

Sylvia's Lovers — Volume 1 eBook

Sylvia's Lovers — Volume 1 by Elizabeth Gaskell

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

Contents

Sylvia's Lovers — Volume 1 eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	7
Page 1.....	8
Page 2.....	9
Page 3.....	10
Page 4.....	11
Page 5.....	12
Page 6.....	13
Page 7.....	14
Page 8.....	15
Page 9.....	16
Page 10.....	18
Page 11.....	19
Page 12.....	21
Page 13.....	23
Page 14.....	25
Page 15.....	27
Page 16.....	29
Page 17.....	30
Page 18.....	31
Page 19.....	33
Page 20.....	35
Page 21.....	37
Page 22.....	39

Page 23.....	41
Page 24.....	43
Page 25.....	44
Page 26.....	45
Page 27.....	47
Page 28.....	49
Page 29.....	50
Page 30.....	52
Page 31.....	54
Page 32.....	56
Page 33.....	58
Page 34.....	59
Page 35.....	61
Page 36.....	62
Page 37.....	63
Page 38.....	64
Page 39.....	65
Page 40.....	66
Page 41.....	68
Page 42.....	69
Page 43.....	71
Page 44.....	73
Page 45.....	75
Page 46.....	76
Page 47.....	77
Page 48.....	78

Page 49.....	79
Page 50.....	80
Page 51.....	82
Page 52.....	84
Page 53.....	86
Page 54.....	88
Page 55.....	90
Page 56.....	92
Page 57.....	94
Page 58.....	96
Page 59.....	98
Page 60.....	100
Page 61.....	102
Page 62.....	104
Page 63.....	105
Page 64.....	107
Page 65.....	109
Page 66.....	111
Page 67.....	113
Page 68.....	115
Page 69.....	117
Page 70.....	118
Page 71.....	119
Page 72.....	120
Page 73.....	121
Page 74.....	122

Page 75.....	124
Page 76.....	125
Page 77.....	127
Page 78.....	128
Page 79.....	130
Page 80.....	132
Page 81.....	133
Page 82.....	135
Page 83.....	137
Page 84.....	138
Page 85.....	140
Page 86.....	141
Page 87.....	142
Page 88.....	144
Page 89.....	146
Page 90.....	148
Page 91.....	149
Page 92.....	150
Page 93.....	151
Page 94.....	153
Page 95.....	154
Page 96.....	155
Page 97.....	157
Page 98.....	159
Page 99.....	161
Page 100.....	163

Page 101.....	165
Page 102.....	167
Page 103.....	169
Page 104.....	171
Page 105.....	172
Page 106.....	173
Page 107.....	175
Page 108.....	177
Page 109.....	178
Page 110.....	179
Page 111.....	181
Page 112.....	182
Page 113.....	183
Page 114.....	184
Page 115.....	185
Page 116.....	187
Page 117.....	188
Page 118.....	190
Page 119.....	192
Page 120.....	193
Page 121.....	195
Page 122.....	197
Page 123.....	198
Page 124.....	199

Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
MONKSHAVEN		1
CHAPTER II		7
CHAPTER III		15
CHAPTER IV		24
CHAPTER V		32
STORY OF THE PRESS-GANG		32
CHAPTER VI		40
CHAPTER VII		51
CHAPTER VIII		60
CHAPTER IX		68
CHAPTER X		75
CHAPTER XI		82
CHAPTER XII		92
CHAPTER XIII		110
CHAPTER XIV		117

Page 1

MONKSHAVEN

On the north-eastern shores of England there is a town called Monkshaven, containing at the present day about fifteen thousand inhabitants. There were, however, but half the number at the end of the last century, and it was at that period that the events narrated in the following pages occurred.

Monkshaven was a name not unknown in the history of England, and traditions of its having been the landing-place of a throneless queen were current in the town. At that time there had been a fortified castle on the heights above it, the site of which was now occupied by a deserted manor-house; and at an even earlier date than the arrival of the queen and coeval with the most ancient remains of the castle, a great monastery had stood on those cliffs, overlooking the vast ocean that blended with the distant sky. Monkshaven itself was built by the side of the Dee, just where the river falls into the German Ocean. The principal street of the town ran parallel to the stream, and smaller lanes branched out of this, and straggled up the sides of the steep hill, between which and the river the houses were pent in. There was a bridge across the Dee, and consequently a Bridge Street running at right angles to the High Street; and on the south side of the stream there were a few houses of more pretension, around which lay gardens and fields. It was on this side of the town that the local aristocracy lived. And who were the great people of this small town? Not the younger branches of the county families that held hereditary state in their manor-houses on the wild bleak moors, that shut in Monkshaven almost as effectually on the land side as ever the waters did on the sea-board. No; these old families kept aloof from the unsavoury yet adventurous trade which brought wealth to generation after generation of certain families in Monkshaven.

The magnates of Monkshaven were those who had the largest number of ships engaged in the whaling-trade. Something like the following was the course of life with a Monkshaven lad of this class:—He was apprenticed as a sailor to one of the great ship-owners—to his own father, possibly—along with twenty other boys, or, it might be, even more. During the summer months he and his fellow apprentices made voyages to the Greenland seas, returning with their cargoes in the early autumn; and employing the winter months in watching the preparation of the oil from the blubber in the melting-sheds, and learning navigation from some quaint but experienced teacher, half schoolmaster, half sailor, who seasoned his instructions by stirring narrations of the wild adventures of his youth. The house of the ship-owner to whom he was apprenticed was his home and that of his companions during the idle season between October and March. The domestic position of these boys varied according to the premium paid; some took rank with the sons of the family, others

Page 2

were considered as little better than servants. Yet once on board an equality prevailed, in which, if any claimed superiority, it was the bravest and brightest. After a certain number of voyages the Monkshaven lad would rise by degrees to be captain, and as such would have a share in the venture; all these profits, as well as all his savings, would go towards building a whaling vessel of his own, if he was not so fortunate as to be the child of a ship-owner. At the time of which I write, there was but little division of labour in the Monkshaven whale fishery. The same man might be the owner of six or seven ships, any one of which he himself was fitted by education and experience to command; the master of a score of apprentices, each of whom paid a pretty sufficient premium; and the proprietor of the melting-sheds into which his cargoes of blubber and whalebone were conveyed to be fitted for sale. It was no wonder that large fortunes were acquired by these ship-owners, nor that their houses on the south side of the river Dee were stately mansions, full of handsome and substantial furniture. It was also not surprising that the whole town had an amphibious appearance, to a degree unusual even in a seaport. Every one depended on the whale fishery, and almost every male inhabitant had been, or hoped to be, a sailor. Down by the river the smell was almost intolerable to any but Monkshaven people during certain seasons of the year; but on these unsavoury 'staithes' the old men and children lounged for hours, almost as if they revelled in the odours of train-oil.

This is, perhaps, enough of a description of the town itself. I have said that the country for miles all around was moorland; high above the level of the sea towered the purple crags, whose summits were crowned with greensward that stole down the sides of the scaur a little way in grassy veins. Here and there a brook forced its way from the heights down to the sea, making its channel into a valley more or less broad in long process of time. And in the moorland hollows, as in these valleys, trees and underwood grew and flourished; so that, while on the bare swells of the high land you shivered at the waste desolation of the scenery, when you dropped into these wooded 'bottoms' you were charmed with the nestling shelter which they gave. But above and around these rare and fertile vales there were moors for many a mile, here and there bleak enough, with the red freestone cropping out above the scanty herbage; then, perhaps, there was a brown tract of peat and bog, uncertain footing for the pedestrian who tried to make a short cut to his destination; then on the higher sandy soil there was the purple ling, or commonest species of heather growing in beautiful wild luxuriance. Tufts of fine elastic grass were occasionally to be found, on which the little black-faced sheep browsed; but either the scanty food, or their goat-like agility, kept them in a lean condition that did not promise

Page 3

much for the butcher, nor yet was their wool of a quality fine enough to make them profitable in that way to their owners. In such districts there is little population at the present day; there was much less in the last century, before agriculture was sufficiently scientific to have a chance of contending with such natural disqualifications as the moors presented, and when there were no facilities of railroads to bring sportsmen from a distance to enjoy the shooting season, and make an annual demand for accommodation.

There were old stone halls in the valleys; there were bare farmhouses to be seen on the moors at long distances apart, with small stacks of coarse poor hay, and almost larger stacks of turf for winter fuel in their farmyards. The cattle in the pasture fields belonging to these farms looked half starved; but somehow there was an odd, intelligent expression in their faces, as well as in those of the black-visaged sheep, which is seldom seen in the placidly stupid countenances of well-fed animals. All the fences were turf banks, with loose stones piled into walls on the top of these.

There was comparative fertility and luxuriance down below in the rare green dales. The narrow meadows stretching along the brookside seemed as though the cows could really satisfy their hunger in the deep rich grass; whereas on the higher lands the scanty herbage was hardly worth the fatigue of moving about in search of it. Even in these 'bottoms' the piping sea-winds, following the current of the stream, stunted and cut low any trees; but still there was rich thick underwood, tangled and tied together with brambles, and brier-rose, [sic] and honeysuckle; and if the farmer in these comparatively happy valleys had had wife or daughter who cared for gardening, many a flower would have grown on the western or southern side of the rough stone house. But at that time gardening was not a popular art in any part of England; in the north it is not yet. Noblemen and gentlemen may have beautiful gardens; but farmers and day-labourers care little for them north of the Trent, which is all I can answer for. A few 'berry' bushes, a black currant tree or two (the leaves to be used in heightening the flavour of tea, the fruit as medicinal for colds and sore throats), a potato ground (and this was not so common at the close of the last century as it is now), a cabbage bed, a bush of sage, and balm, and thyme, and marjoram, with possibly a rose tree, and 'old man' growing in the midst; a little plot of small strong coarse onions, and perhaps some marigolds, the petals of which flavoured the salt-beef broth; such plants made up a well-furnished garden to a farmhouse at the time and place to which my story belongs. But for twenty miles inland there was no forgetting the sea, nor the sea-trade; refuse shell-fish, seaweed, the offal of the melting-houses, were the staple manure of the district; great ghastly whale-jaws, bleached bare and white, were the arches

Page 4

over the gate-posts to many a field or moorland stretch. Out of every family of several sons, however agricultural their position might be, one had gone to sea, and the mother looked wistfully seaward at the changes of the keen piping moorland winds. The holiday rambles were to the coast; no one cared to go inland to see aught, unless indeed it might be to the great annual horse-fairs held where the dreary land broke into habitation and cultivation.

Somehow in this country sea thoughts followed the thinker far inland; whereas in most other parts of the island, at five miles from the ocean, he has all but forgotten the existence of such an element as salt water. The great Greenland trade of the coasting towns was the main and primary cause of this, no doubt. But there was also a dread and an irritation in every one's mind, at the time of which I write, in connection with the neighbouring sea.

Since the termination of the American war, there had been nothing to call for any unusual energy in manning the navy; and the grants required by Government for this purpose diminished with every year of peace. In 1792 this grant touched its minimum for many years. In 1793 the proceedings of the French had set Europe on fire, and the English were raging with anti-Gallican excitement, fomented into action by every expedient of the Crown and its Ministers. We had our ships; but where were our men? The Admiralty had, however, a ready remedy at hand, with ample precedent for its use, and with common (if not statute) law to sanction its application. They issued 'press warrants,' calling upon the civil power throughout the country to support their officers in the discharge of their duty. The sea-coast was divided into districts, under the charge of a captain in the navy, who again delegated sub-districts to lieutenants; and in this manner all homeward-bound vessels were watched and waited for, all ports were under supervision; and in a day, if need were, a large number of men could be added to the forces of his Majesty's navy. But if the Admiralty became urgent in their demands, they were also willing to be unscrupulous. Landsmen, if able-bodied, might soon be trained into good sailors; and once in the hold of the tender, which always awaited the success of the operations of the press-gang, it was difficult for such prisoners to bring evidence of the nature of their former occupations, especially when none had leisure to listen to such evidence, or were willing to believe it if they did listen, or would act upon it for the release of the captive if they had by possibility both listened and believed. Men were kidnapped, literally disappeared, and nothing was ever heard of them again. The street of a busy town was not safe from such press-gang captures, as Lord Thurlow could have told, after a certain walk he took about this time on Tower Hill, when he, the attorney-general of England, was impressed, when the Admiralty had its own peculiar ways of getting rid

Page 5

of tiresome besiegers and petitioners. Nor yet were lonely inland dwellers more secure; many a rustic went to a statute fair or 'mop,' and never came home to tell of his hiring; many a stout young farmer vanished from his place by the hearth of his father, and was no more heard of by mother or lover; so great was the press for men to serve in the navy during the early years of the war with France, and after every great naval victory of that war.

The servants of the Admiralty lay in wait for all merchantmen and traders; there were many instances of vessels returning home after long absence, and laden with rich cargo, being boarded within a day's distance of land, and so many men pressed and carried off, that the ship, with her cargo, became unmanageable from the loss of her crew, drifted out again into the wild wide ocean, and was sometimes found in the helpless guidance of one or two infirm or ignorant sailors; sometimes such vessels were never heard of more. The men thus pressed were taken from the near grasp of parents or wives, and were often deprived of the hard earnings of years, which remained in the hands of the masters of the merchantman in which they had served, subject to all the chances of honesty or dishonesty, life or death. Now all this tyranny (for I can use no other word) is marvellous to us; we cannot imagine how it is that a nation submitted to it for so long, even under any warlike enthusiasm, any panic of invasion, any amount of loyal subservience to the governing powers. When we read of the military being called in to assist the civil power in backing up the press-gang, of parties of soldiers patrolling the streets, and sentries with screwed bayonets placed at every door while the press-gang entered and searched each hole and corner of the dwelling; when we hear of churches being surrounded during divine service by troops, while the press-gang stood ready at the door to seize men as they came out from attending public worship, and take these instances as merely types of what was constantly going on in different forms, we do not wonder at Lord Mayors, and other civic authorities in large towns, complaining that a stop was put to business by the danger which the tradesmen and their servants incurred in leaving their houses and going into the streets, infested by press-gangs.

Whether it was that living in closer neighbourhood to the metropolis—the centre of politics and news—inspired the inhabitants of the southern counties with a strong feeling of that kind of patriotism which consists in hating all other nations; or whether it was that the chances of capture were so much greater at all the southern ports that the merchant sailors became inured to the danger; or whether it was that serving in the navy, to those familiar with such towns as Portsmouth and Plymouth, had an attraction to most men from the dash and brilliancy of the adventurous employment—it is certain that the southerners took the oppression of press-warrants

Page 6

more submissively than the wild north-eastern people. For with them the chances of profit beyond their wages in the whaling or Greenland trade extended to the lowest description of sailor. He might rise by daring and saving to be a ship-owner himself. Numbers around him had done so; and this very fact made the distinction between class and class less apparent; and the common ventures and dangers, the universal interest felt in one pursuit, bound the inhabitants of that line of coast together with a strong tie, the severance of which by any violent extraneous measure, gave rise to passionate anger and thirst for vengeance. A Yorkshireman once said to me, 'My county folk are all alike. Their first thought is how to resist. Why! I myself, if I hear a man say it is a fine day, catch myself trying to find out that it is no such thing. It is so in thought; it is so in word; it is so in deed.'

So you may imagine the press-gang had no easy time of it on the Yorkshire coast. In other places they inspired fear, but here rage and hatred. The Lord Mayor of York was warned on 20th January, 1777, by an anonymous letter, that 'if those men were not sent from the city on or before the following Tuesday, his lordship's own dwelling, and the Mansion-house also, should be burned to the ground.'

Perhaps something of the ill-feeling that prevailed on the subject was owing to the fact which I have noticed in other places similarly situated. Where the landed possessions of gentlemen of ancient family but limited income surround a centre of any kind of profitable trade or manufacture, there is a sort of latent ill-will on the part of the squires to the tradesman, be he manufacturer, merchant, or ship-owner, in whose hands is held a power of money-making, which no hereditary pride, or gentlemanly love of doing nothing, prevents him from using. This ill-will, to be sure, is mostly of a negative kind; its most common form of manifestation is in absence of speech or action, a sort of torpid and genteel ignoring all unpleasant neighbours; but really the whale-fisheries of Monkshaven had become so impertinently and obtrusively prosperous of late years at the time of which I write, the Monkshaven ship-owners were growing so wealthy and consequential, that the squires, who lived at home at ease in the old stone manor-houses scattered up and down the surrounding moorland, felt that the check upon the Monkshaven trade likely to be inflicted by the press-gang, was wisely ordained by the higher powers (how high they placed these powers I will not venture to say), to prevent overhaste in getting rich, which was a scriptural fault, and they also thought that they were only doing their duty in backing up the Admiralty warrants by all the civil power at their disposal, whenever they were called upon, and whenever they could do so without taking too much trouble in affairs which did not after all much concern themselves.

There was just another motive in the minds of some provident parents of many daughters. The captains and lieutenants employed on this service were mostly agreeable bachelors, brought up to a genteel profession, at the least they were very pleasant visitors, when they had a day to spare; who knew what might come of it?

Page 7

Indeed, these brave officers were not unpopular in Monkshaven itself, except at the time when they were brought into actual collision with the people. They had the frank manners of their profession; they were known to have served in those engagements, the very narrative of which at this day will warm the heart of a Quaker, and they themselves did not come prominently forward in the dirty work which, nevertheless, was permitted and quietly sanctioned by them. So while few Monkshaven people passed the low public-house over which the navy blue-flag streamed, as a sign that it was the rendezvous of the press-gang, without spitting towards it in sign of abhorrence, yet, perhaps, the very same persons would give some rough token of respect to Lieutenant Atkinson if they met him in High Street. Touching their hats was an unknown gesture in those parts, but they would move their heads in a droll, familiar kind of way, neither a wag nor a nod, but meant all the same to imply friendly regard. The ship-owners, too, invited him to an occasional dinner or supper, all the time looking forward to the chances of his turning out an active enemy, and not by any means inclined to give him 'the run of the house,' however many unmarried daughters might grace their table. Still as he could tell a rattling story, drink hard, and was seldom too busy to come at a short notice, he got on better than any one could have expected with the Monkshaven folk. And the principal share of the odium of his business fell on his subordinates, who were one and all regarded in the light of mean kidnappers and spies—'varmint,' as the common people esteemed them: and as such they were ready at the first provocation to hunt and to worry them, and little cared the press-gang for this. Whatever else they were, they were brave and daring. They had law to back them, therefore their business was lawful. They were serving their king and country. They were using all their faculties, and that is always pleasant. There was plenty of scope for the glory and triumph of outwitting; plenty of adventure in their life. It was a lawful and loyal employment, requiring sense, readiness, courage, and besides it called out that strange love of the chase inherent in every man. Fourteen or fifteen miles at sea lay the *Aurora*, good man-of-war; and to her were conveyed the living cargoes of several tenders, which were stationed at likely places along the sea-coast. One, the *Lively Lady*, might be seen from the cliffs above Monkshaven, not so far away, but hidden by the angle of the high lands from the constant sight of the townspeople; and there was always the Randyvow-house (as the public-house with the navy blue-flag was called thereabouts) for the crew of the *Lively Lady* to lounge about, and there to offer drink to unwary passers-by. At present this was all that the press-gang had done at Monkshaven.

CHAPTER II

Page 8

HOME FROM GREENLAND

One hot day, early in October of the year 1796, two girls set off from their country homes to Monkshaven to sell their butter and eggs, for they were both farmers' daughters, though rather in different circumstances; for Molly Corney was one of a large family of children, and had to rough it accordingly; Sylvia Robson was an only child, and was much made of in more people's estimation than Mary's by her elderly parents. They had each purchases to make after their sales were effected, as sales of butter and eggs were effected in those days by the market-women sitting on the steps of the great old mutilated cross till a certain hour in the afternoon, after which, if all their goods were not disposed of, they took them unwillingly to the shops and sold them at a lower price. But good housewives did not despise coming themselves to the Butter Cross, and, smelling and depreciating the articles they wanted, kept up a perpetual struggle of words, trying, often in vain, to beat down prices. A housekeeper of the last century would have thought that she did not know her business, if she had not gone through this preliminary process; and the farmers' wives and daughters treated it all as a matter of course, replying with a good deal of independent humour to the customer, who, once having discovered where good butter and fresh eggs were to be sold, came time after time to depreciate the articles she always ended in taking. There was leisure for all this kind of work in those days.

Molly had tied a knot on her pink-spotted handkerchief for each of the various purchases she had to make; dull but important articles needed for the week's consumption at home; if she forgot any one of them she knew she was sure of a good 'rating' from her mother. The number of them made her pocket-handkerchief look like one of the nine-tails of a 'cat;' but not a single thing was for herself, nor, indeed, for any one individual of her numerous family. There was neither much thought nor much money to spend for any but collective wants in the Corney family.

It was different with Sylvia. She was going to choose her first cloak, not to have an old one of her mother's, that had gone down through two sisters, dyed for the fourth time (and Molly would have been glad had even this chance been hers), but to buy a brand-new duffle cloak all for herself, with not even an elder authority to curb her as to price, only Molly to give her admiring counsel, and as much sympathy as was consistent with a little patient envy of Sylvia's happier circumstances. Every now and then they wandered off from the one grand subject of thought, but Sylvia, with unconscious art, soon brought the conversation round to the fresh consideration of the respective merits of gray and scarlet. These girls were walking bare-foot and carrying their shoes and stockings in their hands during the first part of their way; but as they were drawing near Monkshaven

Page 9

they stopped, and turned aside along a foot-path that led from the main-road down to the banks of the Dee. There were great stones in the river about here, round which the waters gathered and eddied and formed deep pools. Molly sate down on the grassy bank to wash her feet; but Sylvia, more active (or perhaps lighter-hearted with the notion of the cloak in the distance), placed her basket on a gravelly bit of shore, and, giving a long spring, seated herself on a stone almost in the middle of the stream. Then she began dipping her little rosy toes in the cool rushing water and whisking them out with childish glee.

'Be quiet, wi' the', Sylvia? Thou'st splashing me all ower, and my feyther'll noane be so keen o' giving me a new cloak as thine is, seemingly.'

Sylvia was quiet, not to say penitent, in a moment. She drew up her feet instantly; and, as if to take herself out of temptation, she turned away from Molly to that side of her stony seat on which the current ran shallow, and broken by pebbles. But once disturbed in her play, her thoughts reverted to the great subject of the cloak. She was now as still as a minute before she had been full of frolic and gambolling life. She had tucked herself up on the stone, as if it had been a cushion, and she a little sultana.

Molly was deliberately washing her feet and drawing on her stockings, when she heard a sudden sigh, and her companion turned round so as to face her, and said,

'I wish mother hadn't spoken up for t' gray.'

'Why, Sylvia, thou wert saying as we topped t'brow, as she did nought but bid thee think twice afore settling on scarlet.'

'Ay! but mother's words are scarce, and weigh heavy. Feyther's liker me, and we talk a deal o' rubble; but mother's words are liker to hewn stone. She puts a deal o' meaning in 'em. And then,' said Sylvia, as if she was put out by the suggestion, 'she bid me ask cousin Philip for his opinion. I hate a man as has gotten an opinion on such-like things.'

'Well! we shall niver get to Monkshaven this day, either for to sell our eggs and stuff, or to buy thy cloak, if we're sittin' here much longer. T' sun's for slanting low, so come along, lass, and let's be going.'

'But if I put on my stockings and shoon here, and jump back into yon wet gravel, I 'se not be fit to be seen,' said Sylvia, in a pathetic tone of bewilderment, that was funnily childlike. She stood up, her bare feet curved round the curving surface of the stone, her slight figure balancing as if in act to spring.

'Thou knows thou'll have just to jump back barefoot, and wash thy feet afresh, without making all that ado; thou shouldst ha' done it at first, like me, and all other sensible folk. But thou'st gotten no gumption.'

Molly's mouth was stopped by Sylvia's hand. She was already on the river bank by her friend's side.

'Now dunnot lecture me; I'm none for a sermon hung on every peg o' words. I'm going to have a new cloak, lass, and I cannot heed thee if thou dost lecture. Thou shall have all the gumption, and I'll have my cloak.'

Page 10

It may be doubted whether Molly thought this an equal division.

Each girl wore tightly-fitting stockings, knit by her own hands, of the blue worsted common in that country; they had on neat high-heeled black leather shoes, coming well over the instep, and fastened as well as ornamented with bright steel buckles. They did not walk so lightly and freely now as they did before they were shod, but their steps were still springy with the buoyancy of early youth; for neither of them was twenty, indeed I believe Sylvia was not more than seventeen at this time.

They clambered up the steep grassy path, with brambles catching at their kilted petticoats, through the copse-wood, till they regained the high road; and then they 'settled themselves,' as they called it; that is to say, they took off their black felt hats, and tied up their clustering hair afresh; they shook off every speck of wayside dust; straightened the little shawls (or large neck-kerchiefs, call them which you will) that were spread over their shoulders, pinned below the throat, and confined at the waist by their apron-strings; and then putting on their hats again, and picking up their baskets, they prepared to walk decorously into the town of Monkshaven.

The next turn of the road showed them the red peaked roofs of the closely packed houses lying almost directly below the hill on which they were. The full autumn sun brought out the ruddy colour of the tiled gables, and deepened the shadows in the narrow streets. The narrow harbour at the mouth of the river was crowded with small vessels of all descriptions, making an intricate forest of masts. Beyond lay the sea, like a flat pavement of sapphire, scarcely a ripple varying its sunny surface, that stretched out leagues away till it blended with the softened azure of the sky. On this blue trackless water floated scores of white-sailed fishing boats, apparently motionless, unless you measured their progress by some land-mark; but still, and silent, and distant as they seemed, the consciousness that there were men on board, each going forth into the great deep, added unspeakably to the interest felt in watching them. Close to the bar of the river Dee a larger vessel lay to. Sylvia, who had only recently come into the neighbourhood, looked at this with the same quiet interest as she did at all the others; but Molly, as soon as her eye caught the build of it, cried out aloud—

'She's a whaler! she's a whaler home from t' Greenland seas! T' first this season! God bless her!' and she turned round and shook both Sylvia's hands in the fulness of her excitement. Sylvia's colour rose, and her eyes sparkled out of sympathy.

'Is ta sure?' she asked, breathless in her turn; for though she did not know by the aspect of the different ships on what trade they were bound, yet she was well aware of the paramount interest attached to whaling vessels.

'Three o'clock! and it's not high water till five!' said Molly. 'If we're sharp we can sell our eggs, and be down to the staithes before she comes into port. Be sharp, lass!'

Page 11

And down the steep long hill they went at a pace that was almost a run. A run they dared not make it; and as it was, the rate at which they walked would have caused destruction among eggs less carefully packed. When the descent was ended, there was yet the long narrow street before them, bending and swerving from the straight line, as it followed the course of the river. The girls felt as if they should never come to the market-place, which was situated at the crossing of Bridge Street and High Street. There the old stone cross was raised by the monks long ago; now worn and mutilated, no one esteemed it as a holy symbol, but only as the Butter Cross, where market-women clustered on Wednesday, and whence the town crier made all his proclamations of household sales, things lost or found, beginning with 'Oh! yes, oh! yes, oh! yes!' and ending with 'God bless the king and the lord of this manor,' and a very brisk 'Amen,' before he went on his way and took off the livery-coat, the colours of which marked him as a servant of the Burnabys, the family who held manorial rights over Monkshaven.

Of course the much frequented space surrounding the Butter Cross was the favourite centre for shops; and on this day, a fine market day, just when good housewives begin to look over their winter store of blankets and flannels, and discover their needs betimes, these shops ought to have had plenty of customers. But they were empty and of even quieter aspect than their every-day wont. The three-legged creepie-stools that were hired out at a penny an hour to such market-women as came too late to find room on the steps were unoccupied; knocked over here and there, as if people had passed by in haste.

Molly took in all at a glance, and interpreted the signs, though she had no time to explain their meaning, and her consequent course of action, to Sylvia, but darted into a corner shop.

'T' whalers is coming home! There's one lying outside t' bar!'

This was put in the form of an assertion; but the tone was that of eager cross-questioning.

'Ay!' said a lame man, mending fishing-nets behind a rough deal counter. 'She's come back airly, and she's brought good news o' t' others, as I've heered say. Time was I should ha' been on th' staithes throwing up my cap wit' t' best on 'em; but now it pleases t' Lord to keep me at home, and set me to mind other folks' gear. See thee, wench, there's a vast o' folk ha' left their skeps o' things wi' me while they're away down to t' quay side. Leave me your eggs and be off wi' ye for t' see t' fun, for mebbe ye'll live to be palsied yet, and then ye'll be fretting ower spilt milk, and that ye didn't tak' all chances when ye was young. Ay, well! they're out o' hearin' o' my moralities; I'd better find a lamiter like mysen to preach to, for it's not iverybody has t' luck t' clargy has of saying their say out whether folks likes it or not.'

He put the baskets carefully away with much of such talk as this addressed to himself while he did so. Then he sighed once or twice; and then he took the better course and began to sing over his tarry work.

Page 12

Molly and Sylvia were far along the staithes by the time he got to this point of cheerfulness. They ran on, regardless of stitches and pains in the side; on along the river bank to where the concourse of people was gathered. There was no great length of way between the Butter Cross and the harbour; in five minutes the breathless girls were close together in the best place they could get for seeing, on the outside of the crowd; and in as short a time longer they were pressed inwards, by fresh arrivals, into the very midst of the throng. All eyes were directed to the ship, beating her anchor just outside the bar, not a quarter of a mile away. The custom-house officer was just gone aboard of her to receive the captain's report of his cargo, and make due examination. The men who had taken him out in his boat were rowing back to the shore, and brought small fragments of news when they landed a little distance from the crowd, which moved as one man to hear what was to be told. Sylvia took a hard grasp of the hand of the older and more experienced Molly, and listened open-mouthed to the answers she was extracting from a gruff old sailor she happened to find near her.

'What ship is she?'

'T' *Resolution* of Monkshaven!' said he, indignantly, as if any goose might have known that.

'An' a good *Resolution*, and a blessed ship she's been to me,' piped out an old woman, close at Mary's elbow. 'She's brought me home my ae' lad—for he shouted to yon boatman to bid him tell me he was well. 'Tell Peggy Christison,' says he (my name is Margaret Christison)—'tell Peggy Christison as her son Hezekiah is come back safe and sound.' The Lord's name be praised! An' me a widow as never thought to see my lad again!'

It seemed as if everybody relied on every one else's sympathy in that hour of great joy.

'I ax pardon, but if you'd gie me just a bit of elbow-room for a minute like, I'd hold my babby up, so that he might see daddy's ship, and happen, my master might see him. He's four months old last Tuesday se'nnight, and his feyther's never clapt eyne on him yet, and he wi' a tooth through, an another just breaking, bless him!'

One or two of the better end of the Monkshaven inhabitants stood a little before Molly and Sylvia; and as they moved in compliance with the young mother's request, they overheard some of the information these ship-owners had received from the boatman.

'Haynes says they'll send the manifest of the cargo ashore in twenty minutes, as soon as Fishburn has looked over the casks. Only eight whales, according to what he says.'

'No one can tell,' said the other, 'till the manifest comes to hand.'

'I'm afraid he's right. But he brings a good report of the *Good Fortune*. She's off St Abb's Head, with something like fifteen whales to her share.'

'We shall see how much is true, when she comes in.'

'That'll be by the afternoon tide to-morrow.'

Page 13

'That's my cousin's ship,' said Molly to Sylvia. 'He's specksioneer on board the *Good Fortune*.'

An old man touched her as she spoke—

'I humbly make my manners, missus, but I'm stone blind; my lad's aboard yon vessel outside t' bar; and my old woman is bed-fast. Will she be long, think ye, in making t' harbour? Because, if so be as she were, I'd just make my way back, and speak a word or two to my missus, who'll be boiling o'er into some mak o' mischief now she knows he's so near. May I be so bold as to ax if t' Crooked Negro is covered yet?'

Molly stood on tip-toe to try and see the black stone thus named; but Sylvia, stooping and peeping through the glimpses afforded between the arms of the moving people, saw it first, and told the blind old man it was still above water.

'A watched pot,' said he, 'ne'er boils, I reckon. It's ta'en a vast o' watter t' cover that stone to-day. Anyhow, I'll have time to go home and rate my missus for worritin' hersen, as I'll be bound she's done, for all as I bade her not, but to keep easy and content.'

'We'd better be off too,' said Molly, as an opening was made through the press to let out the groping old man. 'Eggs and butter is yet to sell, and tha' cloak to be bought.'

'Well, I suppose we had!' said Sylvia, rather regretfully; for, though all the way into Monkshaven her head had been full of the purchase of this cloak, yet she was of that impressible nature that takes the tone of feeling from those surrounding; and though she knew no one on board the *Resolution*, she was just as anxious for the moment to see her come into harbour as any one in the crowd who had a dear relation on board. So she turned reluctantly to follow the more prudent Molly along the quay back to the Butter Cross.

It was a pretty scene, though it was too familiar to the eyes of all who then saw it for them to notice its beauty. The sun was low enough in the west to turn the mist that filled the distant valley of the river into golden haze. Above, on either bank of the Dee, there lay the moorland heights swelling one behind the other; the nearer, russet brown with the tints of the fading bracken; the more distant, gray and dim against the rich autumnal sky. The red and fluted tiles of the gabled houses rose in crowded irregularity on one side of the river, while the newer suburb was built in more orderly and less picturesque fashion on the opposite cliff. The river itself was swelling and chafing with the incoming tide till its vexed waters rushed over the very feet of the watching crowd on the staithes, as the great sea waves encroached more and more every minute. The quay-side was unsavourily ornamented with glittering fish-scales, for the hauls of fish were cleansed in the open air, and no sanitary arrangements existed for sweeping away any of the relics of this operation.

The fresh salt breeze was bringing up the lashing, leaping tide from the blue sea beyond the bar. Behind the returning girls there rocked the white-sailed ship, as if she were all alive with eagerness for her anchors to be heaved.

Page 14

How impatient her crew of beating hearts were for that moment, how those on land sickened at the suspense, may be imagined, when you remember that for six long summer months those sailors had been as if dead from all news of those they loved; shut up in terrible, dreary Arctic seas from the hungry sight of sweethearts and friends, wives and mothers. No one knew what might have happened. The crowd on shore grew silent and solemn before the dread of the possible news of death that might toll in upon their hearts with this uprushing tide. The whalers went out into the Greenland seas full of strong, hopeful men; but the whalers never returned as they sailed forth. On land there are deaths among two or three hundred men to be mourned over in every half-year's space of time. Whose bones had been left to blacken on the gray and terrible icebergs? Who lay still until the sea should give up its dead? Who were those who should come back to Monkshaven never, no, never more?

Many a heart swelled with passionate, unspoken fear, as the first whaler lay off the bar on her return voyage.

Molly and Sylvia had left the crowd in this hushed suspense. But fifty yards along the staithe they passed five or six girls with flushed faces and careless attire, who had mounted a pile of timber, placed there to season for ship-building, from which, as from the steps of a ladder or staircase, they could command the harbour. They were wild and free in their gestures, and held each other by the hand, and swayed from side to side, stamping their feet in time, as they sang—

Weel may the keel row, the keel row, the keel row, Weel may the keel row that my laddie's in!

'What for are ye going off, now?' they called out to our two girls. 'She'll be in in ten minutes!' and without waiting for the answer which never came, they resumed their song.

Old sailors stood about in little groups, too proud to show their interest in the adventures they could no longer share, but quite unable to keep up any semblance of talk on indifferent subjects.

The town seemed very quiet and deserted as Molly and Sylvia entered the dark, irregular Bridge Street, and the market-place was as empty of people as before. But the skeps and baskets and three-legged stools were all cleared away.

