishing, as he worked, all alone, the days through, the consciousness of his secret triumph, and anticipating, with inward chucklings, the discomforted cackle of his mother's female friends. He foresaw without misgiving, her bitter opposition: he felt himself strong; and his heart warmed towards the girl. And when, at intervals, the brusque realization that, after all, he was to possess her swept over him, he gripped the stones, and swung them almost fiercely into their places.

All around him the white, empty fields seemed slumbering breathlessly. The stillness stiffened the leafless trees. The frosty air flicked his blood: singing vigorously to himself he worked with a stubborn, unflagging resolution, methodically postponing, till the length of the wall should be completed, the announcement of his betrothal.

After his reticent, solitary fashion, he was very happy, reviewing his future prospects, with a plain and steady assurance, and, as the week-end approached, coming to ignore the irregularity of the whole business: almost to assume, in the exaltation of his pride, that he had won her honestly; and to discard, stolidly, all thought of Luke Stock, of his relations with her, of the coming child that was to pass for his own.

And there were moments too, when, as he sauntered homewards through the dusk at the end of his day's work, his heart grew full to overflowing of a rugged, superstitious gratitude towards God in Heaven who had granted his desires.

About three o'clock on the Saturday afternoon he finished the length of wall. He went home, washed, shaved, put on his Sunday coat; and, avoiding the kitchen, where his mother sat knitting by the fireside, strode up to the vicarage.

It was Rosa who opened the door to him. On recognizing him she started, and he followed her into the dining-room. He seated himself, and began, brusquely: 'I've coom, Miss Rosa, t' speak t' Mr. Blencarn.'

Then added, eyeing her closely: 'Ye're lookin' sick, lass.'

Her faint smile accentuated the worn, white look on her face.

'I reckon ye've been frettin' yeself,' he continued gently, 'leein' awake o' nights, hev'n't yee, noo?'

She smiled vaguely.

'Well, but ye see I've coom t' settle t' whole business for ye. Ye thought mabbe that I was na a man o' my word.'

'No, no, not that,' she protested, 'but—but—'

'But what then?'

'Ye must not do it, Mr. Garstin ... I must just bear my own trouble the best I can—' she broke out.

'D'ye fancy I'm takin' ye oot of charity? Ye little reckon the sort o' stuff my love for ye's made of. Nay, Miss Rosa, but ye canna draw back noo.'

'But ye cannot do it, Mr. Garstin. Ye know your mother will na have me at Hootsey.... I could na live there with your mother.... I'd sooner bear my trouble alone, as best I can.... She's that stern is Mrs. Garstin. I couldn't look her in the face.... I can go away somewhere.... I could keep it all from uncle.'

Her colour came and went: she stood before him, looking away from him, dully, out of the window.

'I intend ye t' coom t' Hootsey. I'm na lad: I reckon I can choose my own wife. Mother'll hev ye at t' farm, right enough: ye need na distress yeself on that point—'

'Nay, Mr. Garstin, but indeed she will not, never... I know she will not... She always set herself against me, right from the first.'

'Ay, but that was different. T' case is all changed noo,' he objected doggedly.

'She'll support the sight of me all the less,' the girl faltered.

'Mother'll hev ye at Hootsey—receive ye willin' of her own free wish—of her own free wish, d'ye hear? I'll answer for that.'

He struck the table with his fist heavily. His tone of determination awed her: she glanced at him hurriedly, struggling with her irresolution.

'I knaw hoo t' manage mother. An' now,' he concluded, changing his tone, 'is yer uncle about t' place?'

'He's up the paddock, I think,' she answered.

'Well, I'll jest step oop and hev a word wi' him.'

'Ye're ... ye will na tell him.'

'Tut, tut, na harrowin' tales, ye need na fear, lass. I reckon ef I can tackle mother, I can accommodate myself t' parson Blencarn.' He rose, and coming close to her, scanned her face.

'Ye must git t' roses back t' yer cheeks,' he exclaimed, with a short laugh, 'I canna be takin' a ghost t' church.'

She smiled tremulously, and he continued, laying one hand affectionately on her shoulder: 'Nay, but I was but jestin'. Roses or na roses, ye'll be t' bonniest bride in all Coomberland. I'll meet ye in Hullam lane, after church time, tomorrow,' he added, moving towards the door.

