

Face to Face

OR, GERVASE RICKMAN'S
AMBITION.

CHAPTER VII.—(Continued).

When he saw them, he put away the pipe and came to meet them, and the ruddy glow of the sunset faded from his face, which looked pale and care-worn. "I am starting from Neufchâtel to-night for England," he said. "Can I do anything for you, Miss Lingard?"

"Thank you, nothing," she replied, coolly, and he saw that her eyes had recently been full of tears and that her face wore the spiritual calm of conquered sorrow.

"You won't forget the parcel for my sister, Annesley, will you?" said Gervase. "Certainly not. I will give it into her own hands," he replied. "Good-bye, Miss Lingard."

"Good-bye." She suffered him to take her unresponsive hand in his firm clasp and passed on, glad to think she should meet him no more, at least for the present; and he remained, gazing after her wistfully, with a vague presentiment that he might never see her again.

Gervase left Alice at the hotel door and then returned to Edward, who was no longer gazing at the sunset, but upon the blank high front of the hotel, which rose sheer and unbroken from the street, vaguely suggesting mountain desolation without its accompanying grandeur.

"I am afraid she is feeling it terribly," he said, when Gervase came up.

"Poor girl! what can you expect?" replied Gervase. "The only wonder to me is that she does bear up so bravely. It does her no good to be here upon the scene, making pilgrimages to the fatal spot and throwing flowers into that dark and dreary river."

"Of course not," he returned, wondering how Gervase could speak of those things in that off-hand way. He had himself seen her leave the village with the garden flowers, and it was not difficult to guess where she had been. "Do try and get her away, Rickman. I can not understand," he added, after a pause, "why they were not formally engaged. There is no doubt now that she did care for him."

"None whatever. But Paul's was a morbid, jealous nature; he may have taken a mere rebuff for a refusal."

"True."

"The best of women have little coquetish ways which men never understand," pursued Gervase, with a reflective air. "A girl draws back half shyly, half to bring her lover on, and the stupid fellow takes her literally and flies off in a fury and throws himself into the nearest pond, if he does not take to drinking."

"Women should be more honest," said Edward, fiercely. "They should not drive men who love them to despair. Yet the woman always gets the worst of it in the end."

"It depends on the kind of woman."

"Do you think she has any suspicion of the truth?" he continued.

"No, I think not. Indeed I am sure not."

"I trust she never will."

"She will canonize Paul and pass the remainder of her days in worshipping the memory of the man she drove to desperation in his lifetime. It is a pity."

"She is young. Time will heal her."

"You don't know Alice Lingard, Annesley. Her life was spoiled by that unlucky occurrence on the river. Poor girl! Sibyl, now, is of a different stamp; yet they are wonderfully alike in some respects. I'll see you to the station. Time is up."

PART IV.—CHAPTER I.

The great elms bordering the lane leading to Arden Manor had just completed their yearly toilet, and spread out broad masses of delicate green foliage, as yet unstained by dust and undarkened by sun, against the clear, blue sky, over which little clouds floated high up, pearly and ethereal as fairy cars. The cottage gardens were balmy with the indescribable freshness of lilac flowers; an occasional rose in a sunny corner opened its sweet blossom with a sort of shy wonder at its own beauty, and was a treasure for a village lad to give to a sweetheart, because it was so rare. The may had not yet faded from the thorn hedges, it bloomed white in the hollows of the downs, flushing pink and pinker as summer drew on; buttercups made the deep pastures sheets of burnished gold; the spicy breath of clover filled the air.

"I reckon Squire Rickman'll have a powerful weight of hay this year, Dan'l Pink," Raysh Squire prophesied, as he took a thoughtful survey of the meadow which lay beyond the rickyard, by the raa fence of which he was standing in the fresh sunshine one fine afternoon.

The shepherd was too much preoccupied to give serious heed to Raysh's prophecies. With outstretched arms and thoughtful face he stood making strange, dog-like noises at a few sheep, which had slipped by mischance from the pen in the midst of the straw-yard before the great barn, when the hurdles had been opened narrowly so as to let the sheep through one by one into the barn, the folding-doors of which stood wide, and upon the floor of which knelt bare-armed shearers, each with a heap of panting wool before him, through which the shears moved with a quick glitter and snapping, sometimes followed by a

pitious bleat if a maladroit movement drove the keen points into the tender flesh.