'Market's over for to-day,' said Molly Corney, in disappointed surprise. 'We mun make the best on't, and sell to t' huxters, and a hard bargain they'll be for driving. I doubt mother'll be vexed.'

She and Sylvia went to the corner shop to reclaim their baskets. The man had his joke at them for their delay.



'Ay, ay! lasses as has sweethearts a-coming home don't care much what price they get for butter and eggs! I dare say, now, there's some un in yon ship that 'ud give as much as a shilling a pound for this butter if he only knowed who churned it!' This was to Sylvia, as he handed her back her property.

Page 15

The fancy-free Sylvia reddened, pouted, tossed back her head, and hardly deigned a farewell word of thanks or civility to the lame man; she was at an age to be affronted by any jokes on such a subject. Molly took the joke without disclaimer and without offence. She rather liked the unfounded idea of her having a sweetheart, and was rather surprised to think how devoid of foundation the notion was. If she could have a new cloak as Sylvia was going to have, then, indeed, there might be a chance! Until some such good luck, it was as well to laugh and blush as if the surmise of her having a lover was not very far from the truth, and so she replied in something of the same strain as the lame net-maker to his joke about the butter.

'He'll need it all, and more too, to grease his tongue, if iver he reckons to win me for his wife!'

When they were out of the shop, Sylvia said, in a coaxing tone,—

'Molly, who is it? Whose tongue 'll need greasing? Just tell me, and I'll never tell!'

She was so much in earnest that Molly was perplexed. She did not quite like saying that she had alluded to no one in particular, only to a possible sweetheart, so she began to think what young man had made the most civil speeches to her in her life; the list was not a long one to go over, for her father was not so well off as to make her sought after for her money, and her face was rather of the homeliest. But she suddenly remembered her cousin, the specksioneer, who had given her two large shells, and taken a kiss from her half-willing lips before he went to sea the last time. So she smiled a little, and then said,—

'Well! I dunno. It's ill talking o' these things afore one has made up one's mind. And perhaps if Charley Kinraid behaves hissen, I might be brought to listen.'

'Charley Kinraid! who's he?'

'Yon specksioneer cousin o' mine, as I was talking on.'

'And do yo' think he cares for yo'?' asked Sylvia, in a low, tender tone, as if touching on a great mystery.

Molly only said, 'Be quiet wi' yo', ' and Sylvia could not make out whether she cut the conversation so short because she was offended, or because they had come to the shop where they had to sell their butter and eggs.

'Now, Sylvia, if thou'll leave me thy basket, I'll make as good a bargain as iver I can on 'em; and thou can be off to choose this grand new cloak as is to be, afore it gets any darker. Where is ta going to?'



'Mother said I'd better go to Foster's,' answered Sylvia, with a shade of annoyance in her face. 'Feyther said just anywhere.'

'Foster's is t' best place; thou canst try anywhere afterwards. I'll be at Foster's in five minutes, for I reckon we mun hasten a bit now. It'll be near five o'clock.'

Sylvia hung her head and looked very demure as she walked off by herself to Foster's shop in the market-place.

CHAPTER III

Page 16

BUYING A NEW CLOAK

Foster's shop was the shop of Monkshaven. It was kept by two Quaker brothers, who were now old men; and their father had kept it before them; probably his father before that. People remembered it as an old-fashioned dwelling-house, with a sort of supplementary shop with unglazed windows projecting from the lower story. These openings had long been filled with panes of glass that at the present day would be accounted very small, but which seventy years ago were much admired for their size. I can best make you understand the appearance of the place by bidding you think of the long openings in a butcher's shop, and then to fill them up in your imagination with panes about eight inches by six, in a heavy wooden frame. There was one of these windows on each side the door-place, which was kept partially closed through the day by a low gate about a yard high. Half the shop was appropriated to grocery; the other half to drapery, and a little mercery. The good old brothers gave all their known customers a kindly welcome; shaking hands with many of them, and asking all after their families and domestic circumstances before proceeding to business. They would not for the world have had any sign of festivity at Christmas, and scrupulously kept their shop open at that holy festival, ready themselves to serve sooner than tax the consciences of any of their assistants, only nobody ever came. But on New Year's Day they had a great cake, and wine, ready in the parlour behind the shop, of which all who came in to buy anything were asked to partake. Yet, though scrupulous in most things, it did not go against the consciences of these good brothers to purchase smuggled articles. There was a back way from the river-side, up a covered entry, to the yard-door of the Fosters, and a peculiar kind of knock at this door always brought out either John or Jeremiah, or if not them, their shopman, Philip Hepburn; and the same cake and wine that the excise officer's wife might just have been tasting, was brought out in the back parlour to treat the smuggler. There was a little locking of doors, and drawing of the green silk curtain that was supposed to shut out the shop, but really all this was done very much for form's sake. Everybody in Monkshaven smuggled who could, and every one wore smuggled goods who could, and great reliance was placed on the excise officer's neighbourly feelings.

The story went that John and Jeremiah Foster were so rich that they could buy up all the new town across the bridge. They had certainly begun to have a kind of primitive bank in connection with their shop, receiving and taking care of such money as people did not wish to retain in their houses for fear of burglars. No one asked them for interest on the money thus deposited, nor did they give any; but, on the other hand, if any of their customers, on whose character they could depend, wanted a little advance, the Fosters, after due inquiries made, and in some

Page 17

cases due security given, were not unwilling to lend a moderate sum without charging a penny for the use of their money. All the articles they sold were as good as they knew how to choose, and for them they expected and obtained ready money. It was said that they only kept on the shop for their amusement. Others averred that there was some plan of a marriage running in the brothers' heads—a marriage between William Coulson, Mr. Jeremiah's wife's nephew (Mr. Jeremiah was a widower), and Hester Rose, whose mother was some kind of distant relation, and who served in the shop along with William Coulson and Philip Hepburn. Again, this was denied by those who averred that Coulson was no blood relation, and that if the Fosters had intended to do anything considerable for Hester, they would never have allowed her and her mother to live in such a sparing way, ekeing out their small income by having Coulson and Hepburn for lodgers. No; John and Jeremiah would leave all their money to some hospital or to some charitable institution. But, of course, there was a reply to this; when are there not many sides to an argument about a possibility concerning which no facts are known? Part of the reply turned on this: the old gentlemen had, probably, some deep plan in their heads in permitting their cousin to take Coulson and Hepburn as lodgers, the one a kind of nephew, the other, though so young, the head man in the shop; if either of them took a fancy to Hester, how agreeably matters could be arranged!

All this time Hester is patiently waiting to serve Sylvia, who is standing before her a little shy, a little perplexed and distracted, by the sight of so many pretty things.

Hester was a tall young woman, sparsely yet largely formed, of a grave aspect, which made her look older than she really was. Her thick brown hair was smoothly taken off her broad forehead, and put in a very orderly fashion, under her linen cap; her face was a little square, and her complexion sallow, though the texture of her skin was fine. Her gray eyes were very pleasant, because they looked at you so honestly and kindly; her mouth was slightly compressed, as most have it who are in the habit of restraining their feelings; but when she spoke you did not perceive this, and her rare smile slowly breaking forth showed her white even teeth, and when accompanied, as it generally was, by a sudden uplifting of her soft eyes, it made her countenance very winning. She was dressed in stuff of sober colours, both in accordance with her own taste, and in unasked compliance with the religious customs of the Fosters; but Hester herself was not a Friend.

Sylvia, standing opposite, not looking at Hester, but gazing at the ribbons in the shop window, as if hardly conscious that any one awaited the expression of her wishes, was a great contrast; ready to smile or to pout, or to show her feelings in any way, with a character as undeveloped as a child's, affectionate, wilful, naughty, tiresome, charming, anything, in fact, at present that the chances of an hour called out. Hester thought her customer the prettiest creature ever seen, in the moment she had for admiration before Sylvia turned round and, recalled to herself, began,—

Page 18

'Oh, I beg your pardon, miss; I was thinking what may the price of yon crimson ribbon be?'

Hester said nothing, but went to examine the shop-mark.

'Oh! I did not mean that I wanted any, I only want some stuff for a cloak. Thank you, miss, but I am very sorry—some duffle, please.'

Hester silently replaced the ribbon and went in search of the duffle. While she was gone Sylvia was addressed by the very person she most wished to avoid, and whose absence she had rejoiced over on first entering the shop, her cousin Philip Hepburn.

He was a serious-looking young man, tall, but with a slight stoop in his shoulders, brought on by his occupation. He had thick hair standing off from his forehead in a peculiar but not unpleasing manner; a long face, with a slightly aquiline nose, dark eyes, and a long upper lip, which gave a disagreeable aspect to a face that might otherwise have been good-looking.

'Good day, Sylvie,' he said; 'what are you wanting? How are all at home? Let me help you!'

Sylvia pursed up her red lips, and did not look at him as she replied,

'I'm very well, and so is mother; feyther's got a touch of rheumatiz, and there's a young woman getting what I want.'

She turned a little away from him when she had ended this sentence, as if it had comprised all she could possibly have to say to him. But he exclaimed,

'You won't know how to choose,' and, seating himself on the counter, he swung himself over after the fashion of shop-men.

Sylvia took no notice of him, but pretended to be counting over her money.

'What do you want, Sylvie?' asked he, at last annoyed at her silence.

'I don't like to be called "Sylvie;" my name is Sylvia; and I'm wanting duffle for a cloak, if you must know.'

Hester now returned, with a shop-boy helping her to drag along the great rolls of scarlet and gray cloth.

'Not that,' said Philip, kicking the red duffle with his foot, and speaking to the lad. 'It's the gray you want, is it not, Sylvie?' He used the name he had had the cousin's right to

call her by since her childhood, without remembering her words on the subject not five minutes before; but she did, and was vexed.

'Please, miss, it is the scarlet duffle I want; don't let him take it away.'

Hester looked up at both their countenances, a little wondering what was their position with regard to each other; for this, then, was the beautiful little cousin about whom Philip had talked to her mother, as sadly spoilt, and shamefully ignorant; a lovely little dunce, and so forth. Hester had pictured Sylvia Robson, somehow, as very different from what she was: younger, more stupid, not half so bright and charming (for, though she was now both pouting and cross, it was evident that this was not her accustomed mood). Sylvia devoted her attention to the red cloth, pushing aside the gray.

Page 19

Philip Hepburn was vexed at his advice being slighted; and yet he urged it afresh.

'This is a respectable, quiet-looking article that will go well with any colour; you niver will be so foolish as to take what will mark with every drop of rain.'

'I'm sorry you sell such good-for-nothing things,' replied Sylvia, conscious of her advantage, and relaxing a little (as little as she possibly could) of her gravity.

Hester came in now.

'He means to say that this cloth will lose its first brightness in wet or damp; but it will always be a good article, and the colour will stand a deal of wear. Mr. Foster would not have had it in his shop else.'

Philip did not like that even a reasonable peace-making interpreter should come between him and Sylvia, so he held his tongue in indignant silence.

Hester went on:

'To be sure, this gray is the closer make, and would wear the longest.'

'I don't care,' said Sylvia, still rejecting the dull gray. 'I like this best. Eight yards, if you please, miss.'

'A cloak takes nine yards, at least,' said Philip, decisively.

'Mother told me eight,' said Sylvia, secretly conscious that her mother would have preferred the more sober colour; and feeling that as she had had her own way in that respect, she was bound to keep to the directions she had received as to the quantity. But, indeed, she would not have yielded to Philip in anything that she could help.

There was a sound of children's feet running up the street from the river-side, shouting with excitement. At the noise, Sylvia forgot her cloak and her little spirit of vexation, and ran to the half-door of the shop. Philip followed because she went. Hester looked on with passive, kindly interest, as soon as she had completed her duty of measuring. One of those girls whom Sylvia had seen as she and Molly left the crowd on the quay, came quickly up the street. Her face, which was handsome enough as to feature, was whitened with excess of passionate emotion, her dress untidy and flying, her movements heavy and free. She belonged to the lowest class of seaport inhabitants. As she came near, Sylvia saw that the tears were streaming down her cheeks, quite unconsciously to herself. She recognized Sylvia's face, full of interest as it was, and stopped her clumsy run to speak to the pretty, sympathetic creature.

'She's o'er t' bar! She's o'er t' bar! I'm boun' to tell mother!'

She caught at Sylvia's hand, and shook it, and went on breathless and gasping.

'Sylvia, how came you to know that girl?' asked Philip, sternly. 'She's not one for you to be shaking hands with. She's known all down t' quay-side as "Newcastle Bess."'

Page 20

'I can't help it,' said Sylvia, half inclined to cry at his manner even more than his words. 'When folk are glad I can't help being glad too, and I just put out my hand, and she put out hers. To think o' yon ship come in at last! And if yo'd been down seeing all t' folk looking and looking their eyes out, as if they feared they should die afore she came in and brought home the lads they loved, yo'd ha' shaken hands wi' that lass too, and no great harm done. I never set eyne upon her till half an hour ago on th' staithes, and maybe I'll niver see her again.'

Hester was still behind the counter, but had moved so as to be near the window; so she heard what they were saying, and now put in her word:

'She can't be altogether bad, for she thought o' telling her mother first thing, according to what she said.'

Sylvia gave Hester a quick, grateful look. But Hester had resumed her gaze out of the window, and did not see the glance.

And now Molly Corney joined them, hastily bursting into the shop.

'Hech!' said she. 'Hearken! how they're crying and shouting down on t' quay. T' gang's among 'em like t' day of judgment. Hark!'

No one spoke, no one breathed, I had almost said no heart beat for listening. Not long; in an instant there rose the sharp simultaneous cry of many people in rage and despair. Inarticulate at that distance, it was yet an intelligible curse, and the roll, and the roar, and the irregular tramp came nearer and nearer.

'They're taking 'em to t' Randyvowse,' said Molly. 'Eh! I wish I'd King George here just to tell him my mind.'

The girl clenched her hands, and set her teeth.

'It's terrible hard!' said Hester; 'there's mothers, and wives, looking out for 'em, as if they were stars dropt out o' t' lift.'

'But can we do nothing for 'em?' cried Sylvia. 'Let us go into t' thick of it and do a bit of help; I can't stand quiet and see 't!' Half crying, she pushed forwards to the door; but Philip held her back.

'Sylvie! you must not. Don't be silly; it's the law, and no one can do aught against it, least of all women and lasses.'

By this time the vanguard of the crowd came pressing up Bridge Street, past the windows of Foster's shop. It consisted of wild, half-amphibious boys, slowly moving backwards, as they were compelled by the pressure of the coming multitude to go on,

and yet anxious to defy and annoy the gang by insults, and curses half choked with their indignant passion, doubling their fists in the very faces of the gang who came on with measured movement, armed to the teeth, their faces showing white with repressed and determined energy against the bronzed countenances of the half-dozen sailors, who were all they had thought it wise to pick out of the whaler's crew, this being the first time an Admiralty warrant had been used in Monkshaven for many years; not since the close of the American

Page 21

war, in fact. One of the men was addressing to his townspeople, in a high pitched voice, an exhortation which few could hear, for, pressing around this nucleus of cruel wrong, were women crying aloud, throwing up their arms in imprecation, showering down abuse as hearty and rapid as if they had been a Greek chorus. Their wild, famished eyes were strained on faces they might not kiss, their cheeks were flushed to purple with anger or else livid with impotent craving for revenge. Some of them looked scarce human; and yet an hour ago these lips, now tightly drawn back so as to show the teeth with the unconscious action of an enraged wild animal, had been soft and gracious with the smile of hope; eyes, that were fiery and bloodshot now, had been loving and bright; hearts, never to recover from the sense of injustice and cruelty, had been trustful and glad only one short hour ago.

There were men there, too, sullen and silent, brooding on remedial revenge; but not many, the greater proportion of this class being away in the absent whalers.

The stormy multitude swelled into the market-place and formed a solid crowd there, while the press-gang steadily forced their way on into High Street, and on to the rendezvous. A low, deep growl went up from the dense mass, as some had to wait for space to follow the others—now and then going up, as a lion's growl goes up, into a shriek of rage.

A woman forced her way up from the bridge. She lived some little way in the country, and had been late in hearing of the return of the whaler after her six months' absence; and on rushing down to the quay-side, she had been told by a score of busy, sympathizing voices, that her husband was kidnapped for the service of the Government.

She had need pause in the market-place, the outlet of which was crammed up. Then she gave tongue for the first time in such a fearful shriek, you could hardly catch the words she said.

'Jamie! Jamie! will they not let you to me?'

Those were the last words Sylvia heard before her own hysterical burst of tears called every one's attention to her.

She had been very busy about household work in the morning, and much agitated by all she had seen and heard since coming into Monkshaven; and so it ended in this.

Molly and Hester took her through the shop into the parlour beyond—John Foster's parlour, for Jeremiah, the elder brother, lived in a house of his own on the other side of the water. It was a low, comfortable room, with great beams running across the ceiling,

and papered with the same paper as the walls—a piece of elegant luxury which took Molly's fancy mightily! This parlour looked out on the dark courtyard in which there grew two or three poplars, straining upwards to the light; and through an open door between the backs of two houses could be seen a glimpse of the dancing, heaving river, with such ships or fishing cobs as happened to be moored in the waters above the bridge.

Page 22

They placed Sylvia on the broad, old-fashioned sofa, and gave her water to drink, and tried to still her sobbing and choking. They loosed her hat, and copiously splashed her face and clustering chestnut hair, till at length she came to herself; restored, but dripping wet. She sate up and looked at them, smoothing back her tangled curls off her brow, as if to clear both her eyes and her intellect.

'Where am I?—oh, I know! Thank you. It was very silly, but somehow it seemed so sad!'

And here she was nearly going off again, but Hester said—

'Ay, it were sad, my poor lass—if I may call you so, for I don't rightly know your name—but it's best not think on it for we can do no mak' o' good, and it'll mebbe set you off again. Yo're Philip Hepburn's cousin, I reckon, and yo' bide at Haytersbank Farm?'

'Yes; she's Sylvia Robson,' put in Molly, not seeing that Hester's purpose was to make Sylvia speak, and so to divert her attention from the subject which had set her off into hysterics. 'And we came in for market,' continued Molly, 'and for t' buy t' new cloak as her feyther's going to give her; and, for sure, I thought we was i' luck's way when we saw t' first whaler, and niver dreaming as t' press-gang 'ud be so marred.'

She, too, began to cry, but her little whimper was stopped by the sound of the opening door behind her. It was Philip, asking Hester by a silent gesture if he might come in.

Sylvia turned her face round from the light, and shut her eyes. Her cousin came close up to her on tip-toe, and looked anxiously at what he could see of her averted face; then he passed his hand so slightly over her hair that he could scarcely be said to touch it, and murmured—

'Poor lassie! it's a pity she came to-day, for it's a long walk in this heat!'

But Sylvia started to her feet, almost pushing him along. Her quickened senses heard an approaching step through the courtyard before any of the others were aware of the sound. In a minute afterwards, the glass-door at one corner of the parlour was opened from the outside, and Mr. John stood looking in with some surprise at the group collected in his usually empty parlour.

'It's my cousin,' said Philip, reddening a little; 'she came wi' her friend in to market, and to make purchases; and she's got a turn wi' seeing the press-gang go past carrying some of the crew of the whaler to the Randyvowse.'

'Ay, ay,' said Mr. John, quickly passing on into the shop on tip-toe, as if he were afraid he were intruding in his own premises, and beckoning Philip to follow him there. 'Out of strife cometh strife. I guessed something of the sort was up from what I heard on t' bridge as I came across fra' brother Jeremiah's.' Here he softly shut the door between

the parlour and the shop. 'It beareth hard on th' expectant women and childer; nor is it to be wondered at that they, being unconverted, rage together (poor creatures!) like the very heathen. Philip,' he said, coming nearer to his 'head young man,' 'keep Nicholas and Henry at work in the ware-room upstairs until this riot be over, for it would grieve me if they were misled into violence.'

Page 23

Philip hesitated.

'Speak out, man! Always ease an uneasy heart, and never let it get hidebound.'

'I had thought to convoy my cousin and the other young woman home, for the town is like to be rough, and it's getting dark.'

'And thou shalt, my lad,' said the good old man; 'and I myself will try and restrain the natural inclinations of Nicholas and Henry.'

But when he went to find the shop-boys with a gentle homily on his lips, those to whom it should have been addressed were absent. In consequence of the riotous state of things, all the other shops in the market-place had put their shutters up; and Nicholas and Henry, in the absence of their superiors, had followed the example of their neighbours, and, as business was over, they had hardly waited to put the goods away, but had hurried off to help their townsmen in any struggle that might ensue.

There was no remedy for it, but Mr. John looked rather discomfited. The state of the counters, and of the disarranged goods, was such also as would have irritated any man as orderly but less sweet-tempered. All he said on the subject was: 'The old Adam! the old Adam!' but he shook his head long after he had finished speaking.

'Where is William Coulson?' he next asked. 'Oh! I remember. He was not to come back from York till the night closed in.'

Philip and his master arranged the shop in the exact order the old man loved. Then he recollected the wish of his subordinate, and turned round and said—

'Now go with thy cousin and her friend. Hester is here, and old Hannah. I myself will take Hester home, if need be. But for the present I think she had best tarry here, as it isn't many steps to her mother's house, and we may need her help if any of those poor creatures fall into suffering wi' their violence.'

With this, Mr. John knocked at the door of the parlour, and waited for permission to enter. With old-fashioned courtesy he told the two strangers how glad he was that his room had been of service to them; that he would never have made so bold as to pass through it, if he had been aware how it was occupied. And then going to a corner cupboard, high up in the wall, he pulled a key out of his pocket and unlocked his little store of wine, and cake, and spirits; and insisted that they should eat and drink while waiting for Philip, who was taking some last measures for the security of the shop during the night.

Sylvia declined everything, with less courtesy than she ought to have shown to the offers of the hospitable old man. Molly took wine and cake, leaving a good half of both, according to the code of manners in that part of the country; and also because Sylvia

was continually urging her to make haste. For the latter disliked the idea of her cousin's esteeming it necessary to accompany them home, and wanted to escape from him by setting off before he returned. But any such plans were frustrated

Page 24

by Philip's coming back into the parlour, full of grave content, which brimmed over from his eyes, with the parcel of Sylvia's obnoxious red duffle under his arm; anticipating so keenly the pleasure awaiting him in the walk, that he was almost surprised by the gravity of his companions as they prepared for it. Sylvia was a little penitent for her rejection of Mr. John's hospitality, now she found out how unavailing for its purpose such rejection had been, and tried to make up by a modest sweetness of farewell, which quite won his heart, and made him praise her up to Hester in a way to which she, observant of all, could not bring herself fully to respond. What business had the pretty little creature to reject kindly-meant hospitality in the pettish way she did, thought Hester. And, oh! what business had she to be so ungrateful and to try and thwart Philip in his thoughtful wish of escorting them through the streets of the rough, riotous town? What did it all mean?

CHAPTER IV

PHILIP HEPBURN

The coast on that part of the island to which this story refers is bordered by rocks and cliffs. The inland country immediately adjacent to the coast is level, flat, and bleak; it is only where the long stretch of dyke-enclosed fields terminates abruptly in a sheer descent, and the stranger sees the ocean creeping up the sands far below him, that he is aware on how great an elevation he has been. Here and there, as I have said, a cleft in the level land (thus running out into the sea in steep promontories) occurs—what they would call a 'chine' in the Isle of Wight; but instead of the soft south wind stealing up the woody ravine, as it does there, the eastern breeze comes piping shrill and clear along these northern chasms, keeping the trees that venture to grow on the sides down to the mere height of scrubby brushwood. The descent to the shore through these 'bottoms' is in most cases very abrupt, too much so for a cartway, or even a bridle-path; but people can pass up and down without difficulty, by the help of a few rude steps hewn here and there out of the rock.

Sixty or seventy years ago (not to speak of much later times) the farmers who owned or hired the land which lay directly on the summit of these cliffs were smugglers to the extent of their power, only partially checked by the coast-guard distributed, at pretty nearly equal interspaces of eight miles, all along the north-eastern seaboard. Still seawrack was a good manure, and there was no law against carrying it up in great osier baskets for the purpose of tillage, and many a secret thing was lodged in hidden crevices in the rocks till the farmer sent trusty people down to the shore for a good supply of sand and seaweed for his land.

Page 25

One of the farms on the cliff had lately been taken by Sylvia's father. He was a man who had roamed about a good deal—been sailor, smuggler, horse-dealer, and farmer in turns; a sort of fellow possessed by a spirit of adventure and love of change, which did him and his own family more harm than anybody else. He was just the kind of man that all his neighbours found fault with, and all his neighbours liked. Late in life (for such an imprudent man as he, was one of a class who generally wed, trusting to chance and luck for the provision for a family), farmer Robson married a woman whose only want of practical wisdom consisted in taking him for a husband. She was Philip Hepburn's aunt, and had had the charge of him until she married from her widowed brother's house. He it was who had let her know when Haytersbank Farm had been to let; esteeming it a likely piece of land for his uncle to settle down upon, after a somewhat unprosperous career of horse-dealing. The farmhouse lay in the shelter of a very slight green hollow scarcely scooped out of the pasture field by which it was surrounded; the short crisp turf came creeping up to the very door and windows, without any attempt at a yard or garden, or any nearer enclosure of the buildings than the stone dyke that formed the boundary of the field itself. The buildings were long and low, in order to avoid the rough violence of the winds that swept over that wild, bleak spot, both in winter and summer. It was well for the inhabitants of that house that coal was extremely cheap; otherwise a southerner might have imagined that they could never have survived the cutting of the bitter gales that piped all round, and seemed to seek out every crevice for admission into the house.

But the interior was warm enough when once you had mounted the long bleak lane, full of round rough stones, enough to lame any horse unaccustomed to such roads, and had crossed the field by the little dry, hard footpath, which tacked about so as to keep from directly facing the prevailing wind. Mrs. Robson was a Cumberland woman, and as such, was a cleaner housewife than the farmers' wives of that north-eastern coast, and was often shocked at their ways, showing it more by her looks than by her words, for she was not a great talker. This fastidiousness in such matters made her own house extremely comfortable, but did not tend to render her popular among her neighbours. Indeed, Bell Robson piqued herself on her housekeeping generally, and once in-doors in the gray, bare stone house, there were plenty of comforts to be had besides cleanliness and warmth. The great rack of clap-bread hung overhead, and Bell Robson's preference of this kind of oat-cake over the leavened and partly sour kind used in Yorkshire was another source of her unpopularity. Flitches of bacon and 'hands' (*i.e.*, shoulders of cured pork, the legs or hams being sold, as fetching a better price) abounded; and for any visitor who could stay, neither cream nor finest wheaten flour was wanting for 'turf cakes' and 'singing hinnies,' with which it is the delight of the northern housewives to regale the honoured guest, as he sips their high-priced tea, sweetened with dainty sugar.

Page 26

This night farmer Robson was fidgeting in and out of his house-door, climbing the little eminence in the field, and coming down disappointed in a state of fretful impatience. His quiet, taciturn wife was a little put out by Sylvia's non-appearance too; but she showed her anxiety by being shorter than usual in her replies to his perpetual wonders as to where the lass could have been tarrying, and by knitting away with extra diligence.

'I've a vast o' mind to go down to Monkshaven mysen, and see after t' child. It's well on for seven.'

'No, Dannel,' said his wife; 'thou'd best not. Thy leg has been paining thee this week past, and thou'rt not up to such a walk. I'll rouse Kester, and send him off, if thou think'st there's need on it.'

'A'll noan ha' Kester roused. Who's to go afield betimes after t' sheep in t' morn, if he's ca'ed up to-neet? He'd miss t' lass, and find a public-house, a reckon,' said Daniel, querulously.

'I'm not afeard o' Kester,' replied Bell. 'He's a good one for knowing folk i' th' dark. But if thou'd rather, I'll put on my hood and cloak and just go to th' end o' th' lane, if thou'lt have an eye to th' milk, and see as it does na' boil o'er, for she canna stomach it if it's bishopped e'er so little.'

Before Mrs. Robson, however, had put away her knitting, voices were heard at a good distance down the lane, but coming nearer every moment, and once more Daniel climbed the little brow to look and to listen.

'It's a' reet!' said he, hobbling quickly down. 'Niver fidget theesel' wi' gettin' ready to go search for her. I'll tak' thee a bet it's Philip Hepburn's voice, convoying her home, just as I said he would, an hour sin'.'

Bell did not answer, as she might have done, that this probability of Philip's bringing Sylvia home had been her own suggestion, set aside by her husband as utterly unlikely. Another minute and the countenances of both parents imperceptibly and unconsciously relaxed into pleasure as Sylvia came in.

She looked very rosy from the walk, and the October air, which began to be frosty in the evenings; there was a little cloud over her face at first, but it was quickly dispersed as she met the loving eyes of home. Philip, who followed her, had an excited, but not altogether pleased look about him. He received a hearty greeting from Daniel, and a quiet one from his aunt.

'Tak' off thy pan o' milk, missus, and set on t' kettle. Milk may do for wenches, but Philip and me is for a drop o' good Hollands and watter this cold night. I'm a'most chilled to t'



marrow wi' looking out for thee, lass, for t' mother was in a peck o' troubles about thy none coining home i' t' dayleet, and I'd to keep hearkening out on t' browhead.'

This was entirely untrue, and Bell knew it to be so; but her husband did not. He had persuaded himself now, as he had done often before, that what he had in reality done for his own pleasure or satisfaction, he had done in order to gratify some one else.

Page 27

'The town was rough with a riot between the press-gang and the whaling folk; and I thought I'd best see Sylvia home.'

'Ay, ay, lad; always welcome, if it's only as an excuse for t' liquor. But t' whalers, say'st ta? Why, is t' whalers in? There was none i' sight yesterday, when I were down on t' shore. It's early days for 'em as yet. And t' cursed old press-gang's agate again, doing its devil's work!'

His face changed as he ended his speech, and showed a steady passion of old hatred.

'Ay, missus, yo' may look. I wunnot pick and choose my words, noather for yo' nor for nobody, when I speak o' that daumed gang. I'm none ashamed o' my words. They're true, and I'm ready to prove 'em. Where's my forefinger? Ay! and as good a top-joint of a thumb as iver a man had? I wish I'd kept 'em i' sperits, as they done things at t' 'potticary's, just to show t' lass what flesh and bone I made away wi' to get free. I ups wi' a hatchet when I saw as I were fast a-board a man-o'-war standing out for sea—it were in t' time o' the war wi' Amerikay, an' I could na stomach the thought o' being murdered i' my own language—so I ups wi' a hatchet, and I says to Bill Watson, says I, "Now, my lad, if thou'll do me a kindness, I'll pay thee back, niver fear, and they'll be glad enough to get shut on us, and send us to old England again. Just come down with a will." Now, missus, why can't ye sit still and listen to me, 'stead o' pottering after pans and what not?' said he, speaking crossly to his wife, who had heard the story scores of times, and, it must be confessed, was making some noise in preparing bread and milk for Sylvia's supper.

Bell did not say a word in reply, but Sylvia tapped his shoulder with a pretty little authoritative air.

'It's for me, feyther. I'm just keen-set for my supper. Once let me get quickly set down to it, and Philip there to his glass o' grog, and you'll never have such listeners in your life, and mother's mind will be at ease too.'

'Eh! thou's a wilfu' wench,' said the proud father, giving her a great slap on her back. 'Well! set thee down to thy victual, and be quiet wi' thee, for I want to finish my tale to Philip. But, perhaps, I've telled it yo' afore?' said he, turning round to question Hepburn.

Hepburn could not say that he had not heard it, for he piqued himself on his truthfulness. But instead of frankly and directly owning this, he tried to frame a formal little speech, which would soothe Daniel's mortified vanity; and, of course, it had the directly opposite effect. Daniel resented being treated like a child, and yet turned his back on Philip with all the wilfulness of one. Sylvia did not care for her cousin, but hated the discomfort of having her father displeased; so she took up her tale of adventure, and told her father and mother of her afternoon's proceedings. Daniel pretended not to listen at first, and made ostentatious noises with his spoon and glass; but by-and-by he

got quite warm and excited about the doings of the press-gang, and scolded both Philip and Sylvia for not having learnt more particulars as to what was the termination of the riot.

Page 28

'I've been whaling myself,' said he; 'and I've heerd tell as whalers wear knives, and I'd ha' gi'en t' gang a taste o' my whittle, if I'd been cotched up just as I'd set my foot a-shore.'

'I don't know,' said Philip; 'we're at war wi' the French, and we shouldn't like to be beaten; and yet if our numbers are not equal to theirs, we stand a strong chance of it.'

'Not a bit on't—so be d—d!' said Daniel Robson, bringing down his fist with such violence on the round deal table, that the glasses and earthenware shook again. 'Yo'd not strike a child or a woman, for sure! yet it 'ud be like it, if we did na' give the Frenchies some 'vantages—if we took 'em wi' equal numbers. It's not fair play, and that's one place where t' shoe pinches. It's not fair play two ways. It's not fair play to cotch up men as has no call for fightin' at another man's biddin', though they've no objection to fight a bit on their own account and who are just landed, all keen after bread i'stead o' biscuit, and flesh-meat i'stead o' junk, and beds i'stead o' hammocks. (I make naught o' t' sentiment side, for I were niver gi'en up to such carnal-mindedness and poesies.) It's noane fair to cotch 'em up and put 'em in a stifling hole, all lined with metal for fear they should whittle their way out, and send 'em off to sea for years an' years to come. And again it's no fair play to t' French. Four o' them is rightly matched wi' one o' us; and if we go an' fight 'em four to four it's like as if yo' fell to beatin' Sylvie there, or little Billy Croxton, as isn't breeched. And that's my mind. Missus, where's t' pipe?'

Philip did not smoke, so took his turn at talking, a chance he seldom had with Daniel, unless the latter had his pipe between his lips. So after Daniel had filled it, and used Sylvia's little finger as a stopper to ram down the tobacco—a habit of his to which she was so accustomed that she laid her hand on the table by him, as naturally as she would have fetched him his spittoon when he began to smoke—Philip arranged his arguments, and began—

'I'm for fair play wi' the French as much as any man, as long as we can be sure o' beating them; but, I say, make sure o' that, and then give them ivery advantage. Now I reckon Government is not sure as yet, for i' the papers it said as half th' ships i' th' Channel hadn't got their proper complement o' men; and all as I say is, let Government judge a bit for us; and if they say they're hampered for want o' men, why we must make it up somehow. John and Jeremiah Foster pay in taxes, and Militiaman pays in person; and if sailors cannot pay in taxes, and will not pay in person, why they must be made to pay; and that's what th' press-gang is for, I reckon. For my part, when I read o' the way those French chaps are going on, I'm thankful to be governed by King George and a British Constitution.'

Daniel took his pipe out of his mouth at this.

Page 29

'And when did I say a word again King George and the Constitution? I only ax 'em to govern me as I judge best, and that's what I call representation. When I gave my vote to Measter Cholmley to go up to t' Parliament House, I as good as said, 'Now yo' go up theer, sir, and tell 'em what I, Dannel Robson, think right, and what I, Dannel Robson, wish to have done.' Else I'd be darned if I'd ha' gi'en my vote to him or any other man. And div yo' think I want Seth Robson (as is my own brother's son, and mate to a collier) to be cotched up by a press-gang, and ten to one his wages all unpaid? Div yo' think I'd send up Measter Cholmley to speak up for that piece o' work? Not I.' He took up his pipe again, shook out the ashes, puffed it into a spark, and shut his eyes, preparatory to listening.

'But, asking pardon, laws is made for the good of the nation, not for your good or mine.'