After he had gone, she hurried to the backdoor furtively. His retreating figure was already mounting the grey upland field. Presently, beyond him, she perceived her uncle, emerging through the paddock gate. She ran across the poultry yard, and mounting a tub, stood watching the two figures as they moved towards one another along the brow, Anthony vigorously trudging, with his hands thrust deep in his pockets; her uncle, his wideawake tilted over his nose, hobbling, and leaning stiffly on his pair of sticks. They met; she saw Anthony take her uncle's arm: the two, turning together, strolled away towards the fell. She went back into the house. Anthony's dog came towards her, slinking along the passage. She caught the animal's head in her hands, and bent over it caressingly, in an impulsive outburst of almost hysterical affection.

VII

The two men returned towards the vicarage. At the paddock gate they halted, and the old man concluded: 'I could not have wished a better man for her, Anthony. Mabbe the Lord'll not be minded to spare me much longer. After I'm gone Rosa'll hev all I possess. She was my poor brother Isaac's only child. After her mother was taken, he, poor fellow, went altogether to the bad, and until she came here she mostly lived among strangers. It's been a wretched sort of childhood for her—a wretched sort of childhood. Ye'll take care of her, Anthony, will ye not? ... Nay, but I could not hev wished for a better man for her, and there's my hand on 't.'

'Thank ee, Mr. Blencarn, thank ee,' Anthony answered huskily, gripping the old man's hand. And he started off down the lane homewards.

His heart was full of a strange, rugged exaltation. He felt with a swelling pride that God had entrusted to him this great charge—to tend her; to make up to her, tenfold, for all that loving care, which, in her childhood, she had never known. And together with a stubborn confidence in himself, there welled up within him a great pity for her—a tender pity, that, chastening with his passion, made her seem to him, as he brooded over that lonely childhood of hers, the more distinctly beautiful, the more profoundly precious. He pictured to himself, tremulously, almost incredulously, their married life—in the winter, his return home at nightfall to find her awaiting him with a glad, trustful smile; their evenings, passed together, sitting in silent happiness over the smouldering logs; or, in summer-time, the midday rest in the hay-fields when, wearing perhaps a large-brimmed hat fastened with a red ribbon, beneath her chin, he would catch sight of her, carrying his dinner, coming across the upland.

She had not been brought up to be a farmer's wife: she was but a child still, as the old parson had said. She should not have to work as other men's wives worked: she should dress like a lady, and on Sundays, in church, wear fine bonnets, and remain, as she had always been, the belle of all the parish.

And, meanwhile, he would farm as he had never farmed before, watching his opportunities, driving cunning bargains, spending nothing on himself, hoarding every penny that she might have what she wanted.... And, as he strode through the village, he seemed to foresee a general brightening of prospects, a sobering of the fever of speculation in sheep, a cessation of the insensate glutting, year after year, of the great winter marts throughout the North, a slackening of the foreign competition followed by a steady revival of the price of fatted stocks—a period of prosperity in store for the farmer at last.... And the future years appeared to open out before him, spread like a distant, glittering plain, across which, he and she, hand in hand, were called to travel together.... And then, suddenly, as his iron-bound boots clattered over the cobbled yard, he remembered, with brutal determination, his mother, and the stormy struggle that awaited him.

He waited till supper was over, till his mother had moved from the table to her place by the chimney corner. For several minutes he remained debating with himself the best method of breaking the news to her. Of a sudden he glanced up at her: her knitting had slipped on to her lap: she was sitting, bunched of a heap in her chair, nodding with sleep. By the flickering light of the wood fire, she looked worn and broken: he felt a twinge of clumsy compunction. And then he remembered the piteous, hunted look in the girl's eyes, and the old man's words when they had parted at the paddock gate, and he blurted out:

'I doot but what I'll hev t' marry Rosa Blencarn after all.'

She started, and blinking her eyes, said: 'I was jest takin' a wink o' sleep. What was 't ye were saying, Tony?'

He hesitated a moment, puckering his forehead into coarse rugged lines, and fidgeting noisily with his tea-cup. Presently he repeated: 'I doot but what I'll hev t' marry Rosa Blencarn after all.'

She rose stiffly, and stepping down from the hearth, came towards him. 'Mabbe I did na hear ye aright, Tony.' She spoke hurriedly, and though she was quite close to him, steadying herself with one hand clutching the back of his chair, her voice sounded weak, distant almost.