Rough, the wolf-like sheep-dog, barked with zealous skill on the opposite side, and soon managed, with his master's help, to drive the wanderers back into their narrow fold, where they stood huddled closely together, heavy-fleeced and snow-white from their recent washing, vainly protesting by querulous bleatings against the spoliation their brethren were undergoing. Perhaps they were anticipating the time when they too would be mute and defenseless beneath the shearer's hands, and then arise, white and attenuated, and trot the thin spectres of their former plump, fleecy selves, out at the opposite door into the green meadow beyond, where the shorn creatures nibbled at the sweet grass in the sunshine, plainly bemoaning their unaccustomed lightness, with their slim bodies sometimes streaked with blood.

It was an anxious time for Daniel; bleak winds and chill rains might still come in these early June days; he could not bear to see the cruel marks upon the creatures' sides, and was inclined to blame the shearers' clumsiness, while they laid it to the charge of the sheep, who were apt, after a few minutes' perfect quiescence, to kick out of a sudden and jerk the operator's hand. It was not quite so bad as lambing time, and was sooner over, but Daniel was always thankful when shearing-time was well at an end, and the sheep had become accustomed to the loss of their winter coats. Not so the boys, half a dozen of whom were standing about; they delighted in the fun and frolic of helping to catch the stray sheep and haul them along with many a tumble and tussle, now and then holding a respite creature for the shearer. Still more they delighted in the washing, which had taken place down yonder at the valley farm, where there was a good pond with hatches, and where one of the lads, helping to push a great fat ram into the water, had fallen plump in with the struggling beast, to the loudly shouted mirth of the rest.

All the boys on the farm were gathered about the barn and fold-yard; with the farmers' sons and the rector's pupils; the gardener was busy in the barn, the cow-man stopped and looked in to see how the shearers were getting on, on his way from the cow-house with the evening's milk foaming in the pails; John Nobbs, the bailiff, stood by the pen with his stout legs apart and his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, and allowed it was "misable warm;" Mam Gale, from the Traveler's Rest, was there to serve out the ale, the four o'clock, in place of the bailiff's wife, who was laid by; a smart and snubbing maid, another of the shepherd's daughters, attended her; the farm-yard was full of sunshine bustle, and alive with the chatter of human voices, the bleating and lowing of animals, and cackle of poultry.

Mr. Rickman stood by the bailiff with a pensive air, and looked on with a sort of gentle inquiry in his eyes, remarking to Gervase, who had ridden over from Medington that afternoon, that a master's eye was everything. So Gervase thought, and his keen glance was everywhere, and every one knew it. The cow-man lingered no more than was reasonable on his way to the dairy; the boys took care to play no tricks, or let sheep through the fold; the carters, bringing their horses in from the fields, loitered scarcely at all while watering them; the shearers did not pause in their work while they chattered with that arch-gossip, Raysh Squire, whose special object in being there it was not easy to define, unless it were that he considered it his duty as parish clerk to keep an eye on the vicar's handful of sheep, since those ecclesiastical creatures were undergoing the same fate as their lay brethren.

Yet this was scarcely necessary, since not only Joshua Young, the vicarage gardener and factotum, was lending a hand, but the vicar himself, his round hat on the back of his head on account of the heat, and his spectacles accurately balanced upon his nose, stood by Mr. Rickman's side and looked upon the group of shearers with interest. Whether the scene suggested any analogy with a tithe dinner to him he did not say.

"A pleasing spectacle, Merton," Mr. Rickman observed to him; "so primitive and pastoral. Virgil's eyes beheld it, and even David's. Much as science has done in destroying the poetry of rural life, we do not yet shear our sheep by steam."

"Or electricity," added Gervase; "but we shall."

"I am glad the weather is warm for the poor things," said Mr. Merton, who was eminently practical, and cared more about the welfare of his own little flock than all the fashions of sheep-tending, past or future.