Daniel could not stand this. He laid down his pipe, opened his eyes, stared straight at Philip before speaking, in order to enforce his words, and then said slowly—

'Nation here! nation theere! I'm a man and yo're another, but nation's nowheere. If Measter Cholmley talked to me i' that fashion, he'd look long for another vote frae me. I can make out King George, and Measter Pitt, and yo' and me, but nation! nation, go hang!'

Philip, who sometimes pursued an argument longer than was politic for himself, especially when he felt sure of being on the conquering side, did not see that Daniel Robson was passing out of the indifference of conscious wisdom into that state of anger which ensues when a question becomes personal in some unspoken way. Robson had contested this subject once or twice before, and had the remembrance of former disputes to add to his present vehemence. So it was well for the harmony of the evening that Bell and Sylvia returned from the kitchen to sit in the house-place. They had been to wash up the pans and basins used for supper; Sylvia had privately shown off her cloak, and got over her mother's shake of the head at its colour with a coaxing kiss, at the end of which her mother had adjusted her cap with a 'There! there! ha' done wi' thee,' but had no more heart to show her disapprobation; and now they came back to their usual occupations until it should please their visitor to go; then they would rake the fire and be off to bed; for neither Sylvia's spinning nor Bell's knitting was worth candle-light, and morning hours are precious in a dairy.

People speak of the way in which harp-playing sets off a graceful figure; spinning is almost as becoming an employment. A woman stands at the great wool-wheel, one arm extended, the other holding the thread, her head thrown back to take in all the scope of her occupation; or if it is the lesser spinning-wheel for flax—and it was this that Sylvia moved forwards to-night—the pretty sound of the buzzing, whirring motion, the attitude of the spinner, foot and hand alike engaged in the business—the bunch of gay coloured ribbon that ties the bundle of flax on the rock—all make it into a picturesque piece of

domestic business that may rival harp-playing any day for the amount of softness and grace which it calls out.

Page 30

Sylvia's cheeks were rather flushed by the warmth of the room after the frosty air. The blue ribbon with which she had thought it necessary to tie back her hair before putting on her hat to go to market had got rather loose, and allowed her disarranged curls to stray in a manner which would have annoyed her extremely, if she had been upstairs to look at herself in the glass; but although they were not set in the exact fashion which Sylvia esteemed as correct, they looked very pretty and luxuriant. Her little foot, placed on the 'traddle', was still encased in its smartly buckled shoe—not slightly to her discomfort, as she was unaccustomed to be shod in walking far; only as Philip had accompanied them home, neither she nor Molly had liked to go barefoot. Her round mottled arm and ruddy taper hand drew out the flax with nimble, agile motion, keeping time to the movement of the wheel. All this Philip could see; the greater part of her face was lost to him as she half averted it, with a shy dislike to the way in which she knew from past experience that cousin Philip always stared at her. And avert it as she would she heard with silent petulance the harsh screech of Philip's chair as he heavily dragged it on the stone floor, sitting on it all the while, and felt that he was moving round so as to look at her as much as was in his power, without absolutely turning his back on either her father or mother. She got herself ready for the first opportunity of contradiction or opposition.

'Well, wench! and has ta bought this grand new cloak?'

'Yes, feyther. It's a scarlet one.'

'Ay, ay! and what does mother say?'

'Oh, mother's content,' said Sylvia, a little doubting in her heart, but determined to defy Philip at all hazards.

'Mother 'll put up with it if it does na spot would be nearer fact, I'm thinking,' said Bell, quietly.

'I wanted Sylvia to take the gray,' said Philip.

'And I chose the red; it's so much gayer, and folk can see me the farther off. Feyther likes to see me at first turn o' t' lane, don't yo', feyther? and I'll niver turn out when it's boun' for to rain, so it shall niver get a spot near it, mammy.'

'I reckoned it were to wear i' bad weather,' said Bell. 'Leastways that were the pretext for coaxing feyther out o' it.'

She said it in a kindly tone, though the words became a prudent rather than a fond mother. But Sylvia understood her better than Daniel did as it appeared.

'Hou'd thy tongue, mother. She niver spoke a pretext at all.'

He did not rightly know what a 'pretext' was: Bell was a touch better educated than her husband, but he did not acknowledge this, and made a particular point of differing from her whenever she used a word beyond his comprehension.

'She's a good lass at times; and if she liked to wear a yellow-orange cloak she should have it. Here's Philip here, as stands up for laws and press-gangs, I'll set him to find us a law again pleasing our lass; and she our only one. Thou dostn't think on that, mother!

Page 31

Bell did think of that often; oftener than her husband, perhaps, for she remembered every day, and many times a day, the little one that had been born and had died while its father was away on some long voyage. But it was not her way to make replies.

Sylvia, who had more insight into her mother's heart than Daniel, broke in with a new subject.

'Oh! as for Philip, he's been preaching up laws all t' way home. I said naught, but let Molly hold her own; or else I could ha' told a tale about silks an' lace an' things.'

Philip's face flushed. Not because of the smuggling; every one did that, only it was considered polite to ignore it; but he was annoyed to perceive how quickly his little cousin had discovered that his practice did not agree with his preaching, and vexed, too, to see how delighted she was to bring out the fact. He had some little idea, too, that his uncle might make use of his practice as an argument against the preaching he had lately been indulging in, in opposition to Daniel; but Daniel was too far gone in his Hollands-and-water to do more than enunciate his own opinions, which he did with hesitating and laboured distinctness in the following sentence:

'What I think and say is this. Laws is made for to keep some folks fra' harming others. Press-gangs and coast-guards harm me i' my business, and keep me fra' getting what I want. Theerefore, what I think and say is this: Measter Cholmley should put down press-gangs and coast-guards. If that theere isn't reason I ax yo' to tell me what is? an' if Measter Cholmley don't do what I ax him, he may go whistle for my vote, he may.'

At this period in his conversation, Bell Robson interfered; not in the least from any feeling of disgust or annoyance, or dread of what he might say or do if he went on drinking, but simply as a matter of health. Sylvia, too, was in no way annoyed; not only with her father, but with every man whom she knew, excepting her cousin Philip, was it a matter of course to drink till their ideas became confused. So she simply put her wheel aside, as preparatory to going to bed, when her mother said, in a more decided tone than that which she had used on any other occasion but this, and similar ones-

'Come, measter, you've had as much as is good for you.'

'Let a' be! Let a' be,' said he, clutching at the bottle of spirits, but perhaps rather more good-humoured with what he had drunk than he was before; he jerked a little more into his glass before his wife carried it off, and locked it up in the cupboard, putting the key in her pocket, and then he said, winking at Philip—

'Eh! my man. Niver gie a woman t' whip hand o'er yo'! Yo' seen what it brings a man to; but for a' that I'll vote for Cholmley, an' d——t' press-gang!'

He had to shout out the last after Philip, for Hepburn, really anxious to please his aunt, and disliking drinking habits himself by constitution, was already at the door, and setting out on his return home, thinking, it must be confessed, far more of the character of Sylvia's shake of the hand than of the parting words of either his uncle or aunt.

Page 32

CHAPTER V

STORY OF THE PRESS-GANG

For a few days after the evening mentioned in the last chapter the weather was dull. Not in quick, sudden showers did the rain come down, but in constant drizzle, blotting out all colour from the surrounding landscape, and filling the air with fine gray mist, until people breathed more water than air. At such times the consciousness of the nearness of the vast unseen sea acted as a dreary depression to the spirits; but besides acting on the nerves of the excitable, such weather affected the sensitive or ailing in material ways. Daniel Robson's fit of rheumatism incapacitated him from stirring abroad; and to a man of his active habits, and somewhat inactive mind, this was a great hardship. He was not ill-tempered naturally, but this state of confinement made him more ill-tempered than he had ever been before in his life. He sat in the chimney-corner, abusing the weather and doubting the wisdom or desirableness of all his wife saw fit to do in the usual daily household matters. The 'chimney-corner' was really a corner at Haytersbank. There were two projecting walls on each side of the fire-place, running about six feet into the room, and a stout wooden settle was placed against one of these, while opposite was the circular-backed 'master's chair,' the seat of which was composed of a square piece of wood judiciously hollowed out, and placed with one corner to the front. Here, in full view of all the operations going on over the fire, sat Daniel Robson for four live-long days, advising and directing his wife in all such minor matters as the boiling of potatoes, the making of porridge, all the work on which she specially piqued herself, and on which she would have taken advice—no! not from the most skilled housewife in all the three Ridings. But, somehow, she managed to keep her tongue quiet from telling him, as she would have done any woman, and any other man, to mind his own business, or she would pin a dish-clout to his tail. She even checked Sylvia when the latter proposed, as much for fun as for anything else, that his ignorant directions should be followed, and the consequences brought before his eyes and his nose.

'Na, na!' said Bell, 'th' feyther's feyther, and we mun respect him. But it's dree work havin' a man i' th' house, nursing th' fire, an' such weather too, and not a soul coming near us, not even to fall out wi' him; for thee and me must na' do that, for th' Bible's sake, dear; and a good stand-up wordy quarrel would do him a power of good; stir his blood like. I wish Philip would turn up.'

Bell sighed, for in these four days she had experienced somewhat of Madame de Maintenon's difficulty (and with fewer resources to meet it) of trying to amuse a man who was not amusable. For Bell, good and sensible as she was, was not a woman of resources. Sylvia's plan, undutiful as it was in her mother's eyes, would have done Daniel more good, even though it might have made him angry, than his wife's quiet,

careful monotony of action, which, however it might conduce to her husband's comfort when he was absent, did not amuse him when present.

Page 33

Sylvia scouted the notion of cousin Philip coming into their household in the character of an amusing or entertaining person, till she nearly made her mother angry at her ridicule of the good steady young fellow, to whom Bell looked up as the pattern of all that early manhood should be. But the moment Sylvia saw she had been giving her mother pain, she left off her wilful little jokes, and kissed her, and told her she would manage all famously, and ran out of the back-kitchen, in which mother and daughter had been scrubbing the churn and all the wooden implements of butter-making. Bell looked at the pretty figure of her little daughter, as, running past with her apron thrown over her head, she darkened the window beneath which her mother was doing her work. She paused just for a moment, and then said, almost unawares to herself, 'Bless thee, lass,' before resuming her scouring of what already looked almost snow-white.

Sylvia scampered across the rough farmyard in the wetting, drizzling rain to the place where she expected to find Kester; but he was not there, so she had to retrace her steps to the cow-house, and, making her way up a rough kind of ladder-staircase fixed straight against the wall, she surprised Kester as he sat in the wool-loft, looking over the fleeces reserved for the home-spinning, by popping her bright face, swathed round with her blue woollen apron, up through the trap-door, and thus, her head the only visible part, she addressed the farm-servant, who was almost like one of the family.

'Kester, feyther's just tiring hissel' wi' weariness an' vexation, sitting by t' fireside wi' his hands afore him, an' nought to do. An' mother and me can't think on aught as 'll rouse him up to a bit of a laugh, or aught more cheerful than a scolding. Now, Kester, thou mun just be off, and find Harry Donkin th' tailor, and bring him here; it's gettin' on for Martinmas, an' he'll be coming his rounds, and he may as well come here first as last, and feyther's clothes want a deal o' mending up, and Harry's always full of his news, and anyhow he'll do for feyther to scold, an' be a new person too, and that's somewhat for all on us. Now go, like a good old Kester as yo' are.'

Kester looked at her with loving, faithful admiration. He had set himself his day's work in his master's absence, and was very desirous of finishing it, but, somehow, he never dreamed of resisting Sylvia, so he only stated the case.

'T' 'ool's a vast o' muck in 't, an' a thowt as a'd fettle it, an' do it up; but a reckon a mun do yo'r biddin'.'

'There's a good old Kester,' said she, smiling, and nodding her muffled head at him; then she dipped down out of his sight, then rose up again (he had never taken his slow, mooney eyes from the spot where she had disappeared) to say—'Now, Kester, be wary and deep—thou mun tell Harry Donkin not to let on as we've sent for him, but just to come in as if he were on his round, and took us first; and he mun ask feyther if there is any work for him to do; and I'll answer for 't, he'll have a welcome and a half. Now, be deep and fause, mind thee!'

Page 34

'A'se deep an' fause enow wi' simple folk; but what can a do i' Donkin be as fause as me—as happen he may be?'

'Ga way wi' thee! I' Donkin be Solomon, thou mun be t' Queen o' Sheba; and I'se bound for to say she outwitted him at last!'

Kester laughed so long at the idea of his being the Queen of Sheba, that Sylvia was back by her mother's side before the cachinnation ended.

That night, just as Sylvia was preparing to go to bed in her little closet of a room, she heard some shot rattling at her window. She opened the little casement, and saw Kester standing below. He recommenced where he left off, with a laugh—

'He, he, he! A's been t' queen! A'se ta'en Donkin on t' reet side, an' he'll coom in to-morrow, just permiskus, an' ax for work, like as if 't were a favour; t' oud felley were a bit cross-grained at startin', for he were workin' at farmer Crosskey's up at t' other side o' t' town, wheer they puts a strike an' a half of maut intil t' beer, when most folk put nobbut a strike, an' t' made him ill to convince: but he'll coom, niver fear!'

The honest fellow never said a word of the shilling he had paid out of his own pocket to forward Sylvia's wishes, and to persuade the tailor to leave the good beer. All his anxiety now was to know if he had been missed, and if it was likely that a scolding awaited him in the morning.

'T' oud measter didn't set up his back, 'cause a didn't coom in t' supper?'

'He questioned a bit as to what thou were about, but mother didn't know, an' I held my peace. Mother carried thy supper in t' loft for thee.'

'A'll gang after 't, then, for a'm like a pair o' bellowses wi' t' wind out; just two flat sides wi' nowt betwixt.'

The next morning, Sylvia's face was a little redder than usual when Harry Donkin's bow-legs were seen circling down the path to the house door.

'Here's Donkin, for sure!' exclaimed Bell, when she caught sight of him a minute after her daughter. 'Well, I just call that lucky! for he'll be company for thee while Sylvia and me has to turn th' cheeses.'

This was too original a remark for a wife to make in Daniel's opinion, on this especial morning, when his rheumatism was twinging him more than usual, so he replied with severity—

'That's all t' women know about it. Wi' them it's "coompany, coompany, coompany," an' they think a man's no better than theirsels. A'd have yo' to know a've a vast o' thoughts

in myself', as I'm noane willing to lay out for t' benefit o' every man. A've niver gotten time for meditation sin' a were married; leastways, sin' a left t' sea. Aboard ship, wi' niver a woman wi'n leagues o' hail, and upo' t' masthead, in special, a could.'

'Then I'd better tell Donkin as we've no work for him,' said Sylvia, instinctively managing her father by agreeing with him, instead of reasoning with or contradicting him.

Page 35

'Now, theere you go!' wrenching himself round, for fear Sylvia should carry her meekly made threat into execution. 'Ugh! ugh!' as his limb hurt him. 'Come in, Harry, come in, and talk a bit o' sense to me, for a've been shut up wi' women these four days, and a'm a'most a nateral by this time. A'se bound for 't, they'll find yo' some wark, if 't's nought but for to save their own fingers.'

So Harry took off his coat, and seated himself professional-wise on the hastily-cleared dresser, so that he might have all the light afforded by the long, low casement window. Then he blew in his thimble, sucked his finger, so that they might adhere tightly together, and looked about for a subject for opening conversation, while Sylvia and her mother might be heard opening and shutting drawers and box-lids before they could find the articles that needed repair, or that were required to mend each other.

'Women's well enough i' their way,' said Daniel, in a philosophizing tone, 'but a man may have too much on 'em. Now there's me, leg-fast these four days, and a'll make free to say to yo', a'd rather a deal ha' been loading dung i' t' wettest weather; an' a reckon it's th' being wi' nought but women as tires me so: they talk so foolish it gets int' t' bones like. Now thou know'st thou'rt not called much of a man oather, but bless yo', t' ninth part's summut to be thankful for, after nought but women. An' yet, yo' seen, they were for sending yo' away i' their foolishness! Well! missus, and who's to pay for t' fettling of all them clothes?' as Bell came down with her arms full. She was going to answer her husband meekly and literally according to her wont, but Sylvia, already detecting the increased cheerfulness of his tone, called out from behind her mother—

'I am, feyther. I'm going for to sell my new cloak as I bought Thursday, for the mending on your old coats and waistcoats.'

'Hearken till her,' said Daniel, chuckling. 'She's a true wench. Three days sin' noane so full as she o' t' new cloak that now she's fain t' sell.'

'Ay, Harry. If feyther won't pay yo' for making all these old clothes as good as new, I'll sell my new red cloak sooner than yo' shall go unpaid.'

'A reckon it's a bargain,' said Harry, casting sharp, professional eyes on the heap before him, and singling out the best article as to texture for examination and comment.

'They're all again these metal buttons,' said he. 'Silk weavers has been petitioning Ministers t' make a law to favour silk buttons; and I did hear tell as there were informers goin' about spyin' after metal buttons, and as how they could haul yo' before a justice for wearing on 'em.'

Page 36

'A were wed in 'em, and a'll wear 'em to my dyin' day, or a'll wear noane at a'. They're for making such a pack o' laws, they'll be for meddling wi' my fashion o' sleeping next, and taxing me for ivery snore a give. They've been after t' winders, and after t' vittle, and after t' very saut to 't; it's dearer by hauf an' more nor it were when a were a boy: they're a meddlesome set o' folks, law-makers is, an' a'll niver believe King George has ought t' do wi' 't. But mark my words; I were wed wi' brass buttons, and brass buttons a'll wear to my death, an' if they moither me about it, a'll wear brass buttons i' my coffin!'

By this time Harry had arranged a certain course of action with Mrs Robson, conducting the consultation and agreement by signs. His thread was flying fast already, and the mother and daughter felt more free to pursue their own business than they had done for several days; for it was a good sign that Daniel had taken his pipe out of the square hollow in the fireside wall, where he usually kept it, and was preparing to diversify his remarks with satisfying interludes of puffing.

'Why, look ye; this very baccy had a run for 't. It came ashore sewed up neatly enough i' a woman's stays, as was wife to a fishing-smack down at t' bay yonder. She were a lean thing as iver you saw, when she went for t' see her husband aboard t' vessel; but she coom back lustier by a deal, an' wi' many a thing on her, here and theere, beside baccy. An' that were i' t' face o' coast-guard and yon tender, an' a'. But she made as though she were tipsy, an' so they did nought but curse her, an' get out on her way.'

'Speaking of t' tender, there's been a piece o' wark i' Monkshaven this week wi' t' press-gang,' said Harry.

'Ay! ay! our lass was telling about 't; but, Lord bless ye! there's no gettin' t' rights on a story out on a woman—though a will say this for our Sylvie, she's as bright a lass as iver a man looked at.'

Now the truth was, that Daniel had not liked to demean himself, at the time when Sylvia came back so full of what she had seen at Monkshaven, by evincing any curiosity on the subject. He had then thought that the next day he would find some business that should take him down to the town, when he could learn all that was to be learnt, without flattering his womankind by asking questions, as if anything they might say could interest him. He had a strong notion of being a kind of domestic Jupiter.

'It's made a deal o' wark i' Monkshaven. Folk had gotten to think nought o' t' tender, she lay so still, an' t' leftenant paid such a good price for all he wanted for t' ship. But o' Thursday t' *Resolution*, first whaler back this season, came in port, and t' press-gang showed their teeth, and carried off four as good able-bodied seamen as iver I made trousers for; and t' place were all up like a nest o' wasps, when yo've set your foot in t' midst. They were so mad, they were ready for t' fight t' very pavin' stones.'

Page 37

'A wish a'd been theere! A just wish a had! A've a score for t' reckon up wi' t' press-gang!'

And the old man lifted up his right hand—his hand on which the forefinger and thumb were maimed and useless—partly in denunciation, and partly as a witness of what he had endured to escape from the service, abhorred because it was forced. His face became a totally different countenance with the expression of settled and unrelenting indignation, which his words called out.

'G'on, man, g'on,' said Daniel, impatient with Donkin for the little delay occasioned by the necessity of arranging his work more fully.

'Ay! ay! all in good time; for a've a long tale to tell yet; an' a mun have some 'un to iron me out my seams, and look me out my bits, for there's none here fit for my purpose.'

'Dang thy bits! Here, Sylvie! Sylvie! come and be tailor's man, and let t' chap get settled sharp, for a'm fain t' hear his story.'

Sylvia took her directions, and placed her irons in the fire, and ran upstairs for the bundle which had been put aside by her careful mother for occasions like the present. It consisted of small pieces of various coloured cloth, cut out of old coats and waistcoats, and similar garments, when the whole had become too much worn for use, yet when part had been good enough to be treasured by a thrifty housewife. Daniel grew angry before Donkin had selected his patterns and settled the work to his own mind.

'Well,' said he at last; 'a mought be a young man a-goin' a wooin', by t' pains thou'st taken for t' match my oud clothes. I don't care if they're patched wi' scarlet, a tell thee; so as thou'lt work away at thy tale wi' thy tongue, same time as thou works at thy needle wi' thy fingers.'

'Then, as a were saying, all Monkshaven were like a nest o' wasps, flyin' hither and thither, and makin' sich a buzzin' and a talkin' as niver were; and each wi' his sting out, ready for t' vent his venom o' rage and revenge. And women cryin' and sobbin' i' t' streets—when, Lord help us! o' Saturday came a worse time than iver! for all Friday there had been a kind o' expectation an' dismay about t' *Good Fortune*, as t' mariners had said was off St Abb's Head o' Thursday, when t' *Resolution* came in; and there was wives and maids wi' husbands an' sweethearts aboard t' *Good Fortune* ready to throw their eyes out on their heads wi' gazin', gazin' nor'ards over t'sea, as were all one haze o' blankness wi' t' rain; and when t' afternoon tide comed in, an' niver a line on her to be seen, folk were oncertain as t' whether she were holding off for fear o' t' tender—as were out o' sight, too—or what were her mak' o' goin' on. An' t' poor wet draggled women folk came up t' town, some slowly cryin', as if their hearts was sick, an' others just bent their heads to t' wind, and went straight to their homes, nother looking nor speaking to ony one; but barred their doors, and stiffened

Page 38

theirsels up for a night o' waiting. Saturday morn—yo'll mind Saturday morn, it were stormy and gusty, downreet dirty weather—theere stood t' folk again by daylight, a watching an' a straining, and by that tide t' *Good Fortune* came o'er t' bar. But t' excisemen had sent back her news by t' boat as took 'em there. They'd a deal of oil, and a vast o' blubber. But for all that her flag was drooping i' t' rain, half mast high, for mourning and sorrow, an' they'd a dead man aboard—a dead man as was living and strong last sunrise. An' there was another as lay between life an' death, and there was seven more as should ha' been there as wasn't, but was carried off by t' gang. T' frigate as we 'n a' heard tell on, as lying off Hartlepool, got tidings fra' t' tender as captured t' seamen o' Thursday: and t' *Aurora*, as they ca'ed her, made off for t' nor'ard; and nine leagues off St Abb's Head, t' *Resolution* thinks she were, she see'd t' frigate, and knowed by her build she were a man-o'-war, and guessed she were bound on king's kidnapping. I seen t' wounded man mysen wi' my own eyes; and he'll live! he'll live! Niver a man died yet, wi' such a strong purpose o' vengeance in him. He could barely speak, for he were badly shot, but his colour coome and went, as t' master's mate an' t' captain telled me and some others how t' *Aurora* fired at 'em, and how t' innocent whaler hoisted her colours, but afore they were fairly run up, another shot coome close in t' shrouds, and then t' Greenland ship being t' windward, bore down on t' frigate; but as they knew she were an oud fox, and bent on mischief, Kinraid (that's he who lies a-dying, only he'll noane die, a'se bound), the specksioneer, bade t' men go down between decks, and fasten t' hatches well, an' he'd stand guard, he an' captain, and t' oud master's mate, being left upo' deck for t' give a welcome just skin-deep to t' boat's crew fra' t' *Aurora*, as they could see coming t'wards them o'er t' watter, wi' their reg'lar man-o'-war's rowing——'

'Damn 'em!' said Daniel, in soliloquy, and under his breath.

Sylvia stood, poising her iron, and listening eagerly, afraid to give Donkin the hot iron for fear of interrupting the narrative, unwilling to put it into the fire again, because that action would perchance remind him of his work, which now the tailor had forgotten, so eager was he in telling his story.

'Well! they coome on over t' watters wi' great bounds, and up t' sides they coome like locusts, all armed men; an' t' captain says he saw Kinraid hide away his whaling knife under some tarpaulin', and he knew he meant mischief, an' he would no more ha' stopped him wi' a word nor he would ha' stopped him fra' killing a whale. And when t' *Aurora*'s men were aboard, one on 'em runs to t' helm; and at that t' captain says, he felt as if his wife were kissed afore his face; but says he, "I bethought me on t' men as were shut up below hatches, an' I remembered t'

Page 39

folk at Monkshaven as were looking out for us even then; an' I said to mysel', I would speak fair as long as I could, more by token o' the whaling-knife, as I could see glinting bright under t' black tarpaulin." So he spoke quite fair and civil, though he see'd they was nearing t' *Aurora*, and t' *Aurora* was nearing them. Then t' navy captain hailed him thro' t' trumpet, wi' a great rough blast, and, says he, "Order your men to come on deck." And t' captain of t' whaler says his men cried up from under t' hatches as they'd niver be gi'en up wi'out bloodshed, and he sees Kinraid take out his pistol, and look well to t' priming; so he says to t' navy captain, "We're protected Greenland-men, and you have no right t' meddle wi' us." But t' navy captain only bellows t' more, "Order your men t' come on deck. If they won't obey you, and you have lost the command of your vessel, I reckon you're in a state of mutiny, and you may come aboard t' *Aurora* and such men as are willing t' follow you, and I'll fire int' the rest." Yo' see, that were t' depth o' the man: he were for pretending and pretexting as t' captain could na manage his own ship, and as he'd help him. But our Greenland captain were noane so poor-spirited, and says he, "She's full of oil, and I ware you of consequences if you fire into her. Anyhow, pirate, or no pirate" (for t' word pirate stuck in his gizzard), "I'm a honest Monkshaven man, an' I come fra' a land where there's great icebergs and many a deadly danger, but niver a press-gang, thank God! and that's what you are, I reckon." Them's the words he told me, but whether he spoke 'em out so bold at t' time, I'se not so sure; they were in his mind for t' speak, only maybe prudence got t' better on him, for he said he prayed i' his heart to bring his cargo safe to t' owners, come what might. Well, t' *Aurora*'s men aboard t' *Good Fortune* cried out "might they fire down t' hatches, and bring t' men out that a way?" and then t' specksioneer, he speaks, an' he says he stands ower t' hatches, and he has two good pistols, and summut besides, and he don't care for his life, bein' a bachelor, but all below are married men, yo' see, and he'll put an end to t' first two chaps as come near t' hatches. An' they say he picked two off as made for t' come near, and then, just as he were stooping for t' whaling knife, an' it's as big as a sickle——'

'Teach folk as don't know a whaling knife,' cried Daniel. 'I were a Greenland-man mysel'.'

'They shot him through t' side, and dizzied him, and kicked him aside for dead; and fired down t' hatches, and killed one man, and disabled two, and then t' rest cried for quarter, for life is sweet, e'en aboard a king's ship; and t' *Aurora* carried 'em off, wounded men, an' able men, an' all: leaving Kinraid for dead, as wasn't dead, and Darley for dead, as was dead, an' t' captain and master's mate as were too old for work; and t' captain, as loves Kinraid like a brother,

Page 40

poured rum down his throat, and bandaged him up, and has sent for t' first doctor in Monkshaven for to get t' slugs out; for they say there's niver such a harpooner in a' t' Greenland seas; an' I can speak fra' my own seeing he's a fine young fellow where he lies there, all stark and wan for weakness and loss o' blood. But Darley's dead as a door-nail; and there's to be such a burying of him as niver was seen afore i' Monkshaven, come Sunday. And now gi' us t' iron, wench, and let's lose no more time a-talking.'

'It's noane loss o' time,' said Daniel, moving himself heavily in his chair, to feel how helpless he was once more. 'If a were as young as once a were—nay, lad, if a had na these sore rheumatics, now—a reckon as t' press-gang 'ud find out as t' shouldn't do such things for nothing. Bless thee, man! it's waur nor i' my youth i' th' Ameriky war, and then 't were bad enough.'

'And Kinraid?' said Sylvia, drawing a long breath, after the effort of realizing it all; her cheeks had flushed up, and her eyes had glittered during the progress of the tale.

'Oh! he'll do. He'll not die. Life's stuff is in him yet.'

'He'll be Molly Corney's cousin, I reckon,' said Sylvia, bethinking her with a blush of Molly Corney's implication that he was more than a cousin to her, and immediately longing to go off and see Molly, and hear all the little details which women do not think it beneath them to give to women. From that time Sylvia's little heart was bent on this purpose. But it was not one to be openly avowed even to herself. She only wanted sadly to see Molly, and she almost believed herself that it was to consult her about the fashion of her cloak; which Donkin was to cut out, and which she was to make under his directions; at any rate, this was the reason she gave to her mother when the day's work was done, and a fine gleam came out upon the pale and watery sky towards evening.

CHAPTER VI

THE SAILOR'S FUNERAL

Moss Brow, the Corney's house, was but a disorderly, comfortless place. You had to cross a dirty farmyard, all puddles and dungheaps, on stepping-stones, to get to the door of the house-place. That great room itself was sure to have clothes hanging to dry at the fire, whatever day of the week it was; some one of the large irregular family having had what is called in the district a 'dab-wash' of a few articles, forgotten on the regular day. And sometimes these articles lay in their dirty state in the untidy kitchen, out of which a room, half parlour, half bedroom, opened on one side, and a dairy, the only clean place in the house, at the opposite. In face of you, as you entered the door,

was the entrance to the working-kitchen, or scullery. Still, in spite of disorder like this, there was a well-to-do aspect about the place; the Corneys were rich in their way, in flocks and herds as well as in children; and

Page 41

to them neither dirt nor the perpetual bustle arising from ill-ordered work detracted from comfort. They were all of an easy, good-tempered nature; Mrs. Corney and her daughters gave every one a welcome at whatever time of the day they came, and would just as soon sit down for a gossip at ten o'clock in the morning, as at five in the evening, though at the former time the house-place was full of work of various kinds which ought to be got out of hand and done with: while the latter hour was towards the end of the day, when farmers' wives and daughters were usually—'cleaned' was the word then, 'dressed' is that in vogue now. Of course in such a household as this Sylvia was sure to be gladly received. She was young, and pretty, and bright, and brought a fresh breeze of pleasant air about her as her appropriate atmosphere. And besides, Bell Robson held her head so high that visits from her daughter were rather esteemed as a favour, for it was not everywhere that Sylvia was allowed to go.

'Sit yo' down, sit yo' down!' cried Dame Corney, dusting a chair with her apron; 'a reckon Molly 'll be in i' no time. She's nobbut gone int' t' orchard, to see if she can find wind-falls enough for t' make a pie or two for t' lads. They like nowt so weel for supper as apple-pies sweetened wi' treacle, crust stout and leathery, as stands chewing, and we hannot gotten in our apples yet.'

'If Molly is in t' orchard, I'll go find her,' said Sylvia.

'Well! yo' lasses will have your conks' (private talks), 'a know; secrets 'bout sweethearts and such like,' said Mrs. Corney, with a knowing look, which made Sylvia hate her for the moment. 'A've not forgotten as a were young mysen. Tak' care; there's a pool o' mucky watter just outside t' back-door.'

But Sylvia was half-way across the back-yard—worse, if possible, than the front as to the condition in which it was kept—and had passed through the little gate into the orchard. It was full of old gnarled apple-trees, their trunks covered with gray lichen, in which the cunning chaffinch built her nest in spring-time. The cankered branches remained on the trees, and added to the knotted interweaving overhead, if they did not to the productiveness; the grass grew in long tufts, and was wet and tangled under foot. There was a tolerable crop of rosy apples still hanging on the gray old trees, and here and there they showed ruddy in the green bosses of untrimmed grass. Why the fruit was not gathered, as it was evidently ripe, would have puzzled any one not acquainted with the Corney family to say; but to them it was always a maxim in practice, if not in precept, 'Do nothing to-day that you can put off till to-morrow,' and accordingly the apples dropped from the trees at any little gust of wind, and lay rotting on the ground until the 'lads' wanted a supply of pies for supper.

Molly saw Sylvia, and came quickly across the orchard to meet her, catching her feet in knots of grass as she hurried along.

Page 42

'Well, lass!' said she, 'who'd ha' thought o' seeing yo' such a day as it has been?'

'But it's cleared up now beautiful,' said Sylvia, looking up at the soft evening sky, to be seen through the apple boughs. It was of a tender, delicate gray, with the faint warmth of a promising sunset tinging it with a pink atmosphere. 'Rain is over and gone, and I wanted to know how my cloak is to be made; for Donkin 's working at our house, and I wanted to know all about—the news, yo' know.'

'What news?' asked Molly, for she had heard of the affair between the *Good Fortune* and the *Aurora* some days before; and, to tell the truth, it had rather passed out of her head just at this moment.

'Hannot yo' heard all about t' press-gang and t' whaler, and t' great fight, and Kinraid, as is your cousin, acting so brave and grand, and lying on his death-bed now?'

'Oh!' said Molly, enlightened as to Sylvia's 'news,' and half surprised at the vehemence with which the little creature spoke; 'yes; a heerd that days ago. But Charley's noane on his death-bed, he's a deal better; an' mother says as he's to be moved up here next week for nursin' and better air nor he gets i' t' town yonder.'

'Oh! I am so glad,' said Sylvia, with all her heart. 'I thought he'd maybe die, and I should niver see him.'

'A'll promise yo' shall see him; that's t' say if a' goes on well, for he's gotten an ugly hurt. Mother says as there's four blue marks on his side as'll last him his life, an' t' doctor fears bleeding i' his inside; and then he'll drop down dead when no one looks for 't.'

'But you said he was better,' said Sylvia, blanching a little at this account.

'Ay, he's better, but life's uncertain, special after gun-shot wounds.'

'He acted very fine,' said Sylvia, meditating.

'A allays knowed he would. Many's the time a've heerd him say "honour bright," and now he's shown how bright his is.'

Molly did not speak sentimentally, but with a kind of proprietorship in Kinraid's honour, which confirmed Sylvia in her previous idea of a mutual attachment between her and her cousin. Considering this notion, she was a little surprised at Molly's next speech.

'An' about yer cloak, are you for a hood or a cape? a reckon that's the question.'

'Oh, I don't care! tell me more about Kinraid. Do yo' really think he'll get better?'



'Dear! how t' lass takes on about him. A'll tell him what a deal of interest a young woman taks i' him!'

From that time Sylvia never asked another question about him. In a somewhat dry and altered tone, she said, after a little pause—

'I think on a hood. What do you say to it?'

Page 43

'Well; hoods is a bit old-fashioned, to my mind. If 't were mine, I'd have a cape cut i' three points, one to tie on each shoulder, and one to dip down handsome behind. But let yo' an' me go to Monkshaven church o' Sunday, and see Measter Fishburn's daughters, as has their things made i' York, and notice a bit how they're made. We needn't do it i' church, but just scan 'em o'er i' t' churchyard, and there'll be no harm done. Besides, there's to be this grand burryin' o' t' man t' press-gang shot, and 't will be like killing two birds at once.'

'I should like to go,' said Sylvia. 'I feel so sorry like for the poor sailors shot down and kidnapped just as they was coming home, as we see'd 'em o' Thursday last. I'll ask mother if she'll let me go.'

'Ay, do. I know my mother 'll let me, if she doesn't go hersen; for it 'll be a sight to see and to speak on for many a long year, after what I've heerd. And Miss Fishburns is sure to be theere, so I'd just get Donkin to cut out cloak itsel', and keep back yer mind fra' fixing o' either cape or hood till Sunday's turn'd.'