'Look oop at me. Look oop into my face,' she commanded fiercely.

He obeyed sullenly.

'Noo oot wi 't. What's yer meanin', Tony?'

'I mean what I say,' he retorted doggedly, averting his gaze.

'What d'ye mean by sayin' that ye've got t' marry her?'

'I tell yer I mean what I say,' he repeated dully.

'Ye mean ye've bin an' put t' girl in trouble?'

He said nothing; but sat staring stupidly at the floor.

'Look oop at me, and answer,' she commanded, gripping his

shoulder and shaking him.

He raised his face slowly, and met her glance. 'Ay, that's aboot it,' he answered.

'This'll na be truth. It'll be jest a piece o' wanton trickery!' she cried.

'Nay, but't is truth,' he answered deliberately.

'Ye will na swear t' it?' she persisted.

'I see na necessity for swearin''

'Then ye canna swear t' it,' she burst out triumphantly.

He paused an instant; then said quietly: 'Ay, but I'll swear t' it easy enough. Fetch t' Book.'

She lifted the heavy, tattered Bible from the chimney-piece, and placed it before him on the table. He laid his lumpish fist on it.

'Say,' she continued with a tense tremulousness, 'say, I swear t' ye, mother, that 't is t' truth, t' whole truth, and noat but t' truth, s'help me God.'

'I swear t' ye, mother, it's truth, t' whole truth, and nothin' but t' truth, s'help me God,' he repeated after her.

'Kiss t' Book,' she ordered.

He lifted the Bible to his lips. As he replaced it on the table, he burst out into a short laugh: 'Be ye satisfied noo?'

She went back to the chimney corner without a word. The logs on the hearth hissed and crackled. Outside, amid the blackness the wind was rising, hooting through the firs, and past the windows.

After a long while he roused himself, and drawing his pipe from his pocket almost steadily, proceeded leisurely to pare in the palm of his hand a lump of black tobacco.

'We'll be asked in church Sunday,' he remarked bluntly.

She made no answer.

He looked across at her.

Her mouth was drawn tight at the corners: her face wore a queer, rigid aspect. She looked, he thought, like a figure of stone.

'Ye're not feeling poorly, are ye, mother?' he asked.

She shook her head grimly: then, hobbling out into the room, began to speak in a shrill, tuneless voice. 'Ye talked at one time o' takin' a farm over Scarsdale way. But ye'd best stop here. I'll no hinder ye. Ye can have t' large bedroom in t' front, and I'll move ower to what used to be my brother Jake's room. Ye knaw I've never had no opinion of t' girl, but I'll do what's right by her, ef I break my sperrit in t' doin' on't. I'll mak' t' girl welcome here: I'll stand by her proper-like: mebbe I'll finish by findin' soom good in her. But from this day forward, Tony, ye're na son o' mine. Ye've dishonoured yeself: ye've laid a trap for me—ay, laid a trap, that's t' word. Ye've brought shame and bitterness on yer ould mother in her ould age. Ye've made me despise t' varra sect o' ye. Ye can stop on here, but ye shall niver touch a penny of my money; every shillin' of 't shall go t' yer child, or to your child's children. Ay,' she went on, raising her voice, 'ay, ye've got yer way at last, and mebbe ye reckon ye've chosen a mighty smart way. But time 'ull coom when ye'll regret this day, when ye eat oot yer repentance in doost an' ashes. Ay, Lord 'ull punish ye, Tony, chastize ye properly. Ye'll learn that marriage begun in sin can end in nought but sin. Ay,' she concluded, as she reached the door, raising her skinny hand prophetically, 'ay, after I'm deed and gone, ye mind ye o' t' words o' t' apostle—"For them that hev sinned without t' law, shall also perish without t' law."'

And she slammed the door behind her.

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Love is enough: though the World be a-waning,
And the woods have no voice but the voice of complaining,
Though the sky be too dark for dim eyes to discover
The gold-cups and daisies fair blooming thereunder,
Though the hills be held shadows, and the sea a dark wonder
And this day draw a veil over all deeds pass'd over,
Yet their hands shall not tremble, their feet shall not falter;
The void shall not weary, the fear shall not alter
These lips and these eyes of the loved and the lover.

From Love is Enough by William Morris