"It is fortunate, or rather providential. Providence truly tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," replied Mr. Rickman, under the impression that he was quoting Scripture, and thus paying a fitting compliment to Mr. Merton's cloth.

The proverb was new to the shepherd, who took it in with his outward ears and laid it aside in the dim cells of his memory for future contemplation. At

present he was fully occupied with an idea which had come to him years ago, and which refreshed him annually, if the weather were fine, when he stood in Arden farm-yard at shear-time, and looked through the two sets of open barn-doors to the upland meadow beyond—the meadow steeped in sunshine till the grass was liquid emerald and its peacefully pasturing sheep were made of transparent light. The shadowed barn, into which some few shafts of light shot transversely, irradiating far dark corners, made a black frame for the sunny mead, thus enhancing its brilliance and lending it an ethereal beauty. Paradise, the shepherd thought, must be something like that green, flower-starred meadow, glowing with living light. Up there the Celestial Shepherd's flock rested peacefully, feeding in the warm radiance, some of them with bleeding sides that would soon be healed forever. Down in the yard they were penned together, hungering, panting, scared, driven they knew not whither or wherefore, like men in the cruel world. Sooner or later all must lie under the shearer's hands, like men beneath the stern shears of necessity; those that kicked bled, those that lay still beneath the sharp blades were unwounded, and more quickly set at liberty in the sweet pastures above. So the shepherd mused, looking stolid and vacant as he stood in his smock-frock with his crook in his hand, pulling his forelock in answer to some question addressed to him by the vicar.

"Shear-time ain't what it was when you and me was young, Mam Gale," said Raysh Squire, graciously accepting a mug of four o'clock from the latter. "I minds when half the country-side come to a shear feast."

"And bid half the night the folk would, wi' viddies and singing," she replied. "Many's the song I've a year'd you zing at shear-time, Master Squire. Massy on us! here comes Squire Annesley!"

The shearers' eyes were all lifted at the click of the farm-gate, through which Edward Annesley was just riding in search of Gervase Rickman, whom he had tracked from his office in Medington and finally run to earth at Arden.

"Seeing Mr. Rickman, he got off, giving his horse in charge of a carter. The man was pleased to have the handling of a well-bred horse, if only for five minutes; he examined the sleek, well-groomed creature all over, taking in its points and patting its beautiful neck with a look of broad satisfaction, while the rider walked round the pen to the three gentlemen, whose backs were turned, so that they were not aware of his presence until he had nearly joined them, when Gervase came to meet him. Mr. Rickman received him with his wonted cordiality, but the vicar, with a distant salutation to the new-comer, said something about an appointment and hurried away, promising to look in later.

Edward's face flushed and darkened as he looked after the retreating figure of the clergyman, and he made some satirical reference to the unusual amount of business the latter appeared to have on hand.

"It is too bad of me to invade your leisure, Rickman," he added; "for if any mortal man earns his holidays, you do. But I shall not be in Medington for a day or two, and I want five minutes' conversation with you, if you can spare them. How well your sheep look, Mr. Rickman! Are these the prize South-downs?"

"These?" echoed Mr. Rickman, with a puzzled air. "I rather think they are; eh, Gervase?"

"Those in the meadow," replied Gervase; and he asked Edward if he remembered when Mr. Rickman could not be made to understand why the sheep-washing could not be deferred till after the shearing, which he thought would be so much more convenient.

"I remember that sheep-shearing well," Edward replied. "Paul and I stayed here a couple of nights one Whitsuntide holiday."

The peculiar, unpleasant smell of the sheep, their querulous bleating, the click of shears and clack of tongues, brought back the far-off sunny holidays clearly, with a mixture of pleasure and pain to his mind. The long-ago always has something sad, however sweet it may be; but subsequent events had given these memories a sting. The two boys had helped to push the unwilling sheep into the water. Once they stole some shears and cut the horses' manes and poor little Sibyl's hair. She used to trot after them like a little dog, and was always putting them up to mischief, and involving them in scrapes, innocent in intention. He could see her great dark eyes, and hear Paul's merry laugh now. It pained him to recall those golden days, and think how far they then were from dreaming of the black shadow which was to rise between them, extinguishing one life, darkening the other.