'Will yo' set me part o' t' way home?' said Sylvia, seeing the dying daylight become more and more crimson through the blackening trees.

'No; I can't. A should like it well enough, but somehow, there's a deal o' work to be done yet, for t' hours slip through one's fingers so as there's no knowing. Mind yo', then, o' Sunday. A'll be at t' stile one o'clock punctual; and we'll go slowly into t' town, and look about us as we go, and see folk's dresses; and go to t' church, and say wer prayers, and come out and have a look at t' funeral.'

And with this programme of proceedings settled for the following Sunday, the girls whom neighbourhood and parity of age had forced into some measure of friendship parted for the time.

Sylvia hastened home, feeling as if she had been absent long; her mother stood on the little knoll at the side of the house watching for her, with her hand shading her eyes from the low rays of the setting sun: but as soon as she saw her daughter in the distance, she returned to her work, whatever that might be. She was not a woman of many words, or of much demonstration; few observers would have guessed how much she loved her child; but Sylvia, without any reasoning or observation, instinctively knew that her mother's heart was bound up in her.

Her father and Donkin were going on much as when she had left them; talking and disputing, the one compelled to be idle, the other stitching away as fast as he talked. They seemed as if they had never missed Sylvia; no more did her mother for that matter, for she was busy and absorbed in her afternoon dairy-work to all appearance. But Sylvia had noted the watching not three minutes before, and many a time in her after life, when no one cared much for her out-goings and in-comings, the straight,



upright figure of her mother, fronting the setting sun, but searching through its blinding rays for a sight of her child, rose up like a sudden-seen picture, the remembrance of which smote Sylvia to the heart with a sense of a lost blessing, not duly valued while possessed.

Page 44

'Well, feyther, and how's a' wi' you?' asked Sylvia, going to the side of his chair, and laying her hand on his shoulder.

'Eh! harkee till this lass o' mine. She thinks as because she's gone galravergering, I maun ha' missed her and be ailing. Why, lass, Donkin and me has had t' most sensible talk a've had this many a day. A've gi'en him a vast o' knowledge, and he's done me a power o' good. Please God, to-morrow a'll tak' a start at walking, if t' weather holds up.'

'Ay!' said Donkin, with a touch of sarcasm in his voice; 'feyther and me has settled many puzzles; it's been a loss to Government as they hannot been here for profiting by our wisdom. We've done away wi' taxes and press-gangs, and many a plague, and beaten t' French—i' our own minds, that's to say.'

'It's a wonder t' me as those Lunnon folks can't see things clear,' said Daniel, all in good faith.

Sylvia did not quite understand the state of things as regarded politics and taxes—and politics and taxes were all one in her mind, it must be confessed—but she saw that her innocent little scheme of giving her father the change of society afforded by Donkin's coming had answered; and in the gladness of her heart she went out and ran round the corner of the house to find Kester, and obtain from him that sympathy in her success which she dared not ask from her mother.

'Kester, Kester, lad!' said she, in a loud whisper; but Kester was suppering the horses, and in the clump of their feet on the round stable pavement, he did not hear her at first. She went a little farther into the stable. 'Kester! he's a vast better, he'll go out to-morrow; it's all Donkin's doing. I'm beholden to thee for fetching him, and I'll try and spare thee waistcoat fronts out o' t' stuff for my new red cloak. Thou'll like that, Kester, won't ta?'

Kester took the notion in slowly, and weighed it.

'Na, lass,' said he, deliberately, after a pause. 'A could na' bear to see thee wi' thy cloak scrimpit. A like t' see a wench look bonny and smart, an' a tak' a kind o' pride in thee, an should be a'most as much hurt i' my mind to see thee i' a pinched cloak as if old Moll's tail here were docked too short. Na, lass, a'se niver got a mirroring glass for t' see mysen in, so what's waistcoats to me? Keep thy stuff to thysen, there's a good wench; but a'se main and glad about t' measter. Place isn't like itsen when he's shut up and cranky.'

He took up a wisp of straw and began rubbing down the old mare, and hissing over his work as if he wished to consider the conversation as ended. And Sylvia, who had strung herself up in a momentary fervour of gratitude to make the generous offer, was not sorry to have it refused, and went back planning what kindness she could show to

Kester without its involving so much sacrifice to herself. For giving waistcoat fronts to him would deprive her of the pleasant power of selecting a fashionable pattern in Monkshaven churchyard next Sunday.

Page 45

That wished-for day seemed long a-coming, as wished-for days most frequently do. Her father got better by slow degrees, and her mother was pleased by the tailor's good pieces of work; showing the neatly-placed patches with as much pride as many matrons take in new clothes now-a-days. And the weather cleared up into a dim kind of autumnal fineness, into anything but an Indian summer as far as regarded gorgeousness of colouring, for on that coast the mists and sea fogs early spoil the brilliancy of the foliage. Yet, perhaps, the more did the silvery grays and browns of the inland scenery conduce to the tranquillity of the time,—the time of peace and rest before the fierce and stormy winter comes on. It seems a time for gathering up human forces to encounter the coming severity, as well as of storing up the produce of harvest for the needs of winter. Old people turn out and sun themselves in that calm St. Martin's summer, without fear of 'the heat o' th' sun, or the coming winter's rages,' and we may read in their pensive, dreamy eyes that they are weaning themselves away from the earth, which probably many may never see dressed in her summer glory again.

Many such old people set out betimes, on the Sunday afternoon to which Sylvia had been so looking forward, to scale the long flights of stone steps—worn by the feet of many generations—which led up to the parish church, placed on a height above the town, on a great green area at the summit of the cliff, which was the angle where the river and the sea met, and so overlooking both the busy crowded little town, the port, the shipping, and the bar on the one hand, and the wide illimitable tranquil sea on the other—types of life and eternity. It was a good situation for that church. Homeward-bound sailors caught sight of the tower of St Nicholas, the first land object of all. They who went forth upon the great deep might carry solemn thoughts with them of the words they had heard there; not conscious thoughts, perhaps—rather a distinct if dim conviction that buying and selling, eating and marrying, even life and death, were not all the realities in existence. Nor were the words that came up to their remembrance words of sermons preached there, however impressive. The sailors mostly slept through the sermons; unless, indeed, there were incidents such as were involved in what were called 'funeral discourses' to be narrated. They did not recognize their daily faults or temptations under the grand aliases befitting their appearance from a preacher's mouth. But they knew the old, oft-repeated words praying for deliverance from the familiar dangers of lightning and tempest; from battle, murder, and sudden death; and nearly every man was aware that he left behind him some one who would watch for the prayer for the preservation of those who travel by land or by water, and think of him, as God-protected the more for the earnestness of the response then given.

Page 46

There, too, lay the dead of many generations; for St. Nicholas had been the parish church ever since Monkshaven was a town, and the large churchyard was rich in the dead. Masters, mariners, ship-owners, seamen: it seemed strange how few other trades were represented in that great plain so full of upright gravestones. Here and there was a memorial stone, placed by some survivor of a large family, most of whom perished at sea:—'Supposed to have perished in the Greenland seas,' 'Shipwrecked in the Baltic,' 'Drowned off the coast of Iceland.' There was a strange sensation, as if the cold sea-winds must bring with them the dim phantoms of those lost sailors, who had died far from their homes, and from the hallowed ground where their fathers lay.

Each flight of steps up to this churchyard ended in a small flat space, on which a wooden seat was placed. On this particular Sunday, all these seats were filled by aged people, breathless with the unusual exertion of climbing. You could see the church stair, as it was called, from nearly every part of the town, and the figures of the numerous climbers, diminished by distance, looked like a busy ant-hill, long before the bell began to ring for afternoon service. All who could manage it had put on a bit of black in token of mourning; it might be very little; an old ribbon, a rusty piece of crape; but some sign of mourning was shown by every one down to the little child in its mother's arms, that innocently clutched the piece of rosemary to be thrown into the grave 'for remembrance.' Darley, the seaman shot by the press-gang, nine leagues off St. Abb's Head, was to be buried to-day, at the accustomed time for the funerals of the poorer classes, directly after evening service, and there were only the sick and their nurse-tenders who did not come forth to show their feeling for the man whom they looked upon as murdered. The crowd of vessels in harbour bore their flags half-mast high; and the crews were making their way through the High Street. The gentlefolk of Monkshaven, full of indignation at this interference with their ships, full of sympathy with the family who had lost their son and brother almost within sight of his home, came in unusual numbers—no lack of patterns for Sylvia; but her thoughts were far otherwise and more suitably occupied. The unwonted sternness and solemnity visible on the countenances of all whom she met awed and affected her. She did not speak in reply to Molly's remarks on the dress or appearance of those who struck her. She felt as if these speeches jarred on her, and annoyed her almost to irritation; yet Molly had come all the way to Monkshaven Church in her service, and deserved forbearance accordingly. The two mounted the steps alongside of many people; few words were exchanged, even at the breathing places, so often the little centres of gossip. Looking over the sea there was not a sail to be seen; it seemed bared of life, as if to be in serious harmony with what was going on inland.

Page 47

The church was of old Norman architecture; low and massive outside: inside, of vast space, only a quarter of which was filled on ordinary Sundays. The walls were disfigured by numerous tablets of black and white marble intermixed, and the usual ornamentation of that style of memorial as erected in the last century, of weeping willows, urns, and drooping figures, with here and there a ship in full sail, or an anchor, where the seafaring idea prevalent through the place had launched out into a little originality. There was no wood-work, the church had been stripped of that, most probably when the neighbouring monastery had been destroyed. There were large square pews, lined with green baize, with the names of the families of the most flourishing ship-owners painted white on the doors; there were pews, not so large, and not lined at all, for the farmers and shopkeepers of the parish; and numerous heavy oaken benches which, by the united efforts of several men, might be brought within earshot of the pulpit. These were being removed into the most convenient situations when Molly and Sylvia entered the church, and after two or three whispered sentences they took their seats on one of these.

The vicar of Monkshaven was a kindly, peaceable old man, hating strife and troubled waters above everything. He was a vehement Tory in theory, as became his cloth in those days. He had two bugbears to fear—the French and the Dissenters. It was difficult to say of which he had the worst opinion and the most intense dread. Perhaps he hated the Dissenters most, because they came nearer in contact with him than the French; besides, the French had the excuse of being Papists, while the Dissenters might have belonged to the Church of England if they had not been utterly depraved. Yet in practice Dr Wilson did not object to dine with Mr. Fishburn, who was a personal friend and follower of Wesley, but then, as the doctor would say, 'Wesley was an Oxford man, and that makes him a gentleman; and he was an ordained minister of the Church of England, so that grace can never depart from him.' But I do not know what excuse he would have alleged for sending broth and vegetables to old Ralph Thompson, a rabid Independent, who had been given to abusing the Church and the vicar, from a Dissenting pulpit, as long as ever he could mount the stairs. However, that inconsistency between Dr Wilson's theories and practice was not generally known in Monkshaven, so we have nothing to do with it.

Dr Wilson had had a very difficult part to play, and a still more difficult sermon to write, during this last week. The Darley who had been killed was the son of the vicar's gardener, and Dr Wilson's sympathies as a man had been all on the bereaved father's side. But then he had received, as the oldest magistrate in the neighbourhood, a letter from the captain of the *Aurora*, explanatory and exculpatory. Darley had been resisting the orders of an officer in his Majesty's service. What would become of due subordination and loyalty, and the interests of the service, and the chances of beating those confounded French, if such conduct as Darley's was to be encouraged? (Poor Darley! he was past all evil effects of human encouragement now!)

Page 48

So the vicar mumbled hastily over a sermon on the text, 'In the midst of life we are in death'; which might have done as well for a baby cut off in a convulsion-fit as for the strong man shot down with all his eager blood hot within him, by men as hot-blooded as himself. But once when the old doctor's eye caught the up-turned, straining gaze of the father Darley, seeking with all his soul to find a grain of holy comfort in the chaff of words, his conscience smote him. Had he nothing to say that should calm anger and revenge with spiritual power? no breath of the comforter to soothe repining into resignation? But again the discord between the laws of man and the laws of Christ stood before him; and he gave up the attempt to do more than he was doing, as beyond his power. Though the hearers went away as full of anger as they had entered the church, and some with a dull feeling of disappointment as to what they had got there, yet no one felt anything but kindly towards the old vicar. His simple, happy life led amongst them for forty years, and open to all men in its daily course; his sweet-tempered, cordial ways; his practical kindness, made him beloved by all; and neither he nor they thought much or cared much for admiration of his talents. Respect for his office was all the respect he thought of; and that was conceded to him from old traditional and hereditary association. In looking back to the last century, it appears curious to see how little our ancestors had the power of putting two things together, and perceiving either the discord or harmony thus produced. Is it because we are farther off from those times, and have, consequently, a greater range of vision? Will our descendants have a wonder about us, such as we have about the inconsistency of our forefathers, or a surprise at our blindness that we do not perceive that, holding such and such opinions, our course of action must be so and so, or that the logical consequence of particular opinions must be convictions which at present we hold in abhorrence? It seems puzzling to look back on men such as our vicar, who almost held the doctrine that the King could do no wrong, yet were ever ready to talk of the glorious Revolution, and to abuse the Stuarts for having entertained the same doctrine, and tried to put it in practice. But such discrepancies ran through good men's lives in those days. It is well for us that we live at the present time, when everybody is logical and consistent. This little discussion must be taken in place of Dr Wilson's sermon, of which no one could remember more than the text half an hour after it was delivered. Even the doctor himself had the recollection of the words he had uttered swept out of his mind, as, having doffed his gown and donned his surplice, he came out of the dusk of his vestry and went to the church-door, looking into the broad light which came upon the plain of the church-yard on the cliffs; for the sun had not yet set, and the pale moon was slowly rising through the silvery mist

Page 49

that obscured the distant moors. There was a thick, dense crowd, all still and silent, looking away from the church and the vicar, who awaited the bringing of the dead. They were watching the slow black line winding up the long steps, resting their heavy burden here and there, standing in silent groups at each landing-place; now lost to sight as a piece of broken, overhanging ground intervened, now emerging suddenly nearer; and overhead the great church bell, with its mediaeval inscription, familiar to the vicar, if to no one else who heard it, I to the grave do summon all, kept on its heavy booming monotone, with which no other sound from land or sea, near or distant, intermingled, except the cackle of the geese on some far-away farm on the moors, as they were coming home to roost; and that one noise from so great a distance seemed only to deepen the stillness. Then there was a little movement in the crowd; a little pushing from side to side, to make a path for the corpse and its bearers—an aggregate of the fragments of room.

With bent heads and spent strength, those who carried the coffin moved on; behind came the poor old gardener, a brown-black funeral cloak thrown over his homely dress, and supporting his wife with steps scarcely less feeble than her own. He had come to church that afternoon, with a promise to her that he would return to lead her to the funeral of her firstborn; for he felt, in his sore perplexed heart, full of indignation and dumb anger, as if he must go and hear something which should exorcize the unwonted longing for revenge that disturbed his grief, and made him conscious of that great blank of consolation which faithfulness produces. And for the time he was faithless. How came God to permit such cruel injustice of man? Permitting it, He could not be good. Then what was life, and what was death, but woe and despair? The beautiful solemn words of the ritual had done him good, and restored much of his faith. Though he could not understand why such sorrow had befallen him any more than before, he had come back to something of his childlike trust; he kept saying to himself in a whisper, as he mounted the weary steps, 'It is the Lord's doing'; and the repetition soothed him unspeakably. Behind this old couple followed their children, grown men and women, come from distant place or farmhouse service; the servants at the vicarage, and many a neighbour, anxious to show their sympathy, and most of the sailors from the crews of the vessels in port, joined in procession, and followed the dead body into the church.

There was too great a crowd immediately within the door for Sylvia and Molly to go in again, and they accordingly betook themselves to the place where the deep grave was waiting, wide and hungry, to receive its dead. There, leaning against the headstones all around, were many standing—looking over the broad and placid sea, and turned to the soft salt air which blew on their hot eyes and rigid faces; for no one spoke of all that number. They were thinking of the violent death of him over whom the solemn words were now being said in the gray old church, scarcely out of their hearing, had not the sound been broken by the measured lapping of the tide far beneath.

Page 50

Suddenly every one looked round towards the path from the churchyard steps. Two sailors were supporting a ghastly figure that, with feeble motions, was drawing near the open grave.

'It's t' specksioneer as tried to save him! It's him as was left for dead!' the people murmured round.

'It's Charley Kinraid, as I'm a sinner!' said Molly, starting forward to greet her cousin.

But as he came on, she saw that all his strength was needed for the mere action of walking. The sailors, in their strong sympathy, had yielded to his earnest entreaty, and carried him up the steps, in order that he might see the last of his messmate. They placed him near the grave, resting against a stone; and he was hardly there before the vicar came forth, and the great crowd poured out of the church, following the body to the grave.

Sylvia was so much wrapt up in the solemnity of the occasion, that she had no thought to spare at the first moment for the pale and haggard figure opposite; much less was she aware of her cousin Philip, who now singling her out for the first time from among the crowd, pressed to her side, with an intention of companionship and protection.

As the service went on, ill-checked sobs rose from behind the two girls, who were among the foremost in the crowd, and by-and-by the cry and the wail became general. Sylvia's tears rained down her face, and her distress became so evident that it attracted the attention of many in that inner circle. Among others who noticed it, the specksioneer's hollow eyes were caught by the sight of the innocent blooming childlike face opposite to him, and he wondered if she were a relation; yet, seeing that she bore no badge of mourning, he rather concluded that she must have been a sweetheart of the dead man.

And now all was over: the rattle of the gravel on the coffin; the last long, lingering look of friends and lovers; the rosemary sprigs had been cast down by all who were fortunate enough to have brought them—and oh! how much Sylvia wished she had remembered this last act of respect—and slowly the outer rim of the crowd began to slacken and disappear.

Now Philip spoke to Sylvia.

'I never dreamt of seeing you here. I thought my aunt always went to Kirk Moorside.'

'I came with Molly Corney,' said Sylvia. 'Mother is staying at home with feyther.'

'How's his rheumatics?' asked Philip.

But at the same moment Molly took hold of Sylvia's hand, and said—



'A want t' get round and speak to Charley. Mother 'll be main and glad to hear as he's gotten out; though, for sure, he looks as though he'd ha' been better in 's bed. Come, Sylvia.'

And Philip, fain to keep with Sylvia, had to follow the two girls close up to the specksioneer, who was preparing for his slow laborious walk back to his lodgings. He stopped on seeing his cousin.

'Well, Molly,' said he, faintly, putting out his hand, but his eye passing her face to look at Sylvia in the background, her tear-stained face full of shy admiration of the nearest approach to a hero she had ever seen.



Page 51

'Well, Charley, a niver was so taken aback as when a saw yo' theere, like a ghost, a-standin' agin a gravestone. How white and wan yo' do look!'

'Ay!' said he, wearily, 'wan and weak enough.'

'But I hope you're getting better, sir,' said Sylvia, in a low voice, longing to speak to him, and yet wondering at her own temerity.

'Thank you, my lass. I'm o'er th' worst.'

He sighed heavily.

Philip now spoke.

'We're doing him no kindness a-keeping him standing here i' t' night-fall, and him so tired.' And he made as though he would turn away. Kinraid's two sailor friends backed up Philip's words with such urgency, that, somehow, Sylvia thought they had been to blame in speaking to him, and blushed excessively with the idea.

'Yo'll come and be nursed at Moss Brow, Charley,' said Molly; and Sylvia dropped her little maidenly curtsy, and said, 'Good-by;' and went away, wondering how Molly could talk so freely to such a hero; but then, to be sure, he was a cousin, and probably a sweetheart, and that would make a great deal of difference, of course.

Meanwhile her own cousin kept close by her side.

CHAPTER VII

TETE-A-TETE.—THE WILL

'And now tell me all about th' folk at home?' said Philip, evidently preparing to walk back with the girls. He generally came to Haytersbank every Sunday afternoon, so Sylvia knew what she had to expect the moment she became aware of his neighbourhood in the churchyard.

'My feyther's been sadly troubled with his rheumatics this week past; but he's a vast better now, thank you kindly.' Then, addressing herself to Molly, she asked, 'Has your cousin a doctor to look after him?'

'Ay, for sure!' said Molly, quickly; for though she knew nothing about the matter, she was determined to suppose that her cousin had everything becoming an invalid as well as a hero. 'He's well-to-do, and can afford everything as he needs,' continued she. 'His feyther's left him money, and he were a farmer out up in Northumberland, and he's

reckoned such a specksioneer as never, never was, and gets what wage he asks for and a share on every whale he harpoons beside.'

'I reckon he'll have to make himself scarce on this coast for awhile, at any rate,' said Philip.

'An' what for should he?' asked Molly, who never liked Philip at the best of times, and now, if he was going to disparage her cousin in any way, was ready to take up arms and do battle.

'Why, they do say as he fired the shot as has killed some o' the men-o'-war's men, and, of course, if he has, he'll have to stand his trial if he's caught.'

'What lies people do say!' exclaimed Molly. 'He niver killed nought but whales, a'll be bound; or, if he did, it were all right and proper as he should, when they were for stealing him an' all t' others, and did kill poor Darley as we come fra' seeming buried. A suppose, now yo're such a Quaker that, if some one was to break through fra' t' other side o' this dyke and offer for to murder Sylvia and me, yo'd look on wi' yo'r hands hanging by yo'r side.'

Page 52

'But t' press-gang had law on their side, and were doing nought but what they'd warrant for.'

'Th' tender's gone away, as if she were ashamed o' what she'd done,' said Sylvia, 'and t' flag's down fra' o'er the Randyvowse. There 'll be no more press-ganging here awhile.'

'No; feyther says,' continued Molly, 'as they've made t' place too hot t' hold 'em, coming so strong afore people had gotten used to their ways o' catchin' up poor lads just come fra' t' Greenland seas. T' folks ha' their blood so up they'd think no harm o' fighting 'em i' t' streets—ay, and o' killing 'em, too, if they were for using fire-arms, as t' *Aurora's* men did.'

'Women is so fond o' bloodshed,' said Philip; 'for t' hear you talk, who'd ha' thought you'd just come fra' crying ower the grave of a man who was killed by violence? I should ha' thought you'd seen enough of what sorrow comes o' fighting. Why, them lads o' t' *Aurora* as they say Kinraid shot down had fathers and mothers, maybe, a looking out for them to come home.'

'I don't think he could ha' killed them,' said Sylvia; 'he looked so gentle.'

But Molly did not like this half-and-half view of the case.

'A dare say he did kill 'em dead; he's not one to do things by halves. And a think he served 'em reet, that's what a do.'

'Is na' this Hester, as serves in Foster's shop?' asked Sylvia, in a low voice, as a young woman came through a stile in the stone wall by the roadside, and suddenly appeared before them.

'Yes,' said Philip. 'Why, Hester, where have you been?' he asked, as they drew near.

Hester reddened a little, and then replied, in her slow, quiet way—

'I've been sitting with Betsy Darley—her that is bed-ridden. It were lonesome for her when the others were away at the burying.'

And she made as though she would have passed; but Sylvia, all her sympathies alive for the relations of the murdered man, wanted to ask more questions, and put her hand on Hester's arm to detain her a moment. Hester suddenly drew back a little, reddened still more, and then replied fully and quietly to all Sylvia asked.

In the agricultural counties, and among the class to which these four persons belonged, there is little analysis of motive or comparison of characters and actions, even at this present day of enlightenment. Sixty or seventy years ago there was still less. I do not mean that amongst thoughtful and serious people there was not much reading of such

books as *Mason on Self-Knowledge* and *Law's Serious Call*, or that there were not the experiences of the Wesleyans, that were related at class-meeting for the edification of the hearers. But, taken as a general ride, it may be said that few knew what manner of men they were, compared to the numbers now who are fully conscious of their virtues, qualities, failings, and weaknesses, and who go about comparing others with themselves—not in a spirit of Pharisaism and arrogance, but with a vivid self-consciousness that more than anything else deprives characters of freshness and originality.

Page 53

To return to the party we left standing on the high-raised footway that ran alongside of the bridle-road to Haytersbank. Sylvia had leisure in her heart to think 'how good Hester is for sitting with the poor bed-ridden sister of Darley!' without having a pang of self-depreciation in the comparison of her own conduct with that she was capable of so fully appreciating. She had gone to church for the ends of vanity, and remained to the funeral for curiosity and the pleasure of the excitement. In this way a modern young lady would have condemned herself, and therefore lost the simple, purifying pleasure of admiration of another.

Hester passed onwards, going down the hill towards the town. The other three walked slowly on. All were silent for a few moments, then Sylvia said—

'How good she is!'

And Philip replied with ready warmth,—

'Yes, she is; no one knows how good but us, who live in the same house wi' her.'

'Her mother is an old Quakeress, bean't she?' Molly inquired.

'Alice Rose is a Friend, if that is what you mean,' said Philip.

'Well, well! some folk's so particular. Is William Coulson a Quaker, by which a mean a Friend?'

'Yes; they're all on 'em right-down good folk.'

'Deary me! What a wonder yo' can speak to such sinners as Sylvia and me, after keepin' company with so much goodness,' said Molly, who had not yet forgiven Philip for doubting Kinraid's power of killing men. 'Is na' it, Sylvia?'

But Sylvia was too highly strung for banter. If she had not been one of those who went to mock, but remained to pray, she had gone to church with the thought of the cloak-that-was-to-be uppermost in her mind, and she had come down the long church stair with life and death suddenly become real to her mind, the enduring sea and hills forming a contrasting background to the vanishing away of man. She was full of a solemn wonder as to the abiding-place of the souls of the dead, and a childlike dread lest the number of the elect should be accomplished before she was included therein. How people could ever be merry again after they had been at a funeral, she could not imagine; so she answered gravely, and slightly beside the question:

'I wonder if I was a Friend if I should be good?'

'Gi' me your red cloak, that's all, when yo' turn Quaker; they'll none let thee wear scarlet, so it 'll be of no use t' thee.'



'I think thou'rt good enough as thou art,' said Philip, tenderly—at least as tenderly as he durst, for he knew by experience that it did not do to alarm her girlish coyness. Either one speech or the other made Sylvia silent; neither was accordant to her mood of mind; so perhaps both contributed to her quietness.

'Folk say William Coulson looks sweet on Hester Rose,' said Molly, always up in Monkshaven gossip. It was in the form of an assertion, but was said in the tone of a question, and as such Philip replied to it.

Page 54

'Yes, I think he likes her a good deal; but he's so quiet, I never feel sure. John and Jeremiah would like the match, I've a notion.'

And now they came to the stile which had filled Philip's eye for some minutes past, though neither of the others had perceived they were so near it; the stile which led to Moss Brow from the road into the fields that sloped down to Haystersbank. Here they would leave Molly, and now would begin the delicious *tete-a-tete* walk, which Philip always tried to make as lingering as possible. To-day he was anxious to show his sympathy with Sylvia, as far as he could read what was passing in her mind; but how was he to guess the multitude of tangled thoughts in that unseen receptacle? A resolution to be good, if she could, and always to be thinking on death, so that what seemed to her now as simply impossible, might come true—that she might 'dread the grave as little as her bed'; a wish that Philip were not coming home with her; a wonder if the specksioneer really had killed a man, an idea which made her shudder; yet from the awful fascination about it, her imagination was compelled to dwell on the tall, gaunt figure, and try to recall the wan countenance; a hatred and desire of revenge on the press-gang, so vehement that it sadly militated against her intention of trying to be good; all these notions, and wonders, and fancies, were whirling about in Sylvia's brain, and at one of their promptings she spoke,—

'How many miles away is t' Greenland seas?—I mean, how long do they take to reach?'

'I don't know; ten days or a fortnight, or more, maybe. I'll ask.'

'Oh! feyther 'll tell me all about it. He's been there many a time.'

'I say, Sylvie! My aunt said I were to give you lessons this winter i' writing and ciphering. I can begin to come up now, two evenings, maybe, a week. T' shop closes early after November comes in.'

Sylvia did not like learning, and did not want him for her teacher; so she answered in a dry little tone,—

'It'll use a deal o' candle-light; mother 'll not like that. I can't see to spell wi'out a candle close at my elbow.'

'Niver mind about candles. I can bring up a candle wi' me, for I should be burning one at Alice Rose's.'

So that excuse would not do. Sylvia beat her brains for another.

'Writing cramps my hand so, I can't do any sewing for a day after; and feyther wants his shirts very bad.'

'But, Sylvia, I'll teach you geography, and ever such a vast o' fine things about t' countries, on t' map.'

'Is t' Arctic seas down on t' map?' she asked, in a tone of greater interest.

'Yes! Arctics, and tropics, and equator, and equinoctial line; we'll take 'em turn and turn about; we'll do writing and ciphering one night, and geography t' other.'

Philip spoke with pleasure at the prospect, but Sylvia relaxed into indifference.

Page 55

'I'm no scholard; it's like throwing away labour to teach me, I'm such a dunce at my book. Now there's Betsy Corney, third girl, her as is younger than Molly, she'd be a credit to you. There niver was such a lass for pottering ower books.'

If Philip had had his wits about him, he would have pretended to listen to this proposition of a change of pupils, and then possibly Sylvia might have repented making it. But he was too much mortified to be diplomatic.

'My aunt asked me to teach *you* a bit, not any neighbour's lass.'

'Well! if I mun be taught, I mun; but I'd rayther be whipped and ha' done with it,' was Sylvia's ungracious reply.

A moment afterwards, she repented of her little spirit of unkindness, and thought that she should not like to die that night without making friends. Sudden death was very present in her thoughts since the funeral. So she instinctively chose the best method of making friends again, and slipped her hand into his, as he walked a little sullenly at her side. She was half afraid, however, when she found it firmly held, and that she could not draw it away again without making what she called in her own mind a 'fuss.' So, hand in hand, they slowly and silently came up to the door of Haytersbank Farm; not unseen by Bell Robson, who sate in the window-seat, with her Bible open upon her knee. She had read her chapter aloud to herself, and now she could see no longer, even if she had wished to read more; but she gazed out into the darkening air, and a dim look of contentment came like moonshine over her face when she saw the cousins approach.

'That's my prayer day and night,' said she to herself.

But there was no unusual aspect of gladness on her face, as she lighted the candle to give them a more cheerful welcome.

'Wheere's feyther?' said Sylvia, looking round the room for Daniel.

'He's been to Kirk Moorside Church, for t' see a bit o' th' world, as he ca's it. And sin' then he's gone out to th' cattle; for Kester's ta'en his turn of playing hissel', now that father's better.'

'I've been talking to Sylvia,' said Philip, his head still full of his pleasant plan, his hand still tingling from the touch of hers, 'about turning schoolmaster, and coming up here two nights a week for t' teach her a bit o' writing and ciphering.'

'And geography,' put in Sylvia; 'for,' thought she, 'if I'm to learn them things I don't care a pin about, anyhow I'll learn what I do care to know, if it 'll tell me about t' Greenland seas, and how far they're off.'

That same evening, a trio alike in many outward circumstances sate in a small neat room in a house opening out of a confined court on the hilly side of the High Street of Monkshaven—a mother, her only child, and the young man who silently loved that daughter, and was favoured by Alice Rose, though not by Hester.

Page 56

When the latter returned from her afternoon's absence, she stood for a minute or two on the little flight of steep steps, whitened to a snowy whiteness; the aspect of the whole house partook of the same character of irreproachable cleanliness. It was wedged up into a space which necessitated all sorts of odd projections and irregularities in order to obtain sufficient light for the interior; and if ever the being situated in a dusky, confined corner might have been made an excuse for dirt, Alice Rose's house had that apology. Yet the small diamond panes of glass in the casement window were kept so bright and clear that a great sweet-scented-leaved geranium grew and flourished, though it did not flower profusely. The leaves seemed to fill the air with fragrance as soon as Hester summoned up energy enough to open the door. Perhaps that was because the young Quaker, William Coulson, was crushing one between his finger and thumb, while waiting to set down Alice's next words. For the old woman, who looked as if many years of life remained in her yet, was solemnly dictating her last will and testament.

It had been on her mind for many months; for she had something to leave beyond the mere furniture of the house. Something—a few pounds—in the hands of John and Jeremiah Foster, her cousins: and it was they who had suggested the duty on which she was engaged. She had asked William Coulson to write down her wishes, and he had consented, though with some fear and trepidation; for he had an idea that he was infringing on a lawyer's prerogative, and that, for aught he knew, he might be prosecuted for making a will without a licence, just as a man might be punished for selling wine and spirits without going through the preliminary legal forms that give permission for such a sale. But to his suggestion that Alice should employ a lawyer, she had replied—

'That would cost me five pounds sterling; and thee canst do it as well, if thee'll but attend to my words.'

So he had bought, at her desire, a black-edged sheet of fine-wove paper, and a couple of good pens, on the previous Saturday; and while waiting for her to begin her dictation, and full serious thought himself, he had almost unconsciously made the grand flourish at the top of the paper which he had learnt at school, and which was there called a spread-eagle.

'What art thee doing there?' asked Alice, suddenly alive to his proceedings.

Without a word he showed her his handiwork.

'It's a vanity,' said she, 'and 't may make t' will not stand. Folk may think I were na in my right mind, if they see such fly-legs and cob-webs a-top. Write, "This is my doing, William Coulson, and none of Alice Rose's, she being in her sound mind."'

'I don't think it's needed,' said William. Nevertheless he wrote down the words.

'Hast thee put that I'm in my sound mind and seven senses? Then make the sign of the Trinity, and write, "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

Page 57

'Is that the right way o' beginning a will?' said Coulson, a little startled.

'My father, and my father's father, and my husband had it a-top of theirs, and I'm noane going for to cease fra' following after them, for they were godly men, though my husband were o' t' episcopal persuasion.'

'It's done,' said William.

'Hast thee dated it?' asked Alice.

'Nay.'

'Then date it third day, ninth month. Now, art ready?'

Coulson nodded.

'I, Alice Rose, do leave my furniture (that is, my bed and chest o' drawers, for thy bed and things is thine, and not mine), and settle, and saucepans, and dresser, and table, and kettle, and all the rest of my furniture, to my lawful and only daughter, Hester Rose. I think that's safe for her to have all, is 't not, William?'

'I think so, too,' said he, writing on all the time.

'And thee shalt have t' roller and paste-board, because thee's so fond o' puddings and cakes. It 'll serve thy wife after I'm gone, and I trust she'll boil her paste long enough, for that's been t' secret o' mine, and thee'll noane be so easy t' please.'

'I din't reckon on marriage,' said William.

'Thee'll marry,' said Alice. 'Thee likes to have thy victuals hot and comfortable; and there's noane many but a wife as'll look after that for t' please thee.'

'I know who could please me,' sighed forth William, 'but I can't please her.'

Alice looked sharply at him from over her spectacles, which she had put on the better to think about the disposal of her property.

'Thee art thinking on our Hester,' said she, plainly out.

He started a little, but looked up at her and met her eyes.

'Hester cares noane for me,' said he, dejectedly.

'Bide a while, my lad,' said Alice, kindly. 'Young women don't always know their own minds. Thee and her would make a marriage after my own heart; and the Lord has been very good to me hitherto, and I think He'll bring it t' pass. But don't thee let on as

thee cares for her so much. I sometimes think she wearies o' thy looks and thy ways. Show up thy manly heart, and make as though thee had much else to think on, and no leisure for to dawdle after her, and she'll think a deal more on thee. And now mend thy pen for a fresh start. I give and bequeath—did thee put “give and bequeath,” at th' beginning?’

‘Nay,’ said William, looking back. ‘Thee didst not tell me “give and bequeath!”’

‘Then it won’t be legal, and my bit o’ furniture ’ll be taken to London, and put into chancery, and Hester will have noane on it.’

‘I can write it over,’ said William.

Page 58

'Well, write it clear then, and put a line under it to show those are my special words. Hast thee done it? Then now start afresh. I give and bequeath my book o' sermons, as is bound in good calfskin, and lies on the third shelf o' corner cupboard at the right hand o' t' fire-place, to Philip Hepburn; for I reckon he's as fond o' reading sermons as thee art o' light, well-boiled paste, and I'd be glad for each on ye to have somewhat ye like for to remember me by. Is that down? There; now for my cousins John and Jeremiah. They are rich i' world's gear, but they'll prize what I leave 'em if I could only onbethink me what they would like. Hearken! Is na' that our Hester's step? Put it away, quick! I'm noane for grieving her wi' telling her what I've been about. We'll take a turn at t' will next First Day; it will serve us for several Sabbaths to come, and maybe I can think on something as will suit cousin John and cousin Jeremiah afore then.'

Hester, as was mentioned, paused a minute or two before lifting the latch of the door. When she entered there was no unusual sign of writing about; only Will Coulson looking very red, and crushing and smelling at the geranium leaf.

Hester came in briskly, with the little stock of enforced cheerfulness she had stopped at the door to acquire. But it faded away along with the faint flush of colour in her cheeks; and the mother's quick eye immediately noted the wan heavy look of care.

'I have kept t' pot in t' oven; it'll have a'most got a' t' goodness out of t' tea by now, for it'll be an hour since I made it. Poor lass, thou look'st as if thou needed a good cup o' tea. It were dree work sitting wi' Betsy Darley, were it? And how does she look on her affliction?'

'She takes it sore to heart,' said Hester, taking off her hat, and folding and smoothing away her cloak, before putting them in the great oak chest (or 'ark,' as it was called), in which they were laid from Sunday to Sunday.

As she opened the lid a sweet scent of dried lavender and rose-leaves came out. William stepped hastily forwards to hold up the heavy lid for her. She lifted up her head, looked at him full with her serene eyes, and thanked him for his little service. Then she took a creepie-stool and sate down on the side of the fire-place, having her back to the window.

The hearth was of the same spotless whiteness as the steps; all that was black about the grate was polished to the utmost extent; all that was of brass, like the handle of the oven, was burnished bright. Her mother placed the little black earthenware teapot, in which the tea had been stewing, on the table, where cups and saucers were already set for four, and a large plate of bread and butter cut. Then they sate round the table, bowed their heads, and kept silence for a minute or two.

When this grace was ended, and they were about to begin, Alice said, as if without premeditation, but in reality with a keen shrinking of heart out of sympathy with her child

Page 59

'Philip would have been in to his tea by now, I reckon, if he'd been coming.'

William looked up suddenly at Hester; her mother carefully turned her head another way. But she answered quite quietly—

'He'll be gone to his aunt's at Haytersbank. I met him at t' top o' t' Brow, with his cousin and Molly Corney.'

'He's a deal there,' said William.

'Yes,' said Hester. 'It's likely; him and his aunt come from Carlisle-way, and must needs cling together in these strange parts.'

'I saw him at the burying of yon Darley,' said William.

'It were a vast o' people went past th' entry end,' said Alice. 'It were a'most like election time; I were just come back fra' meeting when they were all going up th' church steps. I met yon sailor as, they say, used violence and did murder; he looked like a ghost, though whether it were his bodily wounds, or the sense of his sins stirring within him, it's not for me to say. And by t' time I was back here and settled to my Bible, t' folk were returning, and it were tramp, tramp, past th' entry end for better nor a quarter of an hour.'

'They say Kinraid has gotten slugs and gun-shot in his side,' said Hester.

'He's niver one Charley Kinraid, for sure, as I knowed at Newcastle,' said William Coulson, roused to sudden and energetic curiosity.

'I don't know,' replied Hester; 'they call him just Kinraid; and Betsy Darley says he's t' most daring specksioneer of all that go off this coast to t' Greenland seas. But he's been in Newcastle, for I mind me she said her poor brother met with him there.'

'How didst thee come to know him?' inquired Alice.

'I cannot abide him if it is Charley,' said William. 'He kept company with my poor sister as is dead for better nor two year, and then he left off coming to see her and went wi' another girl, and it just broke her heart.'

'He don't look now as if he iver could play at that game again,' said Alice; 'he has had a warning fra' the Lord. Whether it be a call no one can tell. But to my eyne he looks as if he had been called, and was going.'

'Then he'll meet my sister,' said William, solemnly; 'and I hope the Lord will make it clear to him, then, how he killed her, as sure as he shot down yon sailors; an' if there's a

gnashing o' teeth for murder i' that other place, I reckon he'll have his share on't. He's a bad man yon.'

'Betsy said he were such a friend to her brother as niver was; and he's sent her word and promised to go and see her, first place he goes out to.

But William only shook his head, and repeated his last words,—

'He's a bad man, he is.'

When Philip came home that Sunday night, he found only Alice up to receive him. The usual bedtime in the household was nine o'clock, and it was but ten minutes past the hour; but Alice looked displeased and stern.

'Thee art late, lad,' said she, shortly.

Page 60

'I'm sorry; it's a long way from my uncle's, and I think clocks are different,' said he, taking out his watch to compare it with the round moon's face that told the time to Alice.

'I know nought about thy uncle's, but thee art late. Take thy candle, and begone.'

If Alice made any reply to Philip's 'good-night,' he did not hear it.

CHAPTER VIII

ATTRACTION AND REPULSION

A fortnight had passed over and winter was advancing with rapid strides. In bleak northern farmsteads there was much to be done before November weather should make the roads too heavy for half-fed horses to pull carts through. There was the turf, pared up on the distant moors, and left out to dry, to be carried home and stacked; the brown fern was to be stored up for winter bedding for the cattle; for straw was scarce and dear in those parts; even for thatching, heather (or rather ling) was used. Then there was meat to salt while it could be had; for, in default of turnips and mangold-wurzel, there was a great slaughtering of barren cows as soon as the summer herbage failed; and good housewives stored up their Christmas piece of beef in pickle before Martinmas was over. Corn was to be ground while yet it could be carried to the distant mill; the great racks for oat-cake, that swung at the top of the kitchen, had to be filled. And last of all came the pig-killing, when the second frost set in. For up in the north there is an idea that the ice stored in the first frost will melt, and the meat cured then taint; the first frost is good for nothing but to be thrown away, as they express it.

There came a breathing-time after this last event. The house had had its last autumn cleaning, and was neat and bright from top to bottom, from one end to another. The turf was led; the coal carted up from Monkshaven; the wood stored; the corn ground; the pig killed, and the hams and head and hands lying in salt. The butcher had been glad to take the best parts of a pig of Dame Robson's careful feeding; but there was unusual plenty in the Haytersbank pantry; and as Bell surveyed it one morning, she said to her husband —

'I wonder if yon poor sick chap at Moss Brow would fancy some o' my sausages. They're something to crack on, for they are made fra' an old Cumberland receipt, as is not known i' Yorkshire yet.'

'Thou's allays so set upo' Cumberland ways!' said her husband, not displeased with the suggestion, however. 'Still, when folk's sick they han their fancies, and maybe Kinraid 'll be glad o' thy sausages. I ha' known sick folk tak' t' eating snails.'

This was not complimentary, perhaps. But Daniel went on to say that he did not mind if he stepped over with the sausages himself, when it was too late to do anything else.

Sylvia longed to offer to accompany her father; but, somehow, she did not like to propose it. Towards dusk she came to her mother to ask for the key of the great bureau that stood in the house-place as a state piece of furniture, although its use was to contain the family's best wearing apparel, and stores of linen, such as might be supposed to be more needed upstairs.

Page 61

'What for do yo' want my keys?' asked Bell.

'Only just to get out one of t' damask napkins.'

'The best napkins, as my mother span?'

'Yes!' said Sylvia, her colour heightening. 'I thought as how it would set off t' sausages.'

'A good clean homespun cloth will serve them better,' said Bell, wondering in her own mind what was come over the girl, to be thinking of setting off sausages that were to be eaten, not to be looked at like a picture-book. She might have wondered still more, if she had seen Sylvia steal round to the little flower border she had persuaded Kester to make under the wall at the sunny side of the house, and gather the two or three Michaelmas daisies, and the one bud of the China rose, that, growing against the kitchen chimney, had escaped the frost; and then, when her mother was not looking, softly open the cloth inside of the little basket that contained the sausages and a fresh egg or two, and lay her autumn blossoms in one of the folds of the towel.

After Daniel, now pretty clear of his rheumatism, had had his afternoon meal (tea was a Sunday treat), he prepared to set out on his walk to Moss Brow; but as he was taking his stick he caught the look on Sylvia's face; and unconsciously interpreted its dumb wistfulness.

'Missus,' said he, 't' wench has nought more t' do, has she? She may as well put on her cloak and step down wi' me, and see Molly a bit; she'll be company like.'

Bell considered.

'There's t' yarn for thy stockings as is yet to spin; but she can go, for I'll do a bit at 't mysel', and there's nought else agate.'

'Put on thy things in a jiffy, then, and let's be off,' said Daniel.

And Sylvia did not need another word. Down she came in a twinkling, dressed in her new red cloak and hood, her face peeping out of the folds of the latter, bright and blushing.

'Thou should'st na' ha' put on thy new cloak for a night walk to Moss Brow,' said Bell, shaking her head.

'Shall I go take it off, and put on my shawl?' asked Sylvia, a little dolefully.

'Na, na, come along! a'm noane goin' for t' wait o' women's chops and changes. Come along; come, Lassie!' (this last to his dog).

So Sylvia set off with a dancing heart and a dancing step, that had to be restrained to the sober gait her father chose. The sky above was bright and clear with the light of a thousand stars, the grass was crisping under their feet with the coming hoar frost; and as they mounted to the higher ground they could see the dark sea stretching away far below them. The night was very still, though now and then crisp sounds in the distant air sounded very near in the silence. Sylvia carried the basket, and looked like little Red Riding Hood. Her father had nothing to say, and did not care to make himself agreeable; but Sylvia enjoyed her own thoughts, and any conversation would have been a disturbance to her. The long

Page 62

monotonous roll of the distant waves, as the tide bore them in, the multitudinous rush at last, and then the retreating rattle and trickle, as the baffled waters fell back over the shingle that skirted the sands, and divided them from the cliffs; her father's measured tread, and slow, even movement; Lassie's pattering—all lulled Sylvia into a reverie, of which she could not have given herself any definite account. But at length they arrived at Moss Brow, and with a sudden sigh she quitted the subjects of her dreamy meditations, and followed her father into the great house-place. It had a more comfortable aspect by night than by day. The fire was always kept up to a wasteful size, and the dancing blaze and the partial light of candles left much in shadow that was best ignored in such a disorderly family. But there was always a warm welcome to friends, however roughly given; and after the words of this were spoken, the next rose up equally naturally in the mind of Mrs Corney.

'And what will ye tak'? Eh! but t' measter 'll be fine and vexed at your comin' when he's away. He's off to Horncastle t' sell some colts, and he'll not be back till to-morrow's neet. But here's Charley Kinraid as we've gotten to nurse up a bit, and' t' lads 'll be back fra' Monkshaven in a crack o' no time.'

All this was addressed to Daniel, to whom she knew that none but masculine company would be acceptable. Amongst uneducated people—whose range of subjects and interest do not extend beyond their daily life—it is natural that when the first blush and hurry of youth is over, there should be no great pleasure in the conversation of the other sex. Men have plenty to say to men, which in their estimation (gained from tradition and experience) women cannot understand; and farmers of a much later date than the one of which I am writing, would have contemptuously considered it as a loss of time to talk to women; indeed, they were often more communicative to the sheep-dog that accompanied them through all the day's work, and frequently became a sort of dumb confidant. Farmer Robson's Lassie now lay down at her master's feet, placed her nose between her paws, and watched with attentive eyes the preparations going on for refreshments—preparations which, to the disappointment of her canine heart, consisted entirely of tumblers and sugar.

'Where's t' wench?' said Robson, after he had shaken hands with Kinraid, and spoken a few words to him and to Mrs. Corney. 'She's gotten' a basket wi' sausages in 'em, as my missus has made, and she's a rare hand at sausages; there's noane like her in a' t' three Ridings, I'll be bound!'

For Daniel could praise his wife's powers in her absence, though he did not often express himself in an appreciative manner when she was by to hear. But Sylvia's quick sense caught up the manner in which Mrs. Corney would apply the way in which her mother's housewifery had been exalted, and stepping forwards out of the shadow, she said,—

Page 63

'Mother thought, maybe, you hadn't killed a pig yet, and sausages is always a bit savoury for any one who is na' well, and——'

She might have gone on but that she caught Kinraid's eyes looking at her with kindly admiration. She stopped speaking, and Mrs. Corney took up the word—

'As for sausages, I ha' niver had a chance this year, else I stand again any one for t' making of 'em. Yorkshire hams 's a vast thought on, and I'll niver let another county woman say as she can make better sausages nor me. But, as I'm saying, I'd niver a chance; for our pig, as I were sa fond on, and fed mysel', and as would ha' been fourteen stone by now if he were an ounce, and as knew me as well as any Christian, and a pig, as I may say, that I just idolized, went and took a fit a week after Michaelmas Day, and died, as if it had been to spite me; and t' next is na' ready for killing, nor wunnot be this six week. So I'm much beholden to your missus, and so's Charley, I'm sure; though he's ta'en a turn to betterin' sin' he came out here to be nursed.'

'I'm a deal better,' said Kinraid; 'a'most ready for t' press-gang to give chase to again.'

'But folk say they're gone off this coast for one while,' added Daniel.

'They're gone down towards Hull, as I've been told,' said Kinraid. 'But they're a deep set, they'll be here before we know where we are, some of these days.'

'See thee here!' said Daniel, exhibiting his maimed hand; 'a reckon a served 'em out time o' t' Ameriky war.' And he began the story Sylvia knew so well; for her father never made a new acquaintance but what he told him of his self-mutilation to escape the press-gang. It had been done, as he would himself have owned, to spite himself as well as them; for it had obliged him to leave a sea-life, to which, in comparison, all life spent on shore was worse than nothing for dulness. For Robson had never reached that rank aboard ship which made his being unable to run up the rigging, or to throw a harpoon, or to fire off a gun, of no great consequence; so he had to be thankful that an opportune legacy enabled him to turn farmer, a great degradation in his opinion. But his blood warmed, as he told the specksioneer, towards a sailor, and he pressed Kinraid to beguile the time when he was compelled to be ashore, by coming over to see him at Haytersbank, whenever he felt inclined.

Sylvia, appearing to listen to Molly's confidences, was hearkening in reality to all this conversation between her father and the specksioneer; and at this invitation she became especially attentive.

Kinraid replied,—

'I'm much obliged to ye, I'm sure; maybe I can come and spend an ev'ning wi' you; but as soon as I'm got round a bit, I must go see my own people as live at Cullercoats near Newcastle-upo'-Tyne.'

'Well, well!' said Daniel, rising to take leave, with unusual prudence as to the amount of his drink. 'Thou'lt see, thou'lt see! I shall be main glad to see thee; if thou'lt come. But I've na' lads to keep thee company, only one sprig of a wench. Sylvia, come here, an let's show thee to this young fellow!'

Page 64

Sylvia came forwards, ruddy as any rose, and in a moment Kinraid recognized her as the pretty little girl he had seen crying so bitterly over Darley's grave. He rose up out of true sailor's gallantry, as she shyly approached and stood by her father's side, scarcely daring to lift her great soft eyes, to have one fair gaze at his face. He had to support himself by one hand rested on the dresser, but she saw he was looking far better—-younger, less haggard—than he had seemed to her before. His face was short and expressive; his complexion had been weatherbeaten and bronzed, though now he looked so pale; his eyes and hair were dark,—the former quick, deep-set, and penetrating; the latter curly, and almost in ringlets. His teeth gleamed white as he smiled at her, a pleasant friendly smile of recognition; but she only blushed the deeper, and hung her head.

'I'll come, sir, and be thankful. I daresay a turn'll do me good, if the weather holds up, an' th' frost keeps on.'

'That's right, my lad,' said Robson, shaking him by the hand, and then Kinraid's hand was held out to Sylvia, and she could not avoid the same friendly action.

Molly Corney followed her to the door, and when they were fairly outside, she held Sylvia back for an instant to say,—

'Is na' he a fine likely man? I'm so glad as yo've seen him, for he's to be off next week to Newcastle and that neighbourhood.'

'But he said he'd come to us some night?' asked Sylvia, half in a fright.

'Ay, I'll see as he does; never fear. For I should like yo' for to know him a bit. He's a rare talker. I'll mind him o' coming to yo'.'

Somehow, Sylvia felt as if this repeated promise of reminding Kinraid of his promise to come and see her father took away part of the pleasure she had anticipated from his visit. Yet what could be more natural than that Molly Corney should wish her friend to be acquainted with the man whom Sylvia believed to be all but Molly's engaged lover?

Pondering these thoughts, the walk home was as silent as that going to Moss Brow had been. The only change seemed to be that now they faced the brilliant northern lights flashing up the sky, and that either this appearance or some of the whaling narrations of Kinraid had stirred up Daniel Robson's recollections of a sea ditty, which he kept singing to himself in a low, unmusical voice, the burden of which was, 'for I loves the tossin' say!' Bell met them at the door.

'Well, and here ye are at home again! and Philip has been, Sylvie, to give thee thy ciphering lesson; and he stayed awhile, thinking thou'd be coming back.'

'I'm very sorry,' said Sylvia, more out of deference to her mother's tone of annoyance, than because she herself cared either for her lesson or her cousin's disappointment.

'He'll come again to-morrow night, he says. But thou must take care, and mind the nights he says he'll come, for it's a long way to come for nought.'

Page 65

Sylvia might have repeated her 'I'm very sorry' at this announcement of Philip's intentions; but she restrained herself, inwardly and fervently hoping that Molly would not urge the fulfilment of the specksioneer's promise for to-morrow night, for Philip's being there would spoil all; and besides, if she sate at the dresser at her lesson, and Kinraid at the table with her father, he might hear all, and find out what a dunce she was.

She need not have been afraid. With the next night Hepburn came; and Kinraid did not. After a few words to her mother, Philip produced the candles he had promised, and some books and a quill or two.

'What for hast thou brought candles?' asked Bell, in a half-affronted tone.

Hepburn smiled.

'Sylvia thought it would take a deal of candlelight, and was for making it into a reason not to learn. I should ha' used t' candles if I'd stayed at home, so I just brought them wi' me.'

'Then thou may'st just take them back again,' said Bell, shortly, blowing out that which he had lighted, and placing one of her own on the dresser instead.

Sylvia caught her mother's look of displeasure, and it made her docile for the evening, although she owed her cousin a grudge for her enforced good behaviour.

'Now, Sylvia, here's a copy-book wi' t' Tower o' London on it, and we'll fill it wi' as pretty writing as any in t' North Riding.'

Sylvia sate quite still, unenlivened by this prospect.

'Here's a pen as 'll nearly write of itsel',' continued Philip, still trying to coax her out her sullenness of manner.

Then he arranged her in the right position.

'Don't lay your head down on your left arm, you'll ne'er see to write straight.'

The attitude was changed, but not a word was spoken. Philip began to grow angry at such determined dumbness.

'Are you tired?' asked he, with a strange mixture of crossness and tenderness.

'Yes, very,' was her reply.

'But thou ought'st not to be tired,' said Bell, who had not yet got over the offence to her hospitality; who, moreover, liked her nephew, and had, to boot, a great respect for the learning she had never acquired.

'Mother!' said Sylvia, bursting out, 'what's the use on my writing "Abednego," "Abednego," "Abednego," all down a page? If I could see t' use on 't, I'd ha' axed father to send me t' school; but I'm none wanting to have learning.'

'It's a fine thing, tho', is learning. My mother and my grandmother had it: but th' family came down i' the world, and Philip's mother and me, we had none of it; but I ha' set my heart on thy having it, child.'

'My fingers is stiff,' pleaded Sylvia, holding up her little hand and shaking it.

'Let us take a turn at spelling, then,' said Philip.

'What's t' use on't?' asked captious Sylvia.

'Why, it helps one i' reading an' writing.'

Page 66

‘And what does reading and writing do for one?’

Her mother gave her another of the severe looks that, quiet woman as she was, she could occasionally bestow upon the refractory, and Sylvia took her book and glanced down the column Philip pointed out to her; but, as she justly considered, one man might point out the task, but twenty could not make her learn it, if she did not choose; and she sat herself down on the edge of the dresser, and idly gazed into the fire. But her mother came round to look for something in the drawers of the dresser, and as she passed her daughter she said in a low voice—

‘Sylvie, be a good lass. I set a deal o’ store by learning, and father ‘ud never send thee to school, as has stuck by me sore.’

If Philip, sitting with his back to them, heard these words he was discreet enough not to show that he heard. And he had his reward; for in a very short time, Sylvia stood before him with her book in her hand, prepared to say her spelling. At which he also stood up by instinct, and listened to her slow succeeding letters; helping her out, when she looked up at him with a sweet childlike perplexity in her face: for a dunce as to book-learning poor Sylvia was and was likely to remain; and, in spite of his assumed office of schoolmaster, Philip Hepburn could almost have echoed the words of the lover of Jess MacFarlane—

I sent my love a letter,
But, alas! she canna read,
And I lo’e her a’ the better.

Still he knew his aunt’s strong wish on the subject, and it was very delightful to stand in the relation of teacher to so dear and pretty, if so wilful, a pupil.

Perhaps it was not very flattering to notice Sylvia’s great joy when her lessons were over, sadly shortened as they were by Philip’s desire not to be too hard upon her. Sylvia danced round to her mother, bent her head back, and kissed her face, and then said defyingly to Philip,—

‘If iver I write thee a letter it shall just be full of nothing but “Abednego! Abednego! Abednego!”’

But at this moment her father came in from a distant expedition on the moors with Kester to look after the sheep he had pasturing there before the winter set fairly in. He was tired, and so was Lassie, and so, too, was Kester, who, lifting his heavy legs one after the other, and smoothing down his hair, followed his master into the house-place, and seating himself on a bench at the farther end of the dresser, patiently awaited the supper of porridge and milk which he shared with his master. Sylvia, meanwhile, coaxed Lassie—poor footsore dog—to her side, and gave her some food, which the

creature was almost too tired to eat. Philip made as though he would be going, but Daniel motioned to him to be quiet.

‘Sit thee down, lad. As soon as I’ve had my victual, I want t’ hear a bit o’ news.’

Sylvia took her sewing and sat at the little round table by her mother, sharing the light of the scanty dip-candle. No one spoke. Every one was absorbed in what they were doing. What Philip was doing was, gazing at Sylvia—learning her face off by heart.

Page 67

When every scrap of porridge was cleared out of the mighty bowl, Kester yawned, and wishing good-night, withdrew to his loft over the cow-house. Then Philip pulled out the weekly York paper, and began to read the latest accounts of the war then raging. This was giving Daniel one of his greatest pleasures; for though he could read pretty well, yet the double effort of reading and understanding what he read was almost too much for him. He could read, or he could understand what was read aloud to him; reading was no pleasure, but listening was.

Besides, he had a true John Bullish interest in the war, without very well knowing what the English were fighting for. But in those days, so long as they fought the French for any cause, or for no cause at all, every true patriot was satisfied. Sylvia and her mother did not care for any such far-extended interest; a little bit of York news, the stealing of a few apples out of a Scarborough garden that they knew, was of far more interest to them than all the battles of Nelson and the North.

Philip read in a high-pitched and unnatural tone of voice, which deprived the words of their reality; for even familiar expressions can become unfamiliar and convey no ideas, if the utterance is forced or affected. Philip was somewhat of a pedant; yet there was a simplicity in his pedantry not always to be met with in those who are self-taught, and which might have interested any one who cared to know with what labour and difficulty he had acquired the knowledge which now he prized so highly; reading out Latin quotations as easily as if they were English, and taking a pleasure in rolling polysyllables, until all at once looking askance at Sylvia, he saw that her head had fallen back, her pretty rosy lips open, her eyes fast shut; in short, she was asleep.

'Ay,' said Farmer Robson, 'and t' reading has a'most sent me off. Mother 'd look angry now if I was to tell yo' yo' had a right to a kiss; but when I was a young man I'd ha' kissed a pretty girl as I saw asleep, afore yo'd said Jack Robson.'

Philip trembled at these words, and looked at his aunt. She gave him no encouragement, standing up, and making as though she had never heard her husband's speech, by extending her hand, and wishing him 'good-night.' At the noise of the chairs moving over the flag floor, Sylvia started up, confused and annoyed at her father's laughter.

'Ay, lass; it's iver a good time t' fall asleep when a young fellow is by. Here's Philip here as thou'rt bound t' give a pair o' gloves to.'

Sylvia went like fire; she turned to her mother to read her face.

'It's only father's joke, lass,' said she. 'Philip knows manners too well.'



'He'd better,' said Sylvia, flaming round at him. 'If he'd a touched me, I'd niver ha' spoken to him no more.' And she looked even as it was as if she was far from forgiving him.

'Hoots, lass! wenches are brought up sa mim, now-a-days; i' my time they'd ha' thought na' such great harm of a kiss.'

Page 68

'Good-night, Philip,' said Bell Robson, thinking the conversation unseemly.

'Good-night, aunt, good-night, Sylvie!' But Sylvia turned her back on him, and he could hardly say 'good-night' to Daniel, who had caused such an unpleasant end to an evening that had at one time been going on so well.

CHAPTER IX

THE SPECKSIONEER

A few days after, Farmer Robson left Haytersbank betimes on a longish day's journey, to purchase a horse. Sylvia and her mother were busied with a hundred household things, and the early winter's evening closed in upon them almost before they were aware. The consequences of darkness in the country even now are to gather the members of a family together into one room, and to make them settle to some sedentary employment; and it was much more the case at the period of my story, when candles were far dearer than they are at present, and when one was often made to suffice for a large family.

The mother and daughter hardly spoke at all when they sat down at last. The cheerful click of the knitting-needles made a pleasant home-sound; and in the occasional snatches of slumber that overcame her mother, Sylvia could hear the long-rushing boom of the waves, down below the rocks, for the Haytersbank gulley allowed the sullen roar to come up so far inland. It might have been about eight o'clock—though from the monotonous course of the evening it seemed much later—when Sylvia heard her father's heavy step cranching down the pebbly path. More unusual, she heard his voice talking to some companion.

Curious to see who it could be, with a lively instinctive advance towards any event which might break the monotony she had begun to find somewhat dull, she sprang up to open the door. Half a glance into the gray darkness outside made her suddenly timid, and she drew back behind the door as she opened it wide to admit her father and Kinraid.

Daniel Robson came in bright and boisterous. He was pleased with his purchase, and had had some drink to celebrate his bargain. He had ridden the new mare into Monkshaven, and left her at the smithy there until morning, to have her feet looked at, and to be new shod. On his way from the town he had met Kinraid wandering about in search of Haytersbank Farm itself, so he had just brought him along with him; and here they were, ready for bread and cheese, and aught else the mistress would set before them.

To Sylvia the sudden change into brightness and bustle occasioned by the entrance of her father and the specksioneer was like that which you may effect any winter's night,

when you come into a room where a great lump of coal lies hot and slumbering on the fire; just break it up with a judicious blow from the poker, and the room, late so dark, and dusk, and lone, is full of life, and light, and warmth.

Page 69

She moved about with pretty household briskness, attending to all her father's wants. Kinraid's eye watched her as she went backwards and forwards, to and fro, into the pantry, the back-kitchen, out of light into shade, out of the shadow into the broad firelight where he could see and note her appearance. She wore the high-crowned linen cap of that day, surmounting her lovely masses of golden brown hair, rather than concealing them, and tied firm to her head by a broad blue ribbon. A long curl hung down on each side of her neck— her throat rather, for her neck was concealed by a little spotted handkerchief carefully pinned across at the waist of her brown stuff gown.

How well it was, thought the young girl, that she had doffed her bed-gown and linsey-woolsey petticoat, her working-dress, and made herself smart in her stuff gown, when she sate down to work with her mother.

By the time she could sit down again, her father and Kinraid had their glasses filled, and were talking of the relative merits of various kinds of spirits; that led on to tales of smuggling, and the different contrivances by which they or their friends had eluded the preventive service; the nightly relays of men to carry the goods inland; the kegs of brandy found by certain farmers whose horses had gone so far in the night, that they could do no work the next day; the clever way in which certain women managed to bring in prohibited goods; in fact, that when a woman did give her mind to smuggling, she was more full of resources, and tricks, and impudence, and energy than any man. There was no question of the morality of the affair; one of the greatest signs of the real progress we have made since those times seems to be that our daily concerns of buying and selling, eating and drinking, whatsoever we do, are more tested by the real practical standard of our religion than they were in the days of our grandfathers. Neither Sylvia nor her mother was in advance of their age. Both listened with admiration to the ingenious devices, and acted as well as spoken lies, that were talked about as fine and spirited things. Yet if Sylvia had attempted one tithe of this deceit in her every-day life, it would have half broken her mother's heart. But when the duty on salt was strictly and cruelly enforced, making it penal to pick up rough dirty lumps containing small quantities that might be thrown out with the ashes of the brine-houses on the high-roads; when the price of this necessary was so increased by the tax upon it as to make it an expensive, sometimes an unattainable, luxury to the working man, Government did more to demoralise the popular sense of rectitude and uprightness than heaps of sermons could undo. And the same, though in smaller measure, was the consequence of many other taxes. It may seem curious to trace up the popular standard of truth to taxation; but I do not think the idea would be so very far-fetched.

From smuggling adventures it was easy to pass on to stories of what had happened to Robson, in his youth a sailor in the Greenland seas, and to Kinraid, now one of the best harpooners in any whaler that sailed off the coast.

Page 70

'There's three things to be afeared on,' said Robson, authoritatively: 'there's t' ice, that's bad; there's dirty weather, that's worse; and there's whales theirselves, as is t' worst of all; leastways, they was i' my days; t' darned brutes may ha' larnt better manners sin'. When I were young, they could niver be got to let theirsels be harpooned wi'out flounderin' and makin' play wi' their tales and their fins, till t' say were all in a foam, and t' boats' crews was all o'er wi' spray, which i' them latitudes is a kind o' shower-bath not needed.'

'Th' whales hasn't mended their manners, as you call it,' said Kinraid; 'but th' ice is not to be spoken lightly on. I were once in th' ship *John* of Hull, and we were in good green water, and were keen after whales; and ne'er thought harm of a great gray iceberg as were on our lee-bow, a mile or so off; it looked as if it had been there from the days of Adam, and were likely to see th' last man out, and it ne'er a bit bigger nor smaller in all them thousands and thousands o' years. Well, the fast-boats were out after a fish, and I were specksioneer in one; and we were so keen after capturing our whale, that none on us ever saw that we were drifting away from them right into deep shadow o' th' iceberg. But we were set upon our whale, and I harpooned it; and as soon as it were dead we lashed its fins together, and fastened its tail to our boat; and then we took breath and looked about us, and away from us a little space were th' other boats, wi' two other fish making play, and as likely as not to break loose, for I may say as I were th' best harpooner on board the *John*, wi'out saying great things o' mysel'. So I says, "My lads, one o' you stay i' th' boat by this fish,"—the fins o' which, as I said, I'd reeved a rope through mysel', and which was as dead as Noah's grandfather—"and th' rest on us shall go off and help th' other boats wi' their fish." For, you see, we had another boat close by in order to sweep th' fish. (I suppose they swept fish i' your time, master?)'

'Ay, ay!' said Robson; 'one boat lies still holding t' end o' t' line; t' other makes a circuit round t' fish.'

'Well! luckily for us we had our second boat, for we all got into it, ne'er a man on us was left i' th' fast-boat. And says I, "But who's to stay by t' dead fish?" And no man answered, for they were all as keen as me for to go and help our mates; and we thought as we could come back to our dead fish, as had a boat for a buoy, once we had helped our mates. So off we rowed, every man Jack on us, out o' the black shadow o' th' iceberg, as looked as steady as th' pole-star. Well! we had na' been a dozen fathoms away fra' th' boat as we had left, when crash! down wi' a roaring noise, and then a gulp of the deep waters, and then a shower o' blinding spray; and when we had wiped our eyes clear, and gotten our hearts down agen fra' our mouths, there were never a boat nor a glittering belly o' e'er

Page 71

a great whale to be seen; but th' iceberg were there, still and grim, as if a hundred ton or more had fallen off all in a mass, and crushed down boat, and fish, and all, into th' deep water, as goes half through the earth in them latitudes. Th' coal-miners round about Newcastle way may come upon our good boat if they mine deep enough, else ne'er another man will see her. And I left as good a clasp-knife in her as ever I clapt eyes on.'

'But what a mercy no man stayed in her,' said Bell.

'Why, mistress, I reckon we a' must die some way; and I'd as soon go down into the deep waters as be choked up wi' moulds.'

'But it must be so cold,' said Sylvia, shuddering and giving a little poke to the fire to warm her fancy.

'Cold!' said her father, 'what do ye stay-at-homes know about cold, a should like to know? If yo'd been where a were once, north latitude 81, in such a frost as ye ha' niver known, no, not i' deep winter, and it were June i' them seas, and a whale i' sight, and a were off in a boat after her: an' t' ill-mannered brute, as soon as she were harpooned, ups wi' her big awkward tail, and struck t' boat i' her stern, and chucks me out into t' watter. That were cold, a can tell the'! First, I smarted all ower me, as if my skin were suddenly stript off me: and next, ivery bone i' my body had gotten t' toothache, and there were a great roar i' my ears, an' a great dizziness i' my eyes; an' t' boat's crew kept throwin' out their oars, an' a kept clutchin' at 'em, but a could na' make out where they was, my eyes dazzled so wi' t' cold, an' I thought I were bound for "kingdom come," an' a tried to remember t' Creed, as a might die a Christian. But all a could think on was, "What is your name, M or N?" an' just as a were giving up both words and life, they heaved me aboard. But, bless ye, they had but one oar; for they'd thrown a' t' others after me; so yo' may reckon, it were some time afore we could reach t' ship; an' a've heerd tell, a were a precious sight to look on, for my clothes was just hard frozen to me, an' my hair a'most as big a lump o' ice as yon iceberg he was a-telling us on; they rubbed me as missus there were rubbing t' hams yesterday, and gav' me brandy; an' a've niver gotten t' frost out o' my bones for a' their rubbin', and a deal o' brandy as I 'ave ta'en sin'. Talk o' cold! it's little yo' women known o' cold!'

'But there's heat, too, i' some places,' said Kinraid. I was once a voyage i' an American. They goes for th' most part south, to where you come round to t' cold again; and they'll stay there for three year at a time, if need be, going into winter harbour i' some o' th' Pacific Islands. Well, we were i' th' southern seas, a-seeking for good whaling-ground; and, close on our larboard beam, there were a great wall o' ice, as much as sixty feet high. And says our captain—as were a dare-devil, if ever a man were—"There'll be an opening in yon dark gray wall, and into that

Page 72

opening I'll sail, if I coast along it till th' day o' judgment." But, for all our sailing, we never seemed to come nearer to th' opening. The waters were rocking beneath us, and the sky were steady above us; and th' ice rose out o' the waters, and seemed to reach up into the sky. We sailed on, and we sailed on, for more days nor I could count. Our captain were a strange, wild man, but once he looked a little pale when he came upo' deck after his turn-in, and saw the green-gray ice going straight up on our beam. Many on us thought as the ship were bewitched for th' captain's words; and we got to speak low, and to say our prayers o' nights, and a kind o' dull silence came into th' very air; our voices did na' rightly seem our own. And we sailed on, and we sailed on. All at once, th' man as were on watch gave a cry: he saw a break in the ice, as we'd begun to think were everlasting; and we all gathered towards the bows, and the captain called to th' man at the helm to keep her course, and cocked his head, and began to walk the quarter-deck jaunty again. And we came to a great cleft in th' long weary rock of ice; and the sides o' th' cleft were not jagged, but went straight sharp down into th' foaming waters. But we took but one look at what lay inside, for our captain, with a loud cry to God, bade the helmsman steer nor'ards away fra' th' mouth o' Hell. We all saw wi' our own eyes, inside that fearsome wall o' ice—seventy miles long, as we could swear to—inside that gray, cold ice, came leaping flames, all red and yellow wi' heat o' some unearthly kind out o' th' very waters o' the sea; making our eyes dazzle wi' their scarlet blaze, that shot up as high, nay, higher than th' ice around, yet never so much as a shred on 't was melted. They did say that some beside our captain saw the black devils dart hither and thither, quicker than the very flames themselves; anyhow, he saw them. And as he knew it were his own daring as had led him to have that peep at terrors forbidden to any on us afore our time, he just dwined away, and we hadn't taken but one whale afore our captain died, and first mate took th' command. It were a prosperous voyage; but, for all that, I'll never sail those seas again, nor ever take wage aboard an American again.'

'Eh, dear! but it's awful t' think o' sitting wi' a man that has seen th' doorway into hell,' said Bell, aghast.

Sylvia had dropped her work, and sat gazing at Kinraid with fascinated wonder.

Daniel was just a little annoyed at the admiration which his own wife and daughter were bestowing on the specksioneer's wonderful stories, and he said—

'Ay, ay. If a'd been a talker, ye'd ha' thought a deal more on me nor ye've iver done yet. A've seen such things, and done such things.'

'Tell us, father!' said Sylvia, greedy and breathless.

Page 73

'Some on 'em is past telling,' he replied, 'an some is not to be had for t' asking, seeing as how they might bring a man into trouble. But, as a said, if a had a fancy to reveal all as is on my mind a could make t' hair on your heads lift up your caps—well, we'll say an inch, at least. Thy mother, lass, has heerd one or two on 'em. Thou minds the story o' my ride on a whale's back, Bell? That'll maybe be within this young fellow's comprehension o' t' danger; thou's heerd me tell it, hasn't ta?'

'Yes,' said Bell; 'but it's a long time ago; when we was courting.'

'An' that's afore this young lass were born, as is a'most up to woman's estate. But sin' those days a ha' been o'er busy to tell stories to my wife, an' as a'll warrant she's forgotten it; an' as Sylvia here niver heerd it, if yo'll fill your glass, Kinraid, yo' shall ha' t' benefit o't.

'A were a specksioneer mysel, though, after that, a rayther directed my talents int' t' smuggling branch o' my profession; but a were once a whaling aboard t' *Ainwell* of Whitby. An' we was anchored off t' coast o' Greenland one season, an' we'd gotten a cargo o' seven whale; but our captain he were a keen-eyed chap, an' niver above doin' any man's work; an' once seein' a whale he throws himself int' a boat an' goes off to it, makin' signals to me, an' another specksioneer as were off for diversion i' another boat, for to come after him sharp. Well, afore we comes alongside, captain had harpooned t' fish; an' says he, "Now, Robson, all ready! give into her again when she comes to t' top;" an' I stands up, right leg foremost, harpoon all ready, as soon as iver I cotched a sight o' t' whale, but niver a fin could a see. 'Twere no wonder, for she were right below t' boat in which a were; and when she wanted to rise, what does t' great ugly brute do but come wi' her head, as is like cast iron, up bang again t' bottom o' t' boat. I were thrown up in t' air like a shuttlecock, me an' my line an' my harpoon—up we goes, an' many a good piece o' timber wi' us, an' many a good fellow too; but a had t' look after mysel', an a were up high i' t' air, afore I could say Jack Robinson, an' a thowt a were safe for another dive int' saut water; but i'stead a comes down plump on t' back o' t' whale. Ay! yo' may stare, master, but theere a were, an' main an' slippery it were, only a sticks my harpoon intil her an' steadies mysel', an' looks abroad o'er t' vast o' waves, and gets sea-sick in a manner, an' puts up a prayer as she mayn't dive, and it were as good a prayer for wishin' it might come true as iver t' clargyman an' t' clerk too puts up i' Monkshaven church. Well, a reckon it were heerd, for all a were i' them north latitudes, for she keeps steady, an' a does my best for t' keep steady; an' 'deed a was too steady, for a was fast wi' t' harpoon line, all knotted and tangled about me. T' captain, he sings out for me to cut it; but it's easy singin' out, and it's

Page 74

noane so easy fumblin' for your knife i' t' pocket o' your drawers, when yo've t' hold hard wi' t' other hand on t' back of a whale, swimmin' fourteen knots an hour. At last a thinks to mysel' a can't get free o' t' line, and t' line is fast to t' harpoon, and t' harpoon is fast to t' whale; and t' whale may go down fathoms deep wheniver t' maggot stirs i' her head; an' t' watter's cold, an noane good for drownin' in; a can't get free o' t' line, and a connot get my knife out o' my breeches pocket though t' captain should ca' it mutiny to disobey orders, and t' line's fast to t' harpoon—let's see if t' harpoon's fast to t' whale. So a tugged, and a lugged, and t' whale didn't mistake it for ticklin', but she cocks up her tail, and throws out showers o' water as were ice or iver it touched me; but a pulls on at t' shank, an' a were only afeard as she wouldn't keep at t' top wi' it sticking in her; but at last t' harpoon broke, an' just i' time, for a reckon she was near as tired o' me as a were on her, and down she went; an' a had hard work to make for t' boats as was near enough to catch me; for what wi' t' whale's being but slippery an' t' watter being cold, an' me hampered wi' t' line an' t' piece o' harpoon, it's a chance, missus, as thou had stopped an oud maid.'

'Eh dear a' me!' said Bell, 'how well I mind yo'r telling me that tale! It were twenty-four year ago come October. I thought I never could think enough on a man as had rode on a whale's back!'

'Yo' may learn t' way of winnin' t' women,' said Daniel, winking at the specksioneer.

And Kinraid immediately looked at Sylvia. It was no premeditated action; it came as naturally as wakening in the morning when his sleep was ended; but Sylvia coloured as red as any rose at his sudden glance,—coloured so deeply that he looked away until he thought she had recovered her composure, and then he sat gazing at her again. But not for long, for Bell suddenly starting up, did all but turn him out of the house. It was late, she said, and her master was tired, and they had a hard day before them next day; and it was keeping Ellen Corney up; and they had had enough to drink,—more than was good for them, she was sure, for they had both been taking her in with their stories, which she had been foolish enough to believe. No one saw the real motive of all this almost inhospitable haste to dismiss her guest, how the sudden fear had taken possession of her that he and Sylvia were 'fancying each other'. Kinraid had said early in the evening that he had come to thank her for her kindness in sending the sausages, as he was off to his own home near Newcastle in a day or two. But now he said, in reply to Daniel Robson, that he would step in another night before long and hear some more of the old man's yarns.

Daniel had just had enough drink to make him very good-tempered, or else his wife would not have dared to have acted as she did; and this maudlin amiability took the shape of hospitable urgency that Kinraid should come as often as he liked to Haytersbank; come and make it his home when he was in these parts; stay there

altogether, and so on, till Bell fairly shut the outer door to, and locked it before the specksioneer had well got out of the shadow of their roof.

Page 75

All night long Sylvia dreamed of burning volcanoes springing out of icy southern seas. But, as in the specksioneer's tale the flames were peopled with demons, there was no human interest for her in the wondrous scene in which she was no actor, only a spectator. With daylight came wakening and little homely every-day wonders. Did Kinraid mean that he was going away really and entirely, or did he not? Was he Molly Corney's sweetheart, or was he not? When she had argued herself into certainty on one side, she suddenly wheeled about, and was just of the opposite opinion. At length she settled that it could not be settled until she saw Molly again; so, by a strong gulping effort, she resolutely determined to think no more about him, only about the marvels he had told. She might think a little about them when she sat at night, spinning in silence by the household fire, or when she went out in the gloaming to call the cattle home to be milked, and sauntered back behind the patient, slow-gaited creatures; and at times on future summer days, when, as in the past, she took her knitting out for the sake of the freshness of the faint sea-breeze, and dropping down from ledge to ledge of the rocks that faced the blue ocean, established herself in a perilous nook that had been her haunt ever since her parents had come to Haytersbank Farm. From thence she had often seen the distant ships pass to and fro, with a certain sort of lazy pleasure in watching their swift tranquillity of motion, but no thought as to where they were bound to, or what strange places they would penetrate to before they turned again, homeward bound.

CHAPTER X

A REFRACTORY PUPIL

Sylvia was still full of the specksioneer and his stories, when Hepburn came up to give her the next lesson. But the prospect of a little sensible commendation for writing a whole page full of flourishing 'Abednegos,' had lost all the slight charm it had ever possessed. She was much more inclined to try and elicit some sympathy in her interest in the perils and adventures of the northern seas, than to bend and control her mind to the right formation of letters. Unwisely enough, she endeavoured to repeat one of the narratives that she had heard from Kinraid; and when she found that Hepburn (if, indeed, he did not look upon the whole as a silly invention) considered it only as an interruption to the real business in hand, to which he would try to listen as patiently as he could, in the hope of Sylvia's applying herself diligently to her copy-book when she had cleared her mind, she contracted her pretty lips, as if to check them from making any further appeals for sympathy, and set about her writing-lesson in a very rebellious frame of mind, only restrained by her mother's presence from spoken mutiny.

Page 76

'After all,' said she, throwing down her pen, and opening and shutting her weary, cramped hand, 'I see no good in tiring myself wi' learning for t' write letters when I've never got one in a' my life. What for should I write answers, when there's niver a one writes to me? and if I had one, I couldn't read it; it's bad enough wi' a book o' print as I've niver seen afore, for there's sure to be new-fangled words in 't. I'm sure I wish the man were farred who plagues his brains wi' striking out new words. Why can't folks just ha' a set on 'em for good and a'?'

'Why! you'll be after using two or three hundred yoursel' every day as you live, Sylvie; and yet I must use a great many as you never think on about t' shop; and t' folks in t' fields want their set, let alone the high English that parsons and lawyers speak.'

'Well, it's weary work is reading and writing. Cannot you learn me something else, if we mun do lessons?'

'There's sums—and geography,' said Hepburn, slowly and gravely.

'Geography!' said Sylvia, brightening, and perhaps not pronouncing the word quite correctly, 'I'd like yo' to learn me geography. There's a deal o' places I want to hear all about.'

'Well, I'll bring up a book and a map next time. But I can tell you something now. There's four quarters in the globe.'

'What's that?' asked Sylvia.

'The globe is the earth; the place we live on.'

'Go on. Which quarter is Greenland?'

'Greenland is no quarter. It is only a part of one.'

'Maybe it's a half quarter.'

'No, not so much as that.'

'Half again?'

'No!' he replied, smiling a little.

She thought he was making it into a very small place in order to tease her; so she pouted a little, and then said,—

'Greenland is all t' geography I want to know. Except, perhaps, York. I'd like to learn about York, because of t' races, and London, because King George lives there.'

'But if you learn geography at all, you must learn 'bout all places: which of them is hot, and which is cold, and how many inhabitants is in each, and what's the rivers, and which is the principal towns.'

'I'm sure, Sylvie, if Philip will learn thee all that, thou'lt be such a sight o' knowledge as ne'er a one o' th' Prestons has been sin' my great-grandfather lost his property. I should be main proud o' thee; 'twould seem as if we was Prestons o' Slaideburn once more.'

'I'd do a deal to pleasure yo', mammy; but weary befa' riches and land, if folks that has 'em is to write "Abednegos" by t' score, and to get hard words int' their brains, till they work like barm, and end wi' cracking 'em.'

Page 77

This seemed to be Sylvia's last protest against learning for the night, for after this she turned docile, and really took pains to understand all that Philip could teach her, by means of the not unskilful, though rude, map which he drew for her with a piece of charred wood on his aunt's dresser. He had asked his aunt's leave before beginning what Sylvia called his 'dirty work;' but by-and-by even she became a little interested in starting from a great black spot called Monkshaven, and in the shaping of land and sea around that one centre. Sylvia held her round chin in the palms of her hands, supporting her elbows on the dresser; looking down at the progress of the rough drawing in general, but now and then glancing up at him with sudden inquiry. All along he was not so much absorbed in his teaching as to be unconscious of her sweet proximity. She was in her best mood towards him; neither mutinous nor saucy; and he was striving with all his might to retain her interest, speaking better than ever he had done before (such brightness did love call forth!)—understanding what she would care to hear and to know; when, in the middle of an attempt at explaining the cause of the long polar days, of which she had heard from her childhood, he felt that her attention was no longer his; that a discord had come in between their minds; that she had passed out of his power. This certainty of intuition lasted but for an instant; he had no time to wonder or to speculate as to what had affected her so adversely to his wishes before the door opened and Kinraid came in. Then Hepburn knew that she must have heard his coming footsteps, and recognized them.

He angrily stiffened himself up into coldness of demeanour. Almost to his surprise, Sylvia's greeting to the new comer was as cold as his own. She stood rather behind him; so perhaps she did not see the hand which Kinraid stretched out towards her, for she did not place her own little palm in it, as she had done to Philip an hour ago. And she hardly spoke, but began to pore over the rough black map, as if seized with strong geographical curiosity, or determined to impress Philip's lesson deep on her memory.

Still Philip was dismayed by seeing the warm welcome which Kinraid received from the master of the house, who came in from the back premises almost at the same time as the specksioneer entered at the front. Hepburn was uneasy, too, at finding Kinraid take his seat by the fireside, like one accustomed to the ways of the house. Pipes were soon produced. Philip disliked smoking. Possibly Kinraid did so too, but he took a pipe at any rate, and lighted it, though he hardly used it at all, but kept talking to farmer Robson on sea affairs. He had the conversation pretty much to himself. Philip sat gloomily by; Sylvia and his aunt were silent, and old Robson smoked his long clay pipe, from time to time taking it out of his mouth to spit into the bright copper spittoon, and to shake the white ashes out of the bowl. Before he replaced it, he would give a short laugh of relishing interest in Kinraid's conversation; and now and then he put in a remark. Sylvia perched herself sideways on the end of the dresser, and made pretence to sew; but Philip could see how often she paused in her work to listen.

Page 78

By-and-by, his aunt spoke to him, and they kept up a little side conversation, more because Bell Robson felt that her nephew, her own flesh and blood, was put out, than for any special interest they either of them felt in what they were saying. Perhaps, also, they neither of them disliked showing that they had no great faith in the stories Kinraid was telling. Mrs. Robson, at any rate, knew so little as to be afraid of believing too much.

Philip was sitting on that side of the fire which was nearest to the window and to Sylvia, and opposite to the specksioneer. At length he turned to his cousin and said in a low voice—

'I suppose we can't go on with our spell at geography till that fellow's gone?'

The colour came into Sylvia's cheek at the words 'that fellow'; but she only replied with a careless air—

'Well, I'm one as thinks enough is as good as a feast; and I've had enough of geography this one night, thank you kindly all the same.'

Philip took refuge in offended silence. He was maliciously pleased when his aunt made so much noise with her preparation for supper as quite to prevent the sound of the sailor's words from reaching Sylvia's ears. She saw that he was glad to perceive that her efforts to reach the remainder of the story were balked! this nettled her, and, determined not to let him have his malicious triumph, and still more to put a stop to any attempt at private conversation, she began to sing to herself as she sat at her work; till, suddenly seized with a desire to help her mother, she dexterously slipped down from her seat, passed Hepburn, and was on her knees toasting cakes right in front of the fire, and just close to her father and Kinraid. And now the noise that Hepburn had so rejoiced in proved his foe. He could not hear the little merry speeches that darted backwards and forwards as the specksioneer tried to take the toasting-fork out of Sylvia's hand.

'How comes that sailor chap here?' asked Hepburn of his aunt. 'He's none fit to be where Sylvia is.'

'Nay, I dunnot know,' said she; 'the Corneys made us acquaint first, and my master is quite fain of his company.'

'And do you like him, too, aunt?' asked Hepburn, almost wistfully; he had followed Mrs. Robson into the dairy on pretence of helping her.

'I'm none fond on him; I think he tells us traveller's tales, by way o' seeing how much we can swallow. But the master and Sylvia think that there never was such a one.'

'I could show them a score as good as he down on the quayside.'

'Well, laddie, keep a calm sough. Some folk like some folk and others don't. Wherever I am there'll allays be a welcome for thee.'

Page 79

For the good woman thought that he had been hurt by the evident absorption of her husband and daughter with their new friend, and wished to make all easy and straight. But do what she would, he did not recover his temper all evening: he was uncomfortable, put out, not enjoying himself, and yet he would not go. He was determined to assert his greater intimacy in that house by outstaying Kinraid. At length the latter got up to go; but before he went, he must needs bend over Sylvia and say something to her in so low a tone that Philip could not hear it; and she, seized with a sudden fit of diligence, never looked up from her sewing; only nodded her head by way of reply. At last he took his departure, after many a little delay, and many a quick return, which to the suspicious Philip seemed only pretences for taking stolen glances at Sylvia. As soon as he was decidedly gone, she folded up her work, and declared that she was so much tired that she must go to bed there and then. Her mother, too, had been dozing for the last half-hour, and was only too glad to see signs that she might betake herself to her natural place of slumber.

‘Take another glass, Philip,’ said farmer Robson.

But Hepburn refused the offer rather abruptly. He drew near to Sylvia instead. He wanted to make her speak to him, and he saw that she wished to avoid it. He took up the readiest pretext. It was an unwise one as it proved, for it deprived him of his chances of occasionally obtaining her undivided attention.

‘I don’t think you care much for learning geography, Sylvie?’

‘Not much to-night,’ said she, making a pretence to yawn, yet looking timidly up at his countenance of displeasure.

‘Nor at any time,’ said he, with growing anger; ‘nor for any kind of learning. I did bring some books last time I came, meaning to teach you many a thing—but now I’ll just trouble you for my books; I put them on yon shelf by the Bible.’

He had a mind that she should bring them to him; that, at any rate, he should have the pleasure of receiving them out of her hands.

Sylvia did not reply, but went and took down the books with a languid, indifferent air.

‘And so you won’t learn any more geography,’ said Hepburn.

Something in his tone struck her, and she looked up in his face. There were marks of stern offence upon his countenance, and yet in it there was also an air of wistful regret and sadness that touched her.

‘Yo’re niver angry with me, Philip? Sooner than vex yo’, I’ll try and learn. Only, I’m just stupid; and it mun be such a trouble to you.’

Hepburn would fain have snatched at this half proposal that the lessons should be continued, but he was too stubborn and proud to say anything. He turned away from the sweet, pleading face without a word, to wrap up his books in a piece of paper. He knew that she was standing quite still by his side, though he made as if he did not perceive her. When he had done he abruptly wished them all 'good-night,' and took his leave.

Page 80

There were tears in Sylvia's eyes, although the feeling in her heart was rather one of relief. She had made a fair offer, and it had been treated with silent contempt. A few days afterwards, her father came in from Monkshaven market, and dropped out, among other pieces of news, that he had met Kinraid, who was bound for his own home at Cullercoats. He had desired his respects to Mrs. Robson and her daughter; and had bid Robson say that he would have come up to Haytersbank to wish them good-by, but that as he was pressed for time, he hoped they would excuse him. But Robson did not think it worth while to give this long message of mere politeness. Indeed, as it did not relate to business, and was only sent to women, Robson forgot all about it, pretty nearly as soon as it was uttered. So Sylvia went about fretting herself for one or two days, at her hero's apparent carelessness of those who had at any rate treated him more like a friend than an acquaintance of only a few weeks' standing; and then, her anger quenching her incipient regard, she went about her daily business pretty much as though he had never been. He had gone away out of her sight into the thick mist of unseen life from which he had emerged—gone away without a word, and she might never see him again. But still there was a chance of her seeing him when he came to marry Molly Corney. Perhaps she should be bridesmaid, and then what a pleasant merry time the wedding-day would be! The Corneys were all such kind people, and in their family there never seemed to be the checks and restraints by which her own mother hedged her round. Then there came an overwhelming self-reproaching burst of love for that 'own mother'; a humiliation before her slightest wish, as penance for the moment's unspoken treason; and thus Sylvia was led to request her cousin Philip to resume his lessons in so meek a manner, that he slowly and graciously acceded to a request which he was yearning to fulfil all the time.

During the ensuing winter, all went on in monotonous regularity at Haytersbank Farm for many weeks. Hepburn came and went, and thought Sylvia wonderfully improved in docility and sobriety; and perhaps also he noticed the improvement in her appearance. For she was at that age when a girl changes rapidly, and generally for the better. Sylvia shot up into a tall young woman; her eyes deepened in colour, her face increased in expression, and a sort of consciousness of unusual good looks gave her a slight tinge of coquettish shyness with the few strangers whom she ever saw. Philip hailed her interest in geography as another sign of improvement. He had brought back his book of maps to the farm; and there he sat on many an evening teaching his cousin, who had strange fancies respecting the places about which she wished to learn, and was coolly indifferent to the very existence of other towns, and countries, and seas far more famous in story. She was occasionally wilful, and at times very contemptuous as to the superior knowledge

Page 81

of her instructor; but, in spite of it all, Philip went regularly on the appointed evenings to Haytersbank—through keen black east wind, or driving snow, or slushing thaw; for he liked dearly to sit a little behind her, with his arm on the back of her chair, she stooping over the outspread map, with her eyes,—could he have seen them,—a good deal fixed on one spot in the map, not Northumberland, where Kinraid was spending the winter, but those wild northern seas about which he had told them such wonders.

One day towards spring, she saw Molly Corney coming towards the farm. The companions had not met for many weeks, for Molly had been from home visiting her relations in the north. Sylvia opened the door, and stood smiling and shivering on the threshold, glad to see her friend again. Molly called out, when a few paces off,—

‘Why, Sylvia, is that thee! Why, how thou’rt growed, to be sure! What a bonny lass thou is!’

‘Dunnot talk nonsense to my lass,’ said Bell Robson, hospitably leaving her ironing and coming to the door; but though the mother tried to look as if she thought it nonsense, she could hardly keep down the smile that shone out of her eyes, as she put her hand on Sylvia’s shoulder, with a fond sense of proprietorship in what was being praised.

‘Oh! but she is,’ persisted Molly. ‘She’s grown quite a beauty sin’ I saw her. And if I don’t tell her so, the men will.’

‘Be quiet wi’ thee,’ said Sylvia, more than half offended, and turning away in a huff at the open barefaced admiration.

‘Ay; but they will,’ persevered Molly. ‘Yo’ll not keep her long, Mistress Robson. And as mother says, yo’d feel it a deal more to have yer daughters left on hand.’

‘Thy mother has many, I have but this one,’ said Mrs. Robson, with severe sadness; for now Molly was getting to talk as she disliked. But Molly’s purpose was to bring the conversation round to her own affairs, of which she was very full.

‘Yes! I tell mother that wi’ so many as she has, she ought to be thankful to t’ one as gets off quickest.’

‘Who? which is it?’ asked Sylvia, a little eagerly, seeing that there was news of a wedding behind the talk.

‘Why! who should it be but me?’ said Molly, laughing a good deal, and reddening a little. ‘I’ve not gone fra’ home for nought; I’ve picked up a measter on my travels, leastways one as is to be.’



'Charley Kinraid,' said Sylvia smiling, as she found that now she might reveal Molly's secret, which hitherto she had kept sacred.

'Charley Kinraid be hung!' said Molly, with a toss of her head. 'Whatten good's a husband who's at sea half t' year? Ha ha, my measter is a canny Newcassel shopkeeper, on t' Side. A reckon a've done pretty well for mysel', and a'll wish yo' as good luck, Sylvia. For yo' see,' (turning to Bell Robson, who, perhaps, she thought would more appreciate the substantial advantages of

Page 82

her engagement than Sylvia,) 'though Measter Brunton is near upon forty if he's a day, yet he turns over a matter of two hundred pound every year; an he's a good-looking man of his years too, an' a kind, good-tempered feller int' t' bargain. He's been married once, to be sure; but his childer are dead a' 'cept one; an' I don't mislike childer either; an' a'll feed 'em well, an' get 'em to bed early, out o' t' road.'

Mrs. Robson gave her her grave good wishes; but Sylvia was silent. She was disappointed; it was a coming down from the romance with the specksioneer for its hero. Molly laughed awkwardly, understanding Sylvia's thoughts better than the latter imagined.

'Sylvia's noane so well pleased. Why, lass! it's a' t' better for thee. There's Charley to t' fore now, which if a'd married him, he'd not ha' been; and he's said more nor once what a pretty lass yo'd grow into by-and-by.'

Molly's prosperity was giving her an independence and fearlessness of talk such as had seldom appeared hitherto; and certainly never before Mrs. Robson. Sylvia was annoyed at Molly's whole tone and manner, which were loud, laughing, and boisterous; but to her mother they were positively repugnant. She said shortly and gravely,—

'Sylvia's none so set upo' matrimony; she's content to bide wi' me and her father. Let a be such talking, it's not i' my way.'

Molly was a little subdued; but still her elation at the prospect of being so well married kept cropping out of all the other subjects which were introduced; and when she went away, Mrs. Robson broke out in an unwonted strain of depreciation.

'That's the way wi' some lasses. They're like a cock on a dunghill, when they've teased a silly chap into wedding 'em. It's cock-a-doodle-do, I've cotched a husband, cock-a-doodle-doo, wi' 'em. I've no patience wi' such like; I beg, Sylvie, thou'lt not get too thick wi' Molly. She's not pretty behaved, making such an ado about men-kind, as if they were two-headed calves to be run after.'

'But Molly's a good-hearted lass, mother. Only I never dreamt but what she was troth-plighted wi' Charley Kinraid,' said Sylvia, meditatively.

'That wench 'll be troth-plight to th' first man as 'll wed her and keep her i' plenty; that's a' she thinks about,' replied Bell, scornfully.

CHAPTER XI

VISIONS OF THE FUTURE

Before May was out, Molly Corney was married and had left the neighbourhood for Newcastle. Although Charley Kinraid was not the bridegroom, Sylvia's promise to be bridesmaid was claimed. But the friendship brought on by the circumstances of neighbourhood and parity of age had become very much weakened in the time that elapsed between Molly's engagement and wedding. In the first place, she herself was so absorbed in her preparations, so elated by her good fortune in getting married, and married, too,

Page 83

before her elder sister, that all her faults blossomed out full and strong. Sylvia felt her to be selfish; Mrs. Robson thought her not maidenly. A year before she would have been far more missed and regretted by Sylvia; now it was almost a relief to the latter to be freed from the perpetual calls upon her sympathy, from the constant demands upon her congratulations, made by one who had no thought or feeling to bestow on others; at least, not in these weeks of 'cock-a-doodle-dooing,' as Mrs. Robson persisted in calling it. It was seldom that Bell was taken with a humorous idea; but this once having hatched a solitary joke, she was always clucking it into notice—to go on with her own poultry simile.

Every time during that summer that Philip saw his cousin, he thought her prettier than she had ever been before; some new touch of colour, some fresh sweet charm, seemed to have been added, just as every summer day calls out new beauty in the flowers. And this was not the addition of Philip's fancy. Hester Rose, who met Sylvia on rare occasions, came back each time with a candid, sad acknowledgement in her heart that it was no wonder that Sylvia was so much admired and loved.

One day Hester had seen her sitting near her mother in the market-place; there was a basket by her, and over the clean cloth that covered the yellow pounds of butter, she had laid the hedge-roses and honeysuckles she had gathered on the way into Monkshaven; her straw hat was on her knee, and she was busy placing some of the flowers in the ribbon that went round it. Then she held it on her hand, and turned it round about, putting her head on one side, the better to view the effect; and all this time, Hester, peeping at her through the folds of the stuffs displayed in Foster's windows, saw her with admiring, wistful eyes; wondering, too, if Philip, at the other counter, were aware of his cousin's being there, so near to him. Then Sylvia put on her hat, and, looking up at Foster's windows, caught Hester's face of interest, and smiled and blushed at the consciousness of having been watched over her little vanities, and Hester smiled back, but rather sadly. Then a customer came in, and she had to attend to her business, which, on this as on all market days, was great. In the midst she was aware of Philip rushing bare-headed out of the shop, eager and delighted at something he saw outside. There was a little looking-glass hung against the wall on Hester's side, placed in that retired corner, in order that the good women who came to purchase head-gear of any kind might see the effect thereof before they concluded their bargain. In a pause of custom, Hester, half-ashamed, stole into this corner, and looked at herself in the glass. What did she see? a colourless face, dark soft hair with no light gleams in it, eyes that were melancholy instead of smiling, a mouth compressed with a sense of dissatisfaction. This was what she had to compare with the bright bonny face in the sunlight outside. She gave a gulp to check the sigh that was rising, and came back, even more patient than she had been before this disheartening peep, to serve all the whims and fancies of purchasers.

Page 84

Sylvia herself had been rather put out by Philip's way of coming to her. 'It made her look so silly,' she thought; and 'what for must he make a sight of himself, coming among the market folk in that-a-way'; and when he took to admiring her hat, she pulled out the flowers in a pet, and threw them down, and trampled them under foot.

'What for art thou doing that, Sylvie?' said her mother. 'The flowers is well enough, though may-be thy hat might ha' been stained.'

'I don't like Philip to speak to me so,' said Sylvia, pouting.

'How?' asked her mother.

But Sylvia could not repeat his words. She hung her head, and looked red and pre-occupied, anything but pleased. Philip had addressed his first expression of personal admiration at an unfortunate tune.

It just shows what different views different men and women take of their fellow-creatures, when I say that Hester looked upon Philip as the best and most agreeable man she had ever known. He was not one to speak of himself without being questioned on the subject, so his Haytersbank relations, only come into the neighborhood in the last year or two, knew nothing of the trials he had surmounted, or the difficult duties he had performed. His aunt, indeed, had strong faith in him, both from partial knowledge of his character, and because he was of her own tribe and kin; but she had never learnt the small details of his past life. Sylvia respected him as her mother's friend, and treated him tolerably well as long as he preserved his usual self-restraint of demeanour, but hardly ever thought of him when he was absent.

Now Hester, who had watched him daily for all the years since he had first come as an errand-boy into Foster's shop—watching with quiet, modest, yet observant eyes—had seen how devoted he was to his master's interests, had known of his careful and punctual ministration to his absent mother's comforts, as long as she was living to benefit by his silent, frugal self-denial.

His methodical appropriation of the few hours he could call his own was not without its charms to the equally methodical Hester; the way in which he reproduced any lately acquired piece of knowledge—knowledge so wearisome to Sylvia—was delightfully instructive to Hester—although, as she was habitually silent, it would have required an observer more interested in discovering her feelings than Philip was to have perceived the little flush on the pale cheek, and the brightness in the half-veiled eyes whenever he was talking. She had not thought of love on either side. Love was a vanity, a worldliness not to be spoken about, or even thought about. Once or twice before the Robsons came into the neighbourhood, an idea had crossed her mind that possibly the quiet, habitual way in which she and Philip lived together, might drift them into

matrimony at some distant period; and she could not bear the humble advances which Coulson, Philip's fellow-lodger, sometimes made. They seemed to disgust her with him.

Page 85

But after the Robsons settled at Haytersbank, Philip's evenings were so often spent there that any unconscious hopes Hester might, unawares, have entertained, died away. At first she had felt a pang akin to jealousy when she heard of Sylvia, the little cousin, who was passing out of childhood into womanhood. Once—early in those days—she had ventured to ask Philip what Sylvia was like. Philip had not warmed up at the question, and had given rather a dry catalogue of her features, hair, and height, but Hester, almost to her own surprise, persevered, and jerked out the final question.

'Is she pretty?'

Philip's sallow cheek grew deeper by two or three shades; but he answered with a tone of indifference,—

'I believe some folks think her so.'

'But do you?' persevered Hester, in spite of her being aware that he somehow disliked the question.

'There's no need for talking o' such things,' he answered, with abrupt displeasure.

Hester silenced her curiosity from that time. But her heart was not quite at ease, and she kept on wondering whether Philip thought his little cousin pretty until she saw her and him together, on that occasion of which we have spoken, when Sylvia came to the shop to buy her new cloak; and after that Hester never wondered whether Philip thought his cousin pretty or no, for she knew quite well. Bell Robson had her own anxieties on the subject of her daughter's increasing attractions. She apprehended the dangers consequent upon certain facts, by a mental process more akin to intuition than reason. She was uncomfortable, even while her motherly vanity was flattered, at the admiration Sylvia received from the other sex. This admiration was made evident to her mother in many ways. When Sylvia was with her at market, it might have been thought that the doctors had prescribed a diet of butter and eggs to all the men under forty in Monkshaven. At first it seemed to Mrs. Robson but a natural tribute to the superior merit of her farm produce; but by degrees she perceived that if Sylvia remained at home, she stood no better chance than her neighbours of an early sale. There were more customers than formerly for the fleeces stored in the wool-loft; comely young butchers came after the calf almost before it had been decided to sell it; in short, excuses were seldom wanting to those who wished to see the beauty of Haytersbank Farm. All this made Bell uncomfortable, though she could hardly have told what she dreaded. Sylvia herself seemed unspoilt by it as far as her home relations were concerned. A little thoughtless she had always been, and thoughtless she was still; but, as her mother had often said, 'Yo' canna put old heads on young shoulders;' and if blamed for her carelessness by her parents, Sylvia was always as penitent as she could be for the time being. To be sure, it was only to her father and mother that she remained the same as she had been when an awkward lassie of thirteen.

Page 86

Out of the house there were the most contradictory opinions of her, especially if the voices of women were to be listened to. She was 'an ill-favoured, overgrown thing'; 'just as bonny as the first rose i' June, and as sweet i' her nature as t' honeysuckle a-climbing round it;' she was 'a vixen, with a tongue sharp enough to make yer very heart bleed;' she was 'just a bit o' sunshine wheriver she went;' she was sulky, lively, witty, silent, affectionate, or cold-hearted, according to the person who spoke about her. In fact, her peculiarity seemed to be this—that every one who knew her talked about her either in praise or blame; in church, or in market, she unconsciously attracted attention; they could not forget her presence, as they could that of other girls perhaps more personally attractive. Now all this was a cause of anxiety to her mother, who began to feel as if she would rather have had her child passed by in silence than so much noticed. Bell's opinion was, that it was creditable to a woman to go through life in the shadow of obscurity,—never named except in connexion with good housewifery, husband, or children. Too much talking about a girl, even in the way of praise, disturbed Mrs. Robson's opinion of her; and when her neighbours told her how her own daughter was admired, she would reply coldly, 'She's just well enough,' and change the subject of conversation. But it was quite different with her husband. To his looser, less-restrained mind, it was agreeable to hear of, and still more to see, the attention which his daughter's beauty received. He felt it as reflecting consequence on himself. He had never troubled his mind with speculations as to whether he himself was popular, still less whether he was respected. He was pretty welcome wherever he went, as a jovial good-natured man, who had done adventurous and illegal things in his youth, which in some measure entitled him to speak out his opinions on life in general in the authoritative manner he generally used; but, of the two, he preferred consorting with younger men, to taking a sober stand of respectability with the elders of the place; and he perceived, without reasoning upon it, that the gay daring spirits were more desirous of his company when Sylvia was by his side than at any other time. One or two of these would saunter up to Haytersbank on a Sunday afternoon, and lounge round his fields with the old farmer. Bell kept herself from the nap which had been her weekly solace for years, in order to look after Sylvia, and on such occasions she always turned as cold a shoulder to the visitors as her sense of hospitality and of duty to her husband would permit. But if they did not enter the house, old Robson would always have Sylvia with him when he went the round of his land. Bell could see them from the upper window: the young men standing in the attitudes of listeners, while Daniel laid down the law on some point, enforcing his words by pantomimic actions with his thick stick; and Sylvia, half turning

Page 87

away as if from some too admiring gaze, was possibly picking flowers out of the hedge-bank. These Sunday afternoon strolls were the plague of Bell's life that whole summer. Then it took as much of artifice as was in the simple woman's nature to keep Daniel from insisting on having Sylvia's company every time he went down to Monkshaven. And here, again, came a perplexity, the acknowledgement of which in distinct thought would have been an act of disloyalty, according to Bell's conscience. If Sylvia went with her father, he never drank to excess; and that was a good gain to health at any rate (drinking was hardly a sin against morals in those days, and in that place); so, occasionally, she was allowed to accompany him to Monkshaven as a check upon his folly; for he was too fond and proud of his daughter to disgrace her by any open excess. But one Sunday afternoon early in November, Philip came up before the time at which he usually paid his visits. He looked grave and pale; and his aunt began,—

'Why, lad! what's been ado? Thou'rt looking as peaked and pined as a Methody preacher after a love-feast, when he's talked hisself to Death's door. Thee dost na' get good milk enow, that's what it is,—such stuff as Monkshaven folks put up wi'!

'No, aunt; I'm quite well. Only I'm a bit put out—vexed like at what I've heerd about Sylvie.'

His aunt's face changed immediately.

'And whatten folk say of her, next thing?'

'Oh,' said Philip, struck by the difference of look and manner in his aunt, and subdued by seeing how instantly she took alarm. 'It were only my uncle;—he should na' take a girl like her to a public. She were wi' him at t' "Admiral's Head" upo' All Souls' Day—that were all. There were many a one there beside,—it were statute fair; but such a one as our Sylvie ought not to be cheapened wi' t' rest.'

'And he took her there, did he?' said Bell, in severe meditation. 'I had never no opinion o' th' wenches as 'll set themselves to be hired for servants i' th' fair; they're a bad lot, as cannot find places for themselves—'bout going and stannin' to be stared at by folk, and grinnin' wi' th' plough-lads when no one's looking; it's a bad look-out for t' missus as takes one o' these wenches for a servant; and dost ta mean to say as my Sylvie went and demeaned hersel' to dance and marlock wi' a' th' fair-folk at th' "Admiral's Head?"'

'No, no, she did na' dance; she barely set foot i' th' room; but it were her own pride as saved her; uncle would niver ha' kept her from it, for he had fallen in wi' Hayley o' Seaburn and one or two others, and they were having a glass i' t' bar, and Mrs. Lawson, t' landlady, knew how there was them who would come and dance among parish 'prentices if need were, just to get a word or a look wi' Sylvie! So she tempts her in,

saying that the room were all smartened and fine wi' flags; and there was them in the room as told me that they never were so startled

Page 88

as when they saw our Sylvie's face peeping in among all t' flustered maids and men, rough and red wi' weather and drink; and Jem Macbean, he said she were just like a bit o' apple-blossom among peonies; and some man, he didn't know who, went up and spoke to her; an' either at that, or at some o' t' words she heard—for they'd got a good way on afore that time—she went quite white and mad, as if fire were coming out of her eyes, and then she turned red and left the room, for all t' landlady tried to laugh it off and keep her in.'

'I'll be down to Monkshaven before I'm a day older, and tell Margaret Lawson some on my mind as she'll not forget in a hurry.'

Bell moved as though she would put on her cloak and hood there and then.

'Nay, it's not in reason as a woman i' that line o' life shouldn't try to make her house agreeable,' said Philip.

'Not wi' my wench,' said Bell, in a determined voice.

Philip's information had made a deeper impression on his aunt than he intended. He himself had been annoyed more at the idea that Sylvia would be spoken of as having been at a rough piece of rustic gaiety—a yearly festival for the lower classes of Yorkshire servants, out-door as well as in-door—than at the affair itself, for he had learnt from his informant how instantaneous her appearance had been. He stood watching his aunt's troubled face, and almost wishing that he had not spoken. At last she heaved a deep sigh, and stirring the fire, as if by this little household occupation to compose her mind, she said—

'It's a pity as wenches aren't lads, or married folk. I could ha' wished—but it were the Lord's will—It would ha' been summut to look to, if she'd had a brother. My master is so full on his own thoughts, yo' see, he's no mind left for thinking on her, what wi' th' oats, and th' wool, and th' young colt, and his venture i' th' *Lucky Mary*.'

She really believed her husband to have the serious and important occupation for his mind that she had been taught to consider befitting the superior intellect of the masculine gender; she would have taxed herself severely, if, even in thought, she had blamed him, and Philip respected her feelings too much to say that Sylvia's father ought to look after her more closely if he made such a pretty creature so constantly his companion; yet some such speech was only just pent within Philip's closed lips. Again his aunt spoke—

'I used to think as she and yo' might fancy one another, but thou'rt too old-fashioned like for her; ye would na' suit; and it's as well, for now I can say to thee, that I would take it very kindly if thou would'st look after her a bit.'

Philip's countenance fell into gloom. He had to gulp down certain feelings before he could make answer with discretion.

'How can I look after her, and me tied to the shop more and more every day?'

Page 89

'I could send her on a bit of an errand to Foster's, and then, for sure, yo' might keep an eye upon her when she's in th' town; and just walk a bit way with her when she's in th' street, and keep t' other fellows off her—Ned Simpson, t' butcher, in 'special, for folks do say he means no good by any girl he goes wi'—and I'll ask father to leave her a bit more wi' me. They're coming down th' brow, and Ned Simpson wi' them. Now, Philip, I look to thee to do a brother's part by my wench, and warn off all as isn't fit.'

The door opened, and the coarse strong voice of Simpson made itself heard. He was a stout man, comely enough as to form and feature, but with a depth of colour in his face that betokened the coming on of the habits of the sot. His Sunday hat was in his hand, and he smoothed the long nap of it, as he said, with a mixture of shyness and familiarity

'Sarvant, missus. Yo'r measter is fain that I should come in an' have a drop; no offence, I hope?'

Sylvia passed quickly through the house-place, and went upstairs without speaking to her cousin Philip or to any one. He sat on, disliking the visitor, and almost disliking his hospitable uncle for having brought Simpson into the house, sympathizing with his aunt in the spirit which prompted her curt answers, and in the intervals of all these feelings wondering what ground she had for speaking as if she had now given up all thought of Sylvia and him ever being married, and in what way he was too 'old-fashioned.'

Robson would gladly have persuaded Philip to join him and Simpson in their drink, but Philip was in no sociable mood, and sate a little aloof, watching the staircase down which sooner or later Sylvia must come; for, as perhaps has been already said, the stairs went up straight out of the kitchen. And at length his yearning watch was rewarded; first, the little pointed toe came daintily in sight, then the trim ankle in the tight blue stocking, the wool of which was spun and the web of which was knitted by her mother's careful hands; then the full brown stuff petticoat, the arm holding the petticoat back in decent folds, so as not to encumber the descending feet; the slender neck and shoulders hidden under the folded square of fresh white muslin; the crowning beauty of the soft innocent face radiant in colour, and with the light brown curls clustering around. She made her way quickly to Philip's side; how his heart beat at her approach! and even more when she entered into a low-voiced *tete-a-tete*.

'Isn't he gone yet?' said she. 'I cannot abide him; I could ha' pinched father when he asked him for t' come in.'

'Maybe, he'll not stay long,' said Philip, hardly understanding the meaning of what he said, so sweet was it to have her making her whispered confidences to him.

But Simpson was not going to let her alone in the dark corner between the door and the window. He began paying her some coarse country compliments—too strong in their

direct flattery for even her father's taste, more especially as he saw by his wife's set lips and frowning brow how much she disapproved of their visitor's style of conversation.

Page 90

'Come, measter, leave t' lass alone; she's set up enough a'ready, her mother makes such a deal on her. Yo' an' me's men for sensible talk at our time o' life. An', as I was saying, t' horse was a weaver if iver one was, as any one could ha' told as had come within a mile on him.'

And in this way the old farmer and the bluff butcher chatted on about horses, while Philip and Sylvia sate together, he turning over all manner of hopes and projects for the future, in spite of his aunt's opinion that he was too 'old-fashioned' for her dainty, blooming daughter. Perhaps, too, Mrs. Robson saw some reason for changing her mind on this head as she watched Sylvia this night, for she accompanied Philip to the door, when the time came for him to start homewards, and bade him 'good-night' with unusual fervour, adding—

'Thou'st been a deal o' comfort to me, lad—a'most as one as if thou wert a child o' my own, as at times I could welly think thou art to be. Anyways, I trust to thee to look after the lile lass, as has no brother to guide her among men—and men's very kittle for a woman to deal wi; but if thou'lt have an eye on whom she consorts wi', my mind 'll be easier.'

Philip's heart beat fast, but his voice was as calm as usual when he replied—

'I'd just keep her a bit aloof from Monkshaven folks; a lass is always the more thought on for being chary of herself; and as for t' rest, I'll have an eye to the folks she goes among, and if I see that they don't befit her, I'll just give her a warning, for she's not one to like such chaps as yon Simpson there; she can see what's becoming in a man to say to a lass, and what's not.'

Philip set out on his two-mile walk home with a tumult of happiness in his heart. He was not often carried away by delusions of his own creating; to-night he thought he had good ground for believing that by patient self-restraint he might win Sylvia's love. A year ago he had nearly earned her dislike by obtruding upon her looks and words betokening his passionate love. He alarmed her girlish coyness, as well as wearied her with the wish he had then felt that she should take an interest in his pursuits. But, with unusual wisdom, he had perceived his mistake; it was many months now since he had betrayed, by word or look, that she was anything more to him than a little cousin to be cared for and protected when need was. The consequence was that she had become tamed, just as a wild animal is tamed; he had remained tranquil and impassive, almost as if he did not perceive her shy advances towards friendliness. These advances were made by her after the lessons had ceased. She was afraid lest he was displeased with her behaviour in rejecting his instructions, and was not easy till she was at peace with him; and now, to all appearance, he and she were perfect friends, but nothing more. In his absence she would not allow her young companions to laugh at his grave sobriety of character, and somewhat

Page 91

prim demeanour; she would even go against her conscience, and deny that she perceived any peculiarity. When she wanted it, she sought his advice on such small subjects as came up in her daily life; and she tried not to show signs of weariness when he used more words—and more difficult words—than were necessary to convey his ideas. But her ideal husband was different from Philip in every point, the two images never for an instant merged into one. To Philip she was the only woman in the world; it was the one subject on which he dared not consider, for fear that both conscience and judgment should decide against him, and that he should be convinced against his will that she was an unfit mate for him, that she never would be his, and that it was waste of time and life to keep her shrined in the dearest sanctuary of his being, to the exclusion of all the serious and religious aims which, in any other case, he would have been the first to acknowledge as the object he ought to pursue. For he had been brought up among the Quakers, and shared in their austere distrust of a self-seeking spirit; yet what else but self-seeking was his passionate prayer, 'Give me Sylvia, or else, I die?' No other vision had ever crossed his masculine fancy for a moment; his was a rare and constant love that deserved a better fate than it met with. At this time his hopes were high, as I have said, not merely as to the growth of Sylvia's feelings towards him, but as to the probability of his soon being in a position to place her in such comfort, as his wife, as she had never enjoyed before.

For the brothers Foster were thinking of retiring from business, and relinquishing the shop to their two shopmen, Philip Hepburn and William Coulson. To be sure, it was only by looking back for a few months, and noticing chance expressions and small indications, that this intention of theirs could be discovered. But every step they took tended this way, and Philip knew their usual practice of deliberation too well to feel in the least impatient for the quicker progress of the end which he saw steadily approaching. The whole atmosphere of life among the Friends at this date partook of this character of self-repression, and both Coulson and Hepburn shared in it. Coulson was just as much aware of the prospect opening before him as Hepburn; but they never spoke together on the subject, although their mutual knowledge might be occasionally implied in their conversation on their future lives. Meanwhile the Fosters were imparting more of the background of their business to their successors. For the present, at least, the brothers meant to retain an interest in the shop, even after they had given up the active management; and they sometimes thought of setting up a separate establishment as bankers. The separation of the business,—the introduction of their shopmen to the distant manufacturers who furnished their goods (in those days the system of 'travellers' was not so widely organized

Page 92

as it is at present),—all these steps were in gradual progress; and already Philip saw himself in imagination in the dignified position of joint master of the principal shop in Monkshaven, with Sylvia installed as his wife, with certainly a silk gown, and possibly a gig at her disposal. In all Philip's visions of future prosperity, it was Sylvia who was to be aggrandized by them; his own life was to be spent as it was now, pretty much between the four shop walls.

CHAPTER XII

NEW YEAR'S FETE

All this enlargement of interest in the shop occupied Philip fully for some months after the period referred to in the preceding chapter. Remembering his last conversation with his aunt, he might have been uneasy at his inability to perform his promise and look after his pretty cousin, but that about the middle of November Bell Robson had fallen ill of a rheumatic fever, and that her daughter had been entirely absorbed in nursing her. No thought of company or gaiety was in Sylvia's mind as long as her mother's illness lasted; vehement in all her feelings, she discovered in the dread of losing her mother how passionately she was attached to her. Hitherto she had supposed, as children so often do, that her parents would live for ever; and now when it was a question of days, whether by that time the following week her mother might not be buried out of her sight for ever, she clung to every semblance of service to be rendered, or affection shown, as if she hoped to condense the love and care of years into the few days only that might remain. Mrs. Robson lingered on, began slowly to recover, and before Christmas was again sitting by the fireside in the house-place, wan and pulled down, muffled up with shawls and blankets, but still there once more, where not long before Sylvia had scarcely expected to see her again. Philip came up that evening and found Sylvia in wild spirits. She thought that everything was done, now that her mother had once come downstairs again; she laughed with glee; she kissed her mother; she shook hands with Philip, she almost submitted to a speech of more than usual tenderness from him; but, in the midst of his words, her mother's pillows wanted arranging and she went to her chair, paying no more heed to his words than if they had been addressed to the cat, that lying on the invalid's knee was purring out her welcome to the weak hand feebly stroking her back. Robson himself soon came in, looking older and more subdued since Philip had seen him last. He was very urgent that his wife should have some spirits and water; but on her refusal, almost as if she loathed the thought of the smell, he contented himself with sharing her tea, though he kept abusing the beverage as 'washing the heart out of a man,' and attributing all the degeneracy of the world, growing up about him in his old age, to the drinking of such slop. At the same time, his little self-sacrifice put him in an

Page 93

unusually good temper; and, mingled with his real gladness at having his wife once more on the way to recovery, brought back some of the old charm of tenderness combined with light-heartedness, which had won the sober Isabella Preston long ago. He sat by her side, holding her hand, and talking of old times to the young couple opposite; of his adventures and escapes, and how he had won his wife. She, faintly smiling at the remembrance of those days, yet half-ashamed at having the little details of her courtship revealed, from time to time kept saying,—

‘For shame wi’ thee, Dannel—I never did,’ and faint denials of a similar kind.

‘Niver believe her, Sylvie. She were a woman, and there’s niver a woman but likes to have a sweetheart, and can tell when a chap’s castin’ sheep’s-eyes at her; ay, an’ afore he knows what he’s about hissens. She were a pretty one then, was my old ‘ooman, an’ liked them as thought her so, though she did cock her head high, as bein’ a Preston, which were a family o’ standin’ and means i’ those parts aforetime. There’s Philip there, I’ll warrant, is as proud o’ bein’ Preston by t’ mother’s side, for it runs i’ t’ blood, lass. A can tell when a child of a Preston tak’s to being proud o’ their kin, by t’ cut o’ their nose. Now Philip’s and my missus’s has a turn beyond common i’ their nostrils, as if they was sniffin’ at t’ rest of us world, an’ seein’ if we was good enough for ‘em to consort wi’. Thee an’ me, lass, is Robsons—oat-cake folk, while they’s pie-crust. Lord! how Bell used to speak to me, as short as though a wasn’t a Christian, an’ a’ t’ time she loved me as her very life, an’ well a knew it, tho’ a’d to mak’ as tho’ a didn’t. Philip, when thou goes courtin’, come t’ me, and a’ll give thee many a wrinkle. A’ve shown, too, as a know well how t’ choose a good wife by tokens an’ signs, hannot a, missus? Come t’ me, my lad, and show me t’ lass, an’ a’ll just tak’ a squint at her, an’ tell yo’ if she’ll do or not; an’ if she’ll do, a’ll teach yo’ how to win her.’

‘They say another o’ yon Corney girls is going to be married,’ said Mrs. Robson, in her faint deliberate tones.

‘By gosh, an’ it’s well thou’st spoke on ‘em; a was as clean forgettin’ it as iver could be. A met Nanny Corney i’ Monkshaven last neet, and she axed me for t’ let our Sylvia come o’ New Year’s Eve, an’ see Molly an’ her man, that ‘n as is wed beyond Newcassel, they’ll be over at her feyther’s, for t’ New Year, an’ there’s to be a merry-making.’

Sylvia’s colour came, her eyes brightened, she would have liked to go; but the thought of her mother came across her, and her features fell. Her mother’s eye caught the look and the change, and knew what both meant as well as if Sylvia had spoken out.

‘Thursday se’nnight,’ said she. ‘I’ll be rare and strong by then, and Sylvie shall go play hersen; she’s been nurse-tending long enough.’

‘You’re but weakly yet,’ said Philip shortly; he did not intend to say it, but the words seemed to come out in spite of himself.

Page 94

'A said as our lass should come, God willin', if she only came and went, an' thee goin' on sprightly, old 'ooman. An' a'll turn nurse-tender mysen for t' occasion, 'special if thou can stand t' good honest smell o' whisky by then. So, my lass, get up thy smart clothes, and cut t' best on 'em out, as becomes a Preston. Maybe, a'll fetch thee home, an' maybe Philip will convoy thee, for Nanny Corney bade thee to t' merry-making, as well. She said her measter would be seem' thee about t' wool afore then.'

'I don't think as I can go,' said Philip, secretly pleased to know that he had the opportunity in his power; 'I'm half bound to go Wi' Hester Rose and her mother to t' watch-night.'

'Is Hester a Methodee?' asked Sylvia in surprise.

'No! she's neither a Methodee, nor a Friend, nor a Church person; but she's a turn for serious things, choose wherever they're found.'

'Well, then,' said good-natured farmer Robson, only seeing the surface of things, 'a'll make shift to fetch Sylvie back fra' t' merry-making, and thee an' thy young woman can go to t' prayer-makin'; it's every man to his taste, say I.'

But in spite of his half-promise, nay against his natural inclination, Philip was lured to the Corneys' by the thought of meeting Sylvia, of watching her and exulting in her superiority in pretty looks and ways to all the other girls likely to be assembled. Besides (he told his conscience) he was pledged to his aunt to watch over Sylvia like a brother. So in the interval before New Year's Eve, he silently revelled as much as any young girl in the anticipation of the happy coming time.

At this hour, all the actors in this story having played out their parts and gone to their rest, there is something touching in recording the futile efforts made by Philip to win from Sylvia the love he yearned for. But, at the time, any one who had watched him might have been amused to see the grave, awkward, plain young man studying patterns and colours for a new waistcoat, with his head a little on one side, after the meditative manner common to those who are choosing a new article of dress. They might have smiled could they have read in his imagination the frequent rehearsals of the coming evening, when he and she should each be dressed in their gala attire, to spend a few hours under a bright, festive aspect, among people whose company would oblige them to assume a new demeanour towards each other, not so familiar as their every-day manner, but allowing more scope for the expression of rustic gallantry. Philip had so seldom been to anything of the kind, that, even had Sylvia not been going, he would have felt a kind of shy excitement at the prospect of anything so unusual. But, indeed, if Sylvia had not been going, it is very probable that Philip's rigid conscience might have been aroused to the question whether such parties did not savour too much of the world for him to form one in them.

Page 95

As it was, however, the facts to him were simply these. He was going and she was going. The day before, he had hurried off to Haytersbank Farm with a small paper parcel in his pocket—a ribbon with a little briar-rose pattern running upon it for Sylvia. It was the first thing he had ever ventured to give her—the first thing of the kind would, perhaps, be more accurate; for when he had first begun to teach her any lessons, he had given her Mavor's Spelling-book, but that he might have done, out of zeal for knowledge, to any dunce of a little girl of his acquaintance. This ribbon was quite a different kind of present; he touched it tenderly, as if he were caressing it, when he thought of her wearing it; the briar-rose (sweetness and thorns) seemed to be the very flower for her; the soft, green ground on which the pink and brown pattern ran, was just the colour to show off her complexion. And she would in a way belong to him: her cousin, her mentor, her chaperon, her lover! While others only admired, he might hope to appropriate; for of late they had been such happy friends! Her mother approved of him, her father liked him. A few months, perhaps only a few weeks more of self-restraint, and then he might go and speak openly of his wishes, and what he had to offer. For he had resolved, with the quiet force of his character, to wait until all was finally settled between him and his masters, before he declared himself to either Sylvia or her parents. The interval was spent in patient, silent endeavours to recommend himself to her.

He had to give his ribbon to his aunt in charge for Sylvia, and that was a disappointment to his fancy, although he tried to reason himself into thinking that it was better so. He had not time to wait for her return from some errand on which she had gone, for he was daily more and more occupied with the affairs of the shop.

Sylvia made many a promise to her mother, and more to herself, that she would not stay late at the party, but she might go as early as she liked; and before the December daylight had faded away, Sylvia presented herself at the Corneys'. She was to come early in order to help to set out the supper, which was arranged in the large old flagged parlour, which served as best bed-room as well. It opened out of the house-place, and was the sacred room of the house, as chambers of a similar description are still considered in retired farmhouses in the north of England. They are used on occasions like the one now described for purposes of hospitality; but in the state bed, overshadowing so large a portion of the floor, the births and, as far as may be, the deaths, of the household take place. At the Corneys', the united efforts of some former generation of the family had produced patchwork curtains and coverlet; and patchwork was patchwork in those days, before the early Yates and Peels had found out the secret of printing the parsley-leaf. Scraps of costly Indian chintzes

Page 96

and palepours were intermixed with commoner black and red calico in minute hexagons; and the variety of patterns served for the useful purpose of promoting conversation as well as the more obvious one of displaying the work-woman 's taste. Sylvia, for instance, began at once to her old friend, Molly Brunton, who had accompanied her into this chamber to take off her hat and cloak, with a remark on one of the chintzes. Stooping over the counterpane, with a face into which the flush would come whether or no, she said to Molly,—

'Dear! I never seed this one afore—this—for all t' world like th' eyes in a peacock's tail.'

'Thou's seen it many a time and oft, lass. But weren't thou surprised to find Charley here? We picked him up at Shields, quite by surprise like; and when Brunton and me said as we was comin' here, nought would serve him but comin' with us, for t' see t' new year in. It's a pity as your mother's ta'en this time for t' fall ill and want yo' back so early.'

Sylvia had taken off her hat and cloak by this time, and began to help Molly and a younger unmarried sister in laying out the substantial supper.

'Here,' continued Mrs. Brunton; 'stick a bit o' holly i' yon pig's mouth, that's the way we do things i' Newcassel; but folks is so behindhand in Monkshaven. It's a fine thing to live in a large town, Sylvia; an' if yo're looking out for a husband, I'd advise yo' to tak' one as lives in a town. I feel as if I were buried alive comin' back here, such an out-o'-t'-way place after t' Side, where there's many a hundred carts and carriages goes past in a day. I've a great mind for t' tak yo' two lassies back wi' me, and let yo' see a bit o' t' world; may-be, I may yet.

Her sister Bessy looked much pleased with this plan, but Sylvia was rather inclined to take offence at Molly's patronizing ways, and replied,—

'I'm none so fond o' noise and bustle; why, yo'll not be able to hear yoursels speak wi' all them carts and carriages. I'd rayther bide at home; let alone that mother can't spare me.'

It was, perhaps, a rather ungracious way of answering Molly Brunton's speech, and so she felt it to be, although her invitation had been none of the most courteously worded. She irritated Sylvia still further by repeating her last words,—

""Mother can't spare me;" why, mother 'll have to spare thee sometime, when t' time for wedding comes.'

'I'm none going to be wed,' said Sylvia; 'and if I were, I'd niver go far fra' mother.'



'Eh! what a spoilt darling it is. How Brunton will laugh when I tell him about yo'; Brunton's a rare one for laughin'. It's a great thing to have got such a merry man for a husband. Why! he has his joke for every one as comes into t' shop; and he'll ha' something funny to say to everything this evenin'.'

Bessy saw that Sylvia was annoyed, and, with more delicacy than her sister, she tried to turn the conversation.

Page 97

'That's a pretty ribbon in thy hair, Sylvia; I'd like to have one o' t' same pattern. Feyther likes pickled walnuts stuck about t' round o' beef, Molly.'

'I know what I'm about,' replied Mrs. Brunton, with a toss of her married head.

Bessy resumed her inquiry.

'Is there any more to be had wheere that come fra', Sylvia?'

'I don't know,' replied Sylvia. 'It come fra' Foster's, and yo' can ask.'

'What might it cost?' said Betsy, fingering an end of it to test its quality.

'I can't tell,' said Sylvia, 'it were a present.'

'Niver mak' ado about t' price,' said Molly; 'I'll gi'e thee enough on 't to tie up thy hair, just like Sylvia's. Only thou hastn't such wealth o' curls as she has; it'll niver look t' same i' thy straight locks. And who might it be as give it thee, Sylvia?' asked the unscrupulous, if good-natured Molly.

'My cousin Philip, him as is shopman at Foster's,' said Sylvia, innocently. But it was far too good an opportunity for the exercise of Molly's kind of wit for her to pass over.

'Oh, oh! our cousin Philip, is it? and he'll not be living so far away from your mother? I've no need be a witch to put two and two together. He's a coming here to-night, isn't he, Bessy?'

'I wish yo' wouldn't talk so, Molly,' said Sylvia; 'me and Philip is good enough friends, but we niver think on each other in that way; leastways, I don't

'(Sweet butter! now that's my mother's old-fashioned way; as if folks must eat sweet butter now-a-days, because her mother did!) That way,' continued Molly, in the manner that annoyed Sylvia so much, repeating her words as if for the purpose of laughing at them. "'That way?" and pray what is t' way yo're speaking on? I niver said nought about marrying, did I, that yo' need look so red and shamefaced about yo'r cousin Philip? But, as Brunton says, if t' cap fits yo', put it on. I'm glad he's comin' to-night tho', for as I'm done makin' love and courtin', it's next best t' watch other folks; an' yo'r face, Sylvia, has letten me into a secret, as I'd some glimpses on afore I was wed.'

Sylvia secretly determined not to speak a word more to Philip than she could help, and wondered how she could ever have liked Molly at all, much less have made a companion of her. The table was now laid out, and nothing remained but to criticize the arrangement a little.

Bessy was full of admiration.

‘Theere, Molly!’ said she. ‘Yo’ niver seed more vittle brought together i’ Newcassel, I’ll be bound; there’ll be above half a hundredweight o’ butcher’s meat, beside pies and custards. I’ve eaten no dinner these two days for thinking on ’t; it’s been a weary burden on my mind, but it’s off now I see how well it looks. I told mother not to come near it till we’d spread it all out, and now I’ll go fetch her.’

Bessy ran off into the house-place.

‘It’s well enough in a country kind o’ way,’ said Molly, with the faint approbation of condescension. ‘But if I’d thought on, I’d ha’ brought ’em down a beast or two done i’ sponge-cake, wi’ currants for his eyes to give t’ table an air.’

Page 98

The door was opened, and Bessy came in smiling and blushing with proud pleasure. Her mother followed her on tip-toe, smoothing down her apron, and with her voice subdued to a whisper:—

‘Ay, my lass, it *is* fine! But dunnot mak’ an ado about it, let ‘em think it’s just our common way. If any one says aught about how good t’ vittle is, tak’ it calm, and say we’n better i’ t’ house,—it’ll mak’ ‘em eat wi’ a better appetite, and think the more on us. Sylvie, I’m much beholden t’ ye for comin’ so early, and helpin’ t’ lasses, but yo’ mun come in t’ house-place now, t’ folks is gatherin’, an’ yo’r cousin’s been asking after yo’ a’ready.’

Molly gave her a nudge, which made Sylvia’s face go all aflame with angry embarrassment. She was conscious that the watching which Molly had threatened her with began directly; for Molly went up to her husband, and whispered something to him which set him off in a chuckling laugh, and Sylvia was aware that his eyes followed her about with knowing looks all the evening. She would hardly speak to Philip, and pretended not to see his outstretched hand, but passed on to the chimney-corner, and tried to shelter herself behind the broad back of farmer Corney, who had no notion of relinquishing his customary place for all the young people who ever came to the house, —or for any old people either, for that matter. It was his household throne, and there he sat with no more idea of abdicating in favour of any comer than King George at St James’s. But he was glad to see his friends; and had paid them the unwonted compliment of shaving on a week-day, and putting on his Sunday coat. The united efforts of wife and children had failed to persuade him to make any farther change in his attire; to all their arguments on this head he had replied,—

‘Them as doesn’t like t’ see me i’ my work-a-day wescut and breeches may bide away.’

It was the longest sentence he said that day, but he repeated it several times over. He was glad enough to see all the young people, but they were not ‘of his kidney,’ as he expressed it to himself, and he did not feel any call upon himself to entertain them. He left that to his bustling wife, all smartness and smiles, and to his daughters and son-in-law. His efforts at hospitality consisted in sitting still, smoking his pipe; when any one came, he took it out of his mouth for an instant, and nodded his head in a cheerful friendly way, without a word of speech; and then returned to his smoking with the greater relish for the moment’s intermission. He thought to himself:—

‘They’re a set o’ young chaps as thinks more on t’ lasses than on baccy;—they’ll find out their mistake in time; give ‘em time, give ‘em time.’

And before eight o’clock, he went as quietly as a man of twelve stone can upstairs to bed, having made a previous arrangement with his wife that she should bring him up about two pounds of spiced beef, and a hot tumbler of stiff grog. But at the beginning of

the evening he formed a good screen for Sylvia, who was rather a favourite with the old man, for twice he spoke to her.

Page 99

'Feyther smokes?'

'Yes,' said Sylvia.

'Reach me t' baccy-box, my lass.'

And that was all the conversation that passed between her and her nearest neighbour for the first quarter of an hour after she came into company.

But, for all her screen, she felt a pair of eyes were fixed upon her with a glow of admiration deepening their honest brightness. Somehow, look in what direction she would, she caught the glance of those eyes before she could see anything else. So she played with her apron-strings, and tried not to feel so conscious. There were another pair of eyes,—not such beautiful, sparkling eyes,—deep-set, earnest, sad, nay, even gloomy, watching her every movement; but of this she was not aware. Philip had not recovered from the rebuff she had given him by refusing his offered hand, and was standing still, in angry silence, when Mrs. Corney thrust a young woman just arrived upon his attention.

'Come, Measter Hepburn, here's Nancy Pratt wi'out ev'n a soul to speak t' her, an' yo' mopin' theere. She says she knows yo' by sight fra' having dealt at Foster's these six year. See if yo' can't find summut t' say t' each other, for I mun go pour out tea. Dixons, an' Walkers, an' Elliotts, an' Smiths is come,' said she, marking off the families on her fingers, as she looked round and called over their names; 'an' there's only Will Latham an' his two sisters, and Roger Harbottle, an' Taylor t' come; an' they'll turn up afore tea's ended.'

So she went off to her duty at the one table, which, placed alongside of the dresser, was the only article of furniture left in the middle of the room: all the seats being arranged as close to the four walls as could be managed. The candles of those days gave but a faint light compared to the light of the immense fire, which it was a point of hospitality to keep at the highest roaring, blazing pitch; the young women occupied the seats, with the exception of two or three of the elder ones, who, in an eager desire to show their capability, insisted on helping Mrs. Corney in her duties, very much to her annoyance, as there were certain little contrivances for eking out cream, and adjusting the strength of the cups of tea to the worldly position of the intended drinkers, which she did not like every one to see. The young men,—whom tea did not embolden, and who had as yet had no chance of stronger liquor,—clustered in rustic shyness round the door, not speaking even to themselves, except now and then, when one, apparently the wag of the party, made some whispered remark, which set them all off laughing; but in a minute they checked themselves, and passed the back of their hands across their mouths to compose that unlucky feature, and then some would try to fix their eyes on the rafters of the ceiling, in a manner which was decorous if rather abstracted from the business in

hand. Most of these were young farmers, with whom Philip had nothing in common, and from whom, in shy reserve,

Page 100

he had withdrawn himself when he first came in. But now he wished himself among them sooner than set to talk to Nancy Pratt, when he had nothing to say. And yet he might have had a companion less to his mind, for she was a decent young woman of a sober age, less inclined to giggle than many of the younger ones. But all the time that he was making commonplace remarks to her he was wondering if he had offended Sylvia, and why she would not shake hands with him, and this pre-occupation of his thoughts did not make him an agreeable companion. Nancy Pratt, who had been engaged for some years to a mate of a whaling-ship, perceived something of his state of mind, and took no offence at it; on the contrary, she tried to give him pleasure by admiring Sylvia.

'I've often heerd tell on her,' said she, 'but I niver thought she's be so pretty, and so staid and quiet-like too. T' most part o' girls as has looks like hers are always gape-gazing to catch other folks's eyes, and see what is thought on 'em; but she looks just like a child, a bit flustered wi' coming into company, and gettin' into as dark a corner and bidin' as still as she can.

Just then Sylvia lifted up her long, dark lashes, and catching the same glance which she had so often met before—Charley Kinraid was standing talking to Brunton on the opposite side of the fire-place—she started back into the shadow as if she had not expected it, and in so doing spilt her tea all over her gown. She could almost have cried, she felt herself so awkward, and as if everything was going wrong with her; she thought that every one would think she had never been in company before, and did not know how to behave; and while she was thus fluttered and crimson, she saw through her tearful eyes Kinraid on his knees before her, wiping her gown with his silk pocket handkerchief, and heard him speaking through all the buzz of commiserating voices.

'Your cupboard handle is so much i' th' way—I hurt my elbow against it only this very afternoon.'

So perhaps it was no clumsiness of hers,—as they would all know, now, since he had so skilfully laid the blame somewhere else; and after all it turned out that her accident had been the means of bringing him across to her side, which was much more pleasant than having him opposite, staring at her; for now he began to talk to her, and this was very pleasant, although she was rather embarrassed at their *tete-a-tete* at first.

'I did not know you again when I first saw you,' said he, in a tone which implied a good deal more than was uttered in words.

'I knowed yo' at once,' she replied, softly, and then she blushed and played with her apron-string, and wondered if she ought to have confessed to the clearness of her recollection.

'You're grown up into—well, perhaps it's not manners to say what you're grown into—anyhow, I shan't forget yo' again.'

More playing with her apron-string, and head hung still lower down, though the corners of her mouth would go up in a shy smile of pleasure. Philip watched it all as greedily as if it gave him delight.



Page 101

'Yo'r father, he'll be well and hearty, I hope?' asked Charley.

'Yes,' replied Sylvia, and then she wished she could originate some remark; he would think her so stupid if she just kept on saying such little short bits of speeches, and if he thought her stupid he might perhaps go away again to his former place.

But he was quite far enough gone in love of her beauty, and pretty modest ways, not to care much whether she talked or no, so long as she showed herself so pleasingly conscious of his close neighbourhood.

'I must come and see the old gentleman; and your mother, too,' he added more slowly, for he remembered that his visits last year had not been quite so much welcomed by Bell Robson as by her husband; perhaps it was because of the amount of drink which he and Daniel managed to get through of an evening. He resolved this year to be more careful to please the mother of Sylvia.

When tea was ended there was a great bustle and shifting of places, while Mrs. Corney and her daughters carried out trays full of used cups, and great platters of uneaten bread and butter into the back-kitchen, to be washed up after the guests were gone. Just because she was so conscious that she did not want to move, and break up the little conversation between herself and Kinraid, Sylvia forced herself to be as active in the service going on as became a friend of the house; and she was too much her mother's own daughter to feel comfortable at leaving all the things in the disorder which to the Corney girls was second nature.

'This milk mun go back to t' dairy, I reckon,' said she, loading herself with milk and cream.

'Niver fash thyself' about it,' said Nelly Corney, 'Christmas comes but onest a year, if it does go sour; and mother said she'd have a game at forfeits first thing after tea to loosen folks's tongues, and mix up t' lads and lasses, so come along.'

But Sylvia steered her careful way to the cold chill of the dairy, and would not be satisfied till she had carried away all the unused provision into some fresher air than that heated by the fires and ovens used for the long day's cooking of pies and cakes and much roast meat.

When they came back a round of red-faced 'lads,' as young men up to five-and-thirty are called in Lancashire and Yorkshire if they are not married before, and lasses, whose age was not to be defined, were playing at some country game, in which the women were apparently more interested than the men, who looked shamefaced, and afraid of each other's ridicule. Mrs. Corney, however, knew how to remedy this, and at a sign from her a great jug of beer was brought in. This jug was the pride of her heart, and was in the shape of a fat man in white knee-breeches, and a three-cornered hat; with

one arm he supported the pipe in his broad, smiling mouth, and the other was placed akimbo and formed the handle. There was also a great china punch-bowl filled with grog made after an old ship-receipt

Page 102

current in these parts, but not too strong, because if their visitors had too much to drink at that early part of the evening 'it would spoil t' fun,' as Nelly Corney had observed. Her father, however, after the notions of hospitality prevalent at that time in higher circles, had stipulated that each man should have 'enough' before he left the house; enough meaning in Monkshaven parlance the liberty of getting drunk, if they thought fit to do it.

Before long one of the lads was seized with a fit of admiration for Toby—the name of the old gentleman who contained liquor—and went up to the tray for a closer inspection. He was speedily followed by other amateurs of curious earthenware; and by-and-by Mr. Brunton (who had been charged by his mother-in-law with the due supplying of liquor—by his father-in-law that every man should have his fill, and by his wife and her sisters that no one should have too much, at any rate at the beginning of the evening,) thought fit to carry out Toby to be replenished; and a faster spirit of enjoyment and mirth began to reign in the room.

Kinraid was too well seasoned to care what amount of liquor he drank; Philip had what was called a weak head, and disliked muddling himself with drink because of the immediate consequence of intense feelings of irritability, and the more distant one of a racking headache next day; so both these two preserved very much the same demeanour they had held at the beginning of the evening.

Sylvia was by all acknowledged and treated as the belle. When they played at blind-man's-buff go where she would, she was always caught; she was called out repeatedly to do what was required in any game, as if all had a pleasure in seeing her light figure and deft ways. She was sufficiently pleased with this to have got over her shyness with all except Charley. When others paid her their rustic compliments she tossed her head, and made her little saucy repartees; but when he said something low and flattering, it was too honey-sweet to her heart to be thrown off thus. And, somehow, the more she yielded to this fascination the more she avoided Philip. He did not speak flatteringly—he did not pay compliments—he watched her with discontented, longing eyes, and grew more inclined every moment, as he remembered his anticipation of a happy evening, to cry out in his heart *vanitas vanitatum*.

And now came crying the forfeits. Molly Brunton knelt down, her face buried in her mother's lap; the latter took out the forfeits one by one, and as she held them up, said the accustomed formula,—

'A fine thing and a very fine thing, what must he (or she) do who owns this thing.'

One or two had been told to kneel to the prettiest, bow to the wittiest, and kiss those they loved best; others had had to bite an inch off the poker, or such plays upon words.

And now came Sylvia's pretty new ribbon that Philip had given her (he almost longed to snatch it out of Mrs. Corney's hands and burn it before all their faces, so annoyed was he with the whole affair.)

Page 103

'A fine thing and a very fine thing—a most particular fine thing—choose how she came by it. What must she do as owns this thing?'

'She must blow out t' candle and kiss t' candlestick.'

In one instant Kinraid had hold of the only candle within reach, all the others had been put up high on inaccessible shelves and other places. Sylvia went up and blew out the candle, and before the sudden partial darkness was over he had taken the candle into his fingers, and, according to the traditional meaning of the words, was in the place of the candlestick, and as such was to be kissed. Every one laughed at innocent Sylvia's face as the meaning of her penance came into it, every one but Philip, who almost choked.

'I'm candlestick,' said Kinraid, with less of triumph in his voice than he would have had with any other girl in the room.

'Yo' mun kiss t' candlestick,' cried the Corneys, 'or yo'll niver get yo'r ribbon back.'

'And she sets a deal o' store by that ribbon,' said Molly Brunton, maliciously.

'I'll none kiss t' candlestick, nor him either,' said Sylvia, in a low voice of determination, turning away, full of confusion.

'Yo'll not get yo'r ribbon if yo' dunnot,' cried one and all.

'I don't care for t' ribbon,' said she, flashing up with a look at her tormentors, now her back was turned to Kinraid. 'An' I wunnot play any more at such like games,' she added, with fresh indignation rising in her heart as she took her old place in the corner of the room a little away from the rest.

Philip's spirits rose, and he yearned to go to her and tell her how he approved of her conduct. Alas, Philip! Sylvia, though as modest a girl as ever lived, was no prude, and had been brought up in simple, straightforward country ways; and with any other young man, excepting, perhaps, Philip's self, she would have thought no more of making a rapid pretence of kissing the hand or cheek of the temporary 'candlestick', than our ancestresses did in a much higher rank on similar occasions. Kinraid, though mortified by his public rejection, was more conscious of this than the inexperienced Philip; he resolved not to be balked, and watched his opportunity. For the time he went on playing as if Sylvia's conduct had not affected him in the least, and as if he was hardly aware of her defection from the game. As she saw others submitting, quite as a matter of course, to similar penances, she began to be angry with herself for having thought twice about it, and almost to dislike herself for the strange consciousness which had made it at the time seem impossible to do what she was told. Her eyes kept filling with tears as her isolated position in the gay party, the thought of what a fool she had made

of herself, kept recurring to her mind; but no one saw her, she thought, thus crying; and, ashamed to be discovered when the party should pause in their game, she stole round behind

Page 104

them into the great chamber in which she had helped to lay out the supper, with the intention of bathing her eyes, and taking a drink of water. One instant Charley Kinraid was missing from the circle of which he was the life and soul; and then back he came with an air of satisfaction on his face, intelligible enough to those who had seen his game; but unnoticed by Philip, who, amidst the perpetual noise and movements around him, had not perceived Sylvia's leaving the room, until she came back at the end of about a quarter of an hour, looking lovelier than ever, her complexion brilliant, her eyes drooping, her hair neatly and freshly arranged, tied with a brown ribbon instead of that she was supposed to have forfeited. She looked as if she did not wish her return to be noticed, stealing softly behind the romping lads and lasses with noiseless motions, and altogether such a contrast to them in her cool freshness and modest neatness, that both Kinraid and Philip found it difficult to keep their eyes off her. But the former had a secret triumph in his heart which enabled him to go on with his merry-making as if it absorbed him; while Philip dropped out of the crowd and came up to where she was standing silently by Mrs. Corney, who, arms akimbo, was laughing at the frolic and fun around her. Sylvia started a little when Philip spoke, and kept her soft eyes averted from him after the first glance; she answered him shortly, but with unaccustomed gentleness. He had only asked her when she would like him to take her home; and she, a little surprised at the idea of going home when to her the evening seemed only beginning, had answered—

'Go home? I don't know! It's New Year's eve!'

'Ay! but yo'r mother 'll lie awake till yo' come home, Sylvie!'

But Mrs. Corney, having heard his question, broke in with all sorts of upbraidings. 'Go home! Not see t' New Year in! Why, what should take 'em home these six hours? Wasn't there a moon as clear as day? and did such a time as this come often? And were they to break up the party before the New Year came in? And was there not supper, with a spiced round of beef that had been in pickle pretty nigh sin' Martinmas, and hams, and mince-pies, and what not? And if they thought any evil of her master's going to bed, or that by that early retirement he meant to imply that he did not bid his friends welcome, why he would not stay up beyond eight o'clock for King George upon his throne, as he'd tell them soon enough, if they'd only step upstairs and ask him. Well; she knowed what it was to want a daughter when she was ailing, so she'd say nought more, but hasten supper.

And this idea now took possession of Mrs. Corney's mind, for she would not willingly allow one of her guests to leave before they had done justice to her preparations; and, cutting her speech short, she hastily left Sylvia and Philip together.

Page 105

His heart beat fast; his feeling towards her had never been so strong or so distinct as since her refusal to kiss the 'candlestick.' He was on the point of speaking, of saying something explicitly tender, when the wooden trencher which the party were using at their play, came bowling between him and Sylvia, and spun out its little period right betwixt them. Every one was moving from chair to chair, and when the bustle was over Sylvia was seated at some distance from him, and he left standing outside the circle, as if he were not playing. In fact, Sylvia had unconsciously taken his place as actor in the game while he remained spectator, and, as it turned out, an auditor of a conversation not intended for his ears. He was wedged against the wall, close to the great eight-day clock, with its round moon-like smiling face forming a ludicrous contrast to his long, sallow, grave countenance, which was pretty much at the same level above the sanded floor. Before him sat Molly Brunton and one of her sisters, their heads close together in too deep talk to attend to the progress of the game. Philip's attention was caught by the words—

'I'll lay any wager he kissed her when he ran off into t' parlour.'

'She's so coy she'd niver let him,' replied Bessy Corney.

'She couldn't help hersel'; and for all she looks so demure and prim now' (and then both heads were turned in the direction of Sylvia), 'I'm as sure as I'm born that Charley is not t' chap to lose his forfeit; and yet yo' see he says nought more about it, and she's left off being 'feared of him.'

There was something in Sylvia's look, ay, and in Charley Kinraid's, too, that shot conviction into Philip's mind. He watched them incessantly during the interval before supper; they were intimate, and yet shy with each other, in a manner that enraged while it bewildered Philip. What was Charley saying to her in that whispered voice, as they passed each other? Why did they linger near each other? Why did Sylvia look so dreamily happy, so startled at every call of the game, as if recalled from some pleasant idea? Why did Kinraid's eyes always seek her while hers were averted, or downcast, and her cheeks all aflame? Philip's dark brow grew darker as he gazed. He, too, started when Mrs. Corney, close at his elbow, bade him go in to supper along with some of the elder ones, who were not playing; for the parlour was not large enough to hold all at once, even with the squeezing and cramming, and sitting together on chairs, which was not at all out of etiquette at Monkshaven. Philip was too reserved to express his disappointment and annoyance at being thus arrested in his painful watch over Sylvia; but he had no appetite for the good things set before him, and found it hard work to smile a sickly smile when called upon by Josiah Pratt for applause at some country joke. When supper was ended, there was some little discussion between Mrs. Corney and her son-in-law as to whether the different individuals

Page 106

of the company should be called upon for songs or stories, as was the wont at such convivial meetings. Brunton had been helping his mother-in-law in urging people to eat, heaping their plates over their shoulders with unexpected good things, filling the glasses at the upper end of the table, and the mugs which supplied the deficiency of glasses at the lower. And now, every one being satisfied, not to say stuffed to repletion, the two who had been attending to their wants stood still, hot and exhausted.

'They're a'most stawed,' said Mrs. Corney, with a pleased smile. 'It'll be manners t' ask some one as knows how to sing.'

'It may be manners for full men, but not for fasting,' replied Brunton. 'Folks in t' next room will be wanting their victual, and singing is allays out o' tune to empty bellies.'

'But there's them here as 'll take it ill if they're not asked. I heerd Josiah Pratt a-clearing his throat not a minute ago, an' he thinks as much on his singin' as a cock does on his crowin'.'

'If one sings I'm afeard all on 'em will like to hear their own pipes.'

But their dilemma was solved by Bessy Corney, who opened the door to see if the hungry ones outside might not come in for their share of the entertainment; and in they rushed, bright and riotous, scarcely giving the first party time to rise from their seats ere they took their places. One or two young men, released from all their previous shyness, helped Mrs. Corney and her daughters to carry off such dishes as were actually empty. There was no time for changing or washing of plates; but then, as Mrs. Corney laughingly observed,—

'We're a' on us friends, and some on us mayhap sweethearts; so no need to be particular about plates. Them as gets clean ones is lucky; and them as doesn't, and cannot put up wi' plates that has been used, mun go without.'

It seemed to be Philip's luck this night to be pent up in places; for again the space between the benches and the wall was filled up by the in-rush before he had time to make his way out; and all he could do was to sit quiet where he was. But between the busy heads and over-reaching arms he could see Charley and Sylvia, sitting close together, talking and listening more than eating. She was in a new strange state of happiness not to be reasoned about, or accounted for, but in a state of more exquisite feeling than she had ever experienced before; when, suddenly lifting her eyes, she caught Philip's face of extreme displeasure.

'Oh,' said she, 'I must go. There's Philip looking at me so.'

'Philip!' said Kinraid, with a sudden frown upon his face.

'My cousin,' she replied, instinctively comprehending what had flashed into his mind, and anxious to disclaim the suspicion of having a lover. 'Mother told him to see me home, and he's noan one for staying up late.'

'But you needn't go. I'll see yo' home.'

Page 107

'Mother's but ailing,' said Sylvia, a little conscience-smitten at having so entirely forgotten everything in the delight of the present, 'and I said I wouldn't be late.'

'And do you allays keep to your word?' asked he, with a tender meaning in his tone.

'Allays; leastways I think so,' replied she, blushing.

'Then if I ask you not to forget me, and you give me your word, I may be sure you'll keep it.'

'It wasn't I as forgot you,' said Sylvia, so softly as not to be heard by him.

He tried to make her repeat what she had said, but she would not, and he could only conjecture that it was something more tell-tale than she liked to say again, and that alone was very charming to him.

'I shall walk home with you,' said he, as Sylvia at last rose to depart, warned by a further glimpse of Philip's angry face.

'No!' said she, hastily, 'I can't do with yo'; for somehow she felt the need of pacifying Philip, and knew in her heart that a third person joining their *tete-a-tete* walk would only increase his displeasure.

'Why not?' said Charley, sharply.

'Oh! I don't know, only please don't!'

By this time her cloak and hood were on, and she was slowly making her way down her side of the room followed by Charley, and often interrupted by indignant remonstrances against her departure, and the early breaking-up of the party. Philip stood, hat in hand, in the doorway between the kitchen and parlour, watching her so intently that he forgot to be civil, and drew many a jest and gibe upon him for his absorption in his pretty cousin.

When Sylvia reached him, he said,—

'Yo're ready at last, are yo'?'

'Yes,' she replied, in her little beseeching tone. 'Yo've not been wanting to go long, han yo'? I ha' but just eaten my supper.'

'Yo've been so full of talk, that's been the reason your supper lasted so long. That fellow's none going wi' us?' said he sharply, as he saw Kinraid rummaging for his cap in a heap of men's clothes, thrown into the back-kitchen.

‘No,’ said Sylvia, in affright at Philip’s fierce look and passionate tone. ‘I telled him not.’

But at that moment the heavy outer door was opened by Daniel Robson himself—bright, broad, and rosy, a jolly impersonation of Winter. His large drover’s coat was covered with snow-flakes, and through the black frame of the doorway might be seen a white waste world of sweeping fell and field, with the dark air filled with the pure down-fall. Robson stamped his snow-laden feet and shook himself well, still standing on the mat, and letting a cold frosty current of fresh air into the great warm kitchen. He laughed at them all before he spoke.

Page 108

'It's a coud new year as I'm lettin' in though it's noan t' new year yet. Yo'll a' be snowed up, as sure as my name s Dannel, if yo' stop for twel' o'clock. Yo'd better mak' haste and go whoam. Why, Charley, my lad! how beest ta? who'd ha' thought o' seeing thee i' these parts again! Nay, missus, nay, t' new year mun find its way int' t' house by itsel' for me; for a ha' promised my oud woman to bring Sylvie whoam as quick as may-be; she's lyin' awake and frettin' about t' snow and what not. Thank yo' kindly, missus, but a'll tak' nought to eat; just a drop o' somethin' hot to keep out coud, and wish yo' a' the compliments o' the season. Philip, my man, yo'll not be sorry to be spared t' walk round by Haytersbank such a neet. My missus were i' such a way about Sylvie that a thought a'd just step off mysel', and have a peep at yo' a', and bring her some wraps. Yo'r sheep will be a' folded, a reckon, Measter Pratt, for there'll niver be a nibble o' grass to be seen this two month, accordin' to my readin'; and a've been at sea long enough, and on land long enough t' know signs and wonders. It's good stuff that, any way, and worth comin' for,' after he had gulped down a tumblerful of half-and-half grog. 'Kinraid, if ta doesn't come and see me afore thou'rt many days ouder, thee and me'll have words. Come, Sylvie, what art ta about, keepin' me here? Here's Mistress Corney mixin' me another jorum. Well, this time a'll give "T' married happy, and t' single wed!"'

Sylvia was all this while standing by her father quite ready for departure, and not a little relieved by his appearance as her convoy home.

'I'm ready to see Haytersbank to-night, master!' said Kinraid, with easy freedom—a freedom which Philip envied, but could not have imitated, although he was deeply disappointed at the loss of his walk with Sylvia, when he had intended to exercise the power his aunt had delegated to him of remonstrance if her behaviour had been light or thoughtless, and of warning if he saw cause to disapprove of any of her associates.

After the Robsons had left, a blank fell upon both Charley and Philip. In a few minutes, however, the former, accustomed to prompt decision, resolved that she and no other should be his wife. Accustomed to popularity among women, and well versed in the incipient signs of their liking for him, he anticipated no difficulty in winning her. Satisfied with the past, and pleasantly hopeful about the future, he found it easy to turn his attention to the next prettiest girl in the room, and to make the whole gathering bright with his ready good temper and buoyant spirit.

Page 109

Mrs. Corney had felt it her duty to press Philip to stay, now that, as she said, he had no one but himself to see home, and the new year so near coming in. To any one else in the room she would have added the clinching argument, 'A shall take it very unkind if yo' go now'; but somehow she could not say this, for in truth Philip's look showed that he would be but a wet blanket on the merriment of the party. So, with as much civility as could be mustered up between them, he took leave. Shutting the door behind him, he went out into the dreary night, and began his lonesome walk back to Monkshaven. The cold sleet almost blinded him as the sea-wind drove it straight in his face; it cut against him as it was blown with drifting force. The roar of the wintry sea came borne on the breeze; there was more light from the whitened ground than from the dark laden sky above. The field-paths would have been a matter of perplexity, had it not been for the well-known gaps in the dyke-side, which showed the whitened land beyond, between the two dark stone walls. Yet he went clear and straight along his way, having unconsciously left all guidance to the animal instinct which co-exists with the human soul, and sometimes takes strange charge of the human body, when all the nobler powers of the individual are absorbed in acute suffering. At length he was in the lane, toiling up the hill, from which, by day, Monkshaven might be seen. Now all features of the landscape before him were lost in the darkness of night, against which the white flakes came closer and nearer, thicker and faster. On a sudden, the bells of Monkshaven church rang out a welcome to the new year, 1796. From the direction of the wind, it seemed as if the sound was flung with strength and power right into Philip's face. He walked down the hill to its merry sound—its merry sound, his heavy heart. As he entered the long High Street of Monkshaven he could see the watching lights put out in parlour, chamber, or kitchen. The new year had come, and expectation was ended. Reality had begun.

He turned to the right, into the court where he lodged with Alice Rose. There was a light still burning there, and cheerful voices were heard. He opened the door; Alice, her daughter, and Coulson stood as if awaiting him. Hester's wet cloak hung on a chair before the fire; she had her hood on, for she and Coulson had been to the watch-night.

The solemn excitement of the services had left its traces upon her countenance and in her mind. There was a spiritual light in her usually shadowed eyes, and a slight flush on her pale cheek. Merely personal and self-conscious feelings were merged in a loving good-will to all her fellow-creatures. Under the influence of this large charity, she forgot her habitual reserve, and came forward as Philip entered to meet him with her new year's wishes—wishes that she had previously interchanged with the other two.

'A happy new year to you, Philip, and may God have you in his keeping all the days thereof!'



Page 110

He took her hand, and shook it warmly in reply. The flush on her cheek deepened as she withdrew it. Alice Rose said something curtly about the lateness of the hour and her being much tired; and then she and her daughter went upstairs to the front chamber, and Philip and Coulson to that which they shared at the back of the house.

CHAPTER XIII

PERPLEXITIES

Coulson and Philip were friendly, but not intimate. They never had had a dispute, they never were confidential with each other; in truth, they were both reserved and silent men, and, probably, respected each other the more for being so self-contained. There was a private feeling in Coulson's heart which would have made a less amiable fellow dislike Philip. But of this the latter was unconscious: they were not apt to exchange many words in the room which they occupied jointly.

Coulson asked Philip if he had enjoyed himself at the Corneys', and Philip replied,—

'Not much; such parties are noane to my liking.'

'And yet thou broke off from t' watch-night to go there.'

No answer; so Coulson went on, with a sense of the duty laid upon him, to improve the occasion—the first that had presented itself since the good old Methodist minister had given his congregation the solemn warning to watch over the opportunities of various kinds which the coming year would present.

'Jonas Barclay told us as the pleasures o' this world were like apples o' Sodom, pleasant to look at, but ashes to taste.'

Coulson wisely left Philip to make the application for himself. If he did he made no sign, but threw himself on his bed with a heavy sigh.

'Are yo' not going to undress?' said Coulson, as he covered him up in bed.

There had been a long pause of silence. Philip did not answer him, and he thought he had fallen asleep. But he was roused from his first slumber by Hepburn's soft movements about the room. Philip had thought better of it, and, with some penitence in his heart for his gruffness to the unoffending Coulson, was trying not to make any noise while he undressed.

But he could not sleep. He kept seeing the Corneys' kitchen and the scenes that had taken place in it, passing like a pageant before his closed eyes. Then he opened them in angry weariness at the recurring vision, and tried to make out the outlines of the room

and the furniture in the darkness. The white ceiling sloped into the whitewashed walls, and against them he could see the four rush-bottomed chairs, the looking-glass hung on one side, the old carved oak-chest (his own property, with the initials of forgotten ancestors cut upon it), which held his clothes; the boxes that belonged to Coulson, sleeping soundly in the bed in the opposite corner of the room; the casement window in the roof, through which the snowy ground on the steep hill-side could be plainly seen; and when he got so far as this in the catalogue of the room, he fell into a troubled feverish sleep, which lasted two or three hours; and then he awoke with a start, and a consciousness of uneasiness, though what about he could not remember at first.

Page 111

When he recollected all that had happened the night before, it impressed him much more favourably than it had done at the time. If not joy, hope had come in the morning; and, at any rate, he could be up and be doing, for the late wintry light was stealing down the hill-side, and he knew that, although Coulson lay motionless in his sleep, it was past their usual time of rising. Still, as it was new year's Day, a time of some licence, Philip had mercy on his fellow-shopman, and did not waken him till just as he was leaving the room.

Carrying his shoes in his hand, he went softly downstairs for he could see from the top of the flight that neither Alice nor her daughter was down yet, as the kitchen shutters were not unclosed. It was Mrs. Rose's habit to rise early, and have all bright and clean against her lodgers came down; but then, in general, she went to rest before nine o'clock, whereas the last night she had not gone till past twelve. Philip went about undoing the shutters, and trying to break up the raking coal, with as little noise as might be, for he had compassion on the tired sleepers. The kettle had not been filled, probably because Mrs. Rose had been unable to face the storm of the night before, in taking it to the pump just at the entrance of the court. When Philip came back from filling it, he found Alice and Hester both in the kitchen, and trying to make up for lost time by hastening over their work. Hester looked busy and notable with her gown pinned up behind her, and her hair all tucked away under a clean linen cap; but Alice was angry with herself for her late sleeping, and that and other causes made her speak crossly to Philip, as he came in with his snowy feet and well-filled kettle.

'Look the' there! droppin' and drippin' along t' flags as was cleaned last night, and meddlin' wi' woman's work as a man has no business wi'.'

Philip was surprised and annoyed. He had found relief from his own thoughts in doing what he believed would help others. He gave up the kettle to her snatching hands, and sate down behind the door in momentary ill-temper. But the kettle was better filled, and consequently heavier than the old woman expected, and she could not manage to lift it to the crook from which it generally hung suspended. She looked round for Hester, but she was gone into the back-kitchen. In a minute Philip was at her side, and had heaved it to its place for her. She looked in his face for a moment wistfully, but hardly condescended to thank him; at least the sound of the words did not pass the lips that formed them. Rebuffed by her manner, he went back to his old seat, and mechanically watched the preparations for breakfast; but his thoughts went back to the night before, and the comparative ease of his heart was gone. The first stir of a new day had made him feel as if he had had no sufficient cause for his annoyance and despondency the previous evening; but now, condemned to sit quiet, he reviewed looks and words, and saw just reason for his anxiety. After some consideration he resolved to go that very night to Haytersbank, and have some talk with either Sylvia or her mother; what the exact nature of this purposed conversation should be, he did not determine; much would depend on Sylvia's manner and mood, and on her mother's state of health; but at any rate something would be learnt.

Page 112

During breakfast something was learnt nearer home; though not all that a man less unconscious and more vain than Philip might have discovered. He only found out that Mrs. Rose was displeased with him for not having gone to the watch-night with Hester, according to the plan made some weeks before. But he soothed his conscience by remembering that he had made no promise; he had merely spoken of his wish to be present at the service, about which Hester was speaking; and although at the time and for a good while afterwards, he had fully intended going, yet as there had been William Coulson to accompany her, his absence could not have been seriously noticed. Still he was made uncomfortable by Mrs. Rose's change of manner; once or twice he said to himself that she little knew how miserable he had been during his 'gay evening,' as she would persist in calling it, or she would not talk at him with such persevering bitterness this morning. Before he left for the shop, he spoke of his intention of going to see how his aunt was, and of paying her a new year's day visit.

Hepburn and Coulson took it in turns week and week about to go first home to dinner; the one who went first sate down with Mrs. Rose and her daughter, instead of having his portion put in the oven to keep warm for him. To-day it was Hepburn's turn to be last. All morning the shop was full with customers, come rather to offer good wishes than to buy, and with an unspoken remembrance of the cake and wine which the two hospitable brothers Foster made a point of offering to all comers on new year's day. It was busy work for all—for Hester on her side, where caps, ribbons, and women's gear were exclusively sold—for the shopmen and boys in the grocery and drapery department. Philip was trying to do his business with his mind far away; and the consequence was that his manner was not such as to recommend him to the customers, some of whom recollected it as very different, courteous and attentive, if grave and sedate. One buxom farmer's wife noticed the change to him. She had a little girl with her, of about five years old, that she had lifted up on the counter, and who was watching Philip with anxious eyes, occasionally whispering in her mother's ear, and then hiding her face against her cloak.

'She's thought a deal o' coming to see yo', and a dunnot think as yo' mind her at all. My pretty, he's clean forgotten as how he said last new year's day, he'd gi' thee a barley-sugar stick, if thou'd hem him a handkercher by this.'

The child's face was buried in the comfortable breadth of duffle at these words, while the little outstretched hand held a small square of coarse linen.

'Ay, she's noane forgotten it, and has done her five stitches a day, bless her; and a dunnot believe as yo' know her again. She's Phoebe Moorsom, and a'm Hannah, and a've dealt at t' shop reg'lar this fifteen year.'

'I'm very sorry,' said Philip. 'I was up late last night, and I'm a bit dazed to-day. Well! this is nice work, Phoebe, and I'm sure I'm very much beholden to yo'. And here's five sticks o' barley-sugar, one for every stitch, and thank you kindly, Mrs. Moorsom, too.'

Page 113

Philip took the handkerchief and hoped he had made honourable amends for his want of recognition. But the wee lassie refused to be lifted down, and whispered something afresh into her mother's ear, who smiled and bade her be quiet. Philip saw, however, that there was some wish ungratified on the part of the little maiden which he was expected to inquire into, and, accordingly, he did his duty.

'She's a little fool; she says yo' promised to gi'e her a kiss, and t' make her yo'r wife.'

The child burrowed her face closer into her mother's neck, and refused to allow the kiss which Philip willingly offered. All he could do was to touch the back of the little white fat neck with his lips. The mother carried her off only half satisfied, and Philip felt that he must try and collect his scattered wits, and be more alive to the occasion.

Towards the dinner-hour the crowd slackened; Hester began to replenish decanters and bottles, and to bring out a fresh cake before she went home to dinner; and Coulson and Philip looked over the joint present they always made to her on this day. It was a silk handkerchief of the prettiest colours they could pick out of the shop, intended for her to wear round her neck. Each tried to persuade the other to give it to her, for each was shy of the act of presentation. Coulson was, however, the most resolute; and when she returned from the parlour the little parcel was in Philip's hands.

'Here, Hester,' said he, going round the counter to her, just as she was leaving the shop. 'It's from Coulson and me; a handkerchief for yo' to wear; and we wish yo' a happy New Year, and plenty on 'em; and there's many a one wishes the same.'

He took her hand as he said this. She went a little paler, and her eyes brightened as though they would fill with tears as they met his; she could not have helped it, do what she would. But she only said, 'Thank yo' kindly,' and going up to Coulson she repeated the words and action to him; and then they went off together to dinner.

There was a lull of business for the next hour. John and Jeremiah were dining like the rest of the world. Even the elder errand-boy had vanished. Philip rearranged disorderly goods; and then sate down on the counter by the window; it was the habitual place for the one who stayed behind; for excepting on market-day there was little or no custom during the noon-hour. Formerly he used to move the drapery with which the window was ornamented, and watch the passers-by with careless eye. But now, though he seemed to gaze abroad, he saw nothing but vacancy. All the morning since he got up he had been trying to fight through his duties—leaning against a hope—a hope that first had bowed, and then had broke as soon as he really tried its weight. There was not a sign of Sylvia's liking for him to be gathered from the most careful recollection of the past evening. It was of no use thinking that there was. It was better to give it up altogether and at once. But what if he could not? What if the thought of her was bound up with his life; and that once torn out by his own free will, the very roots of his heart must come also?

Page 114

No; he was resolved he would go on; as long as there was life there was hope; as long as Sylvia remained unpledged to any one else, there was a chance for him. He would remodel his behaviour to her. He could not be merry and light-hearted like other young men; his nature was not cast in that mould; and the early sorrows that had left him a lonely orphan might have matured, but had not enlivened, his character. He thought with some bitterness on the power of easy talking about trifles which some of those he had met with at the Corneys' had exhibited. But then he felt stirring within him a force of enduring love which he believed to be unusual, and which seemed as if it must compel all things to his wish in the end. A year or so ago he had thought much of his own cleverness and his painfully acquired learning, and he had imagined that these were the qualities which were to gain Sylvia. But now, whether he had tried them and had failed to win even her admiration, or whether some true instinct had told him that a woman's love may be gained in many ways sooner than by mere learning, he was only angry with himself for his past folly in making himself her school—nay, her taskmaster. To-night, though, he would start off on a new tack. He would not even upbraid her for her conduct the night before; he had shown her his displeasure at the time; but she should see how tender and forgiving he could be. He would lure her to him rather than find fault with her. There had perhaps been too much of that already.

When Coulson came back Philip went to his solitary dinner. In general he was quite alone while eating it; but to-day Alice Rose chose to bear him company. She watched him with cold severe eye for some time, until he had appeased his languid appetite. Then she began with the rebuke she had in store for him; a rebuke the motives to which were not entirely revealed even to herself.

'Thou 're none so keen after thy food as common,' she began. 'Plain victuals goes ill down after feasting'.'

Philip felt the colour mount to his face; he was not in the mood for patiently standing the brunt of the attack which he saw was coming, and yet he had a reverent feeling for woman and for age. He wished she would leave him alone; but he only said—'I had nought but a slice o' cold beef for supper, if you'll call that feasting.'

'Neither do godly ways savour delicately after the pleasures of the world,' continued she, unheeding his speech. 'Thou wert wont to seek the house of the Lord, and I thought well on thee; but of late thou'st changed, and fallen away, and I mun speak what is in my heart towards thee.'

'Mother,' said Philip, impatiently (both he and Coulson called Alice 'mother' at times), 'I don't think I am fallen away, and any way I cannot stay now to be—it's new year's Day, and t' shop is throng.'

But Alice held up her hand. Her speech was ready, and she must deliver it.

Page 115

'Shop here, shop there. The flesh and the devil are gettin' hold on yo', and yo' need more nor iver to seek t' ways o' grace. New year's day comes and says, "Watch and pray," and yo' say, "Nay, I'll seek feasts and market-places, and let times and seasons come and go without heedn' into whose presence they're hastening me." Time was, Philip, when thou'd niver ha' letten a merry-making keep thee fra' t' watch-night, and t' company o' the godly.'

'I tell yo' it was no merry-making to me,' said Philip, with sharpness, as he left the house.

Alice sat down on the nearest seat, and leant her head on her wrinkled hand.

'He's tangled and snared,' said she; 'my heart has yearned after him, and I esteemed him as one o' the elect. And more nor me yearns after him. O Lord, I have but one child! O Lord, spare her! But o'er and above a' I would like to pray for his soul, that Satan might not have it, for he came to me but a little lad.'

At that moment Philip, smitten by his conscience for his hard manner of speech, came back; but Alice did not hear or see him till he was close by her, and then he had to touch her to recall her attention.

'Mother,' said he, 'I was wrong. I'm fretted by many things. I shouldn't ha' spoken so. It was ill-done of me.'

'Oh, my lad!' said she, looking up and putting her thin arm on his shoulder as he stooped, 'Satan is desiring after yo' that he may sift yo' as wheat. Bide at whoam, bide at whoam, and go not after them as care nought for holy things. Why need yo' go to Haytersbank this night?'

Philip reddened. He could not and would not give it up, and yet it was difficult to resist the pleading of the usually stern old woman.

'Nay,' said he, withdrawing himself ever so little from her hold; 'my aunt is but ailing, they're my own flesh and blood, and as good folks as needs be, though they mayn't be o' our—o' your way o' thinking in a' things.'

'Our ways—your ways o' thinking, says he, as if they were no longer his'n. And as good folks as need be,' repeated she, with returning severity. 'Them's Satan's words, tho' yo' spoke 'em, Philip. I can do nought again Satan, but I can speak to them as can; an' we'll see which pulls hardest, for it'll be better for thee to be riven and rent i' twain than to go body and soul to hell.'

'But don't think, mother,' said Philip, his last words of conciliation, for the clock had given warning for two, 'as I'm boun' for hell, just because I go t' see my own folks, all I ha' left

o' kin.' And once more, after laying his hand with as much of a caress as was in his nature on hers, he left the house.

Probably Alice would have considered the first words that greeted Philip on his entrance into the shop as an answer to her prayer, for they were such as put a stop to his plan of going to see Sylvia that evening; and if Alice had formed her inchoate thoughts into words, Sylvia would have appeared as the nearest earthly representative of the spirit of temptation whom she dreaded for Philip.

Page 116

As he took his place behind the counter, Coulson said to him in a low voice,—

‘Jeremiah Foster has been round to bid us to sup wi’ him to-night. He says that he and John have a little matter o’ business to talk over with us.’

A glance from his eyes to Philip told the latter that Coulson believed the business spoken of had something to do with the partnership, respecting which