"Ay, to be sure; how the time goes and the children spring up," Mr. Rickman said, as they went past the monastic-looking barns and the bailiff's stone-buttressed house to the Manor; "how the time goes and nothing remains," he repeated, going in and leaving them alone to dispatch their business.

Scarcely a year had passed since Paul's death, and little more than a year since the fated inheritance fell to him so unexpectedly by the extinction of the elder branch of Annesleys. But Edward looked years older than when some fifteen months before an accident brought him to Arden Manor to tangle the web of so many lives. Gervase Rickman would not now call him a good-looking fool if he saw him for the first time. His face then wore the unwritten expression of early youth, that strange, half-tranced look which has such a charm for the world-worn and weary; it was stamped to-day with an indelible record; the features, beautiful then with young and gentle curves, had become marked and masculine, though what was left in grace was gained in strength.

The old ready smile and frank, good-humored look had given place to a stern, almost defiant expression. He was now grave and taciturn; the reproach of which Mrs. Annesley had spoken seemed branded upon him.

"Was that Squire Annesley?" one of the shearers who came from a distance was asking, "and was it true, as folks averred, that he had sold himself to the devil for Gledesworth lands?"

"Some say there's a curse on the Gledesworth lands, and it do seem like it," John Nobbs replied; "there was never a squire of Gledesworth without trouble yet."

"Ah! Mr. Nobbs, there's that on the back of Squire Annesley would break any one of ourn, let alone the heft of the curse," added Mam Gale, with a mysterious air.

"What was it he done?" asked the shearer.

"Some say he shoved t'other one over cliff," replied Raysh Squire. "Whatever he done he drove a bad bargain for hisself. Gledesworth lands is wide and Gledesworth lands isn't worth what goes on inside of 'em."

"Bad luck they lands brings," said a shearer; "look at Squire Paul!"

"A good dacter was spiled in 'em," observed Mam Gale, thoughtfully inverting her tin mugs to get rid of heel taps; "he had as good a eye for the working of folks' inizes as Mr. Nobbs hev fur the pinls of beesies. Poor Ellen, she couldn't go off comfortable without him. 'Twas he zent our Hreub abroad with young Mrs. Annesley, and made a man of 'n."

Then the others recalled traits of Paul's excellence. Joshua Young dilated on the wild wet night-ride he had taken to his father; Raysh averred that no one else had ever grappled so successfully with Grandmother Squire's rheumatism; Jim Read, one of the shearers, showed the scars on his arm, which had once been torn in a threshing-machine, and which Paul Annesley had saved from amputation. To Paul, as to many another artist, fame came in full flood when death had made him deaf to it.

"An understanden zart of a dacter was Paul Annesley," said John Nobbs. "You minds when I was down in the fever, Dan'l Pink. There was I with no more power of meself than a dree weeks' babe. This yer hand," he held up a broad, brown fist in the sunshine, "was so thin as an egg-shell; you med a looked drough 'em. My missus, she give me up. Mr. Merton said 'twas pretty nigh time to think on my zins. Squire Rickman, he called in a town doctor, let alone doctoring of me hisself. Thinks I to meself, 'John Nobbs, I thinks, 'you've a got to go, and the quieter you goes the better, they want let your widow want while she keeps her health for dairy work.' There I bid abed and never knowed nigh from noon. Doctor Annesley, he came in and felt the pulse of me. Then he looks pretty straight at me, 'John Nobbs,' he says, 'you've got down mis'able low, but you've a powerful fine constitution; it's a pity to let a constitution like yours go,' he says, kind of sorrowful. 'There ain't a man in Arden,' he says, 'with a better eye fur cattle than yours, John Nobbs.' When he said this yer, I sort of waked up, fur I zimmed going off quiet like when he come in, and darned if I didn't begin to cry. I was that weak and low. 'Come, now,' he says, 'you ain't easy beat, John Nobbs; you've abeen through wet harvests and bad lambing-times, and you never give in. Don't you give in to this yer fever, John Nobbs. Drink off this yer stuff and make up yer mind you want be beat, and you'll hae the laugh of we doctors,' he says, cheerful and easy. 'Make up your mind you want be beat, John Nobbs,' he says. With that he pour some warm stuff into me and he heft me up in bed and put some pillows around me, and bid me look out of window. Thinks I to meself, 'You med so well hae another look around, John Nobbs, avore you go.' And there when I looked hround at the archard, where the apple-trees was all hred with bloom and the sunshine was coming down warm on them, and I zeen wuld Serrel in close with a foal capering at her zide, and the meadow beyond pul up fur hay with the wind blowing the grass about, and smelled the bean blossom drough the open window, and zeen everything coming on so nice, I zimmed mis'able queer. Then I zes to meself, 'John Nobbs, I zes, 'you look sharp and get up and now that there grass, and thank the Lord, who hae give you as good a eye for judgen cattle and as good a hand for a straight furrow as any man alive,' I zes. And here I be," he added in conclusion, passing a red handkerchief over his broad face.

"Sure enough, Mr. Nobbs, there you be," echoed Raysh, thoughtfully surveying the bailiff's substantial amplitude of body as if trying to persuade himself that he was indeed no aerial vision likely to fade from his gaze. "Without he you'd a ben in Lytlen long with your vather up in the north-east corner by the wall; ay, you'd a ben in church lytlen, Mr. Nobbs, sure enough."

"They do say 'twas all along of a ooman they two fell out," said Joshua Baker.

"Zure enough," replied Mam Gale, "Miss Lingard favored the captain first, then comes the doctor, and she favored 'em, and then they both come together and she favored 'em both and they fell out."

"Ah," said one of the shearers, pausing in the act of turning over the sheep upon the floor before him, "wherever there's mischief there's a ooman, I'll war'n't."

"Womankind," observed Raysh, with mournful acquiescence, "is a auspicious zart, a terrible auspicious zart is the female zart."

"Womankind," retorted Mam Gale, who was leaving the barn with leisurely reluctance, "med hae their vaults, as I wunt deny. But massy on us! come to think of menfolk, when their vaults is

look away, there ain't nothin left of 'em, not a sciddick."

"Womankind," continued Raysh, majestically disregarding this interruption, "was made to bring down the pride of man. Adam, he was made lust, and he got that proud and vore-right drough having nobody to go agen 'n, there was no bearen of 'n. Then Eve, she was made, and she pretty soon brought 'n down, and that was the Fall of Man, as you med all hreed in the Bible."

"You go on, Raysh," retorted Jim Reed; "you thinks nobody knows the Bible about 'tis you."

"Well, I lows this young ooman hae got summat to answer for," said the stranger shearer; "she ought to a cleaved to one and left t'other, which is likewise in the Bible, instead of wivveren about between the two to their destruction."

"It's a mis'able bad job, and talkin' won't mend it," said John Nobbs, turning the conversation, when he saw Sibyl standing on the granary steps at the other end of the yard, scattering handfuls of grain before her for the fowls, who came hurriedly flocking from all parts, cackling and clucking and jostling one another as they rushed helter-skelter in response to her call.

(To be continued).

SENTENCE SERMONS.

Success is a fine disregard for difficulties. No man ever was convicted by scolding.

There is nothing resistless in the restless life.

Daily bread is not sweet without daily duty.

He only always is wise who ever is gaining wisdom.

An honest smile is worth ten million sunless sermons.

The good we do is the best antidote to the ill we rue.

You cannot lift the world by pulling down your face.

Days are sacred in proportion as they serve high ends.

If your faith possesses your heart it will propel your feet.

The heart is dead when the smile of a child cannot stir its depths.

A hard and fast theology often leaves many hazy lines in morality.

Convince men of the love of men and they will believe the love of God.

You do not have much faith in your Father unless you have some in his family.

Is it strange that the heart is starved when we give it neither food nor mealiness?

In due time Miss Haley will introduce the two platoon system into the public schools.

No man can have a place in the kingdom of heaven who is complacent to the ills of earth.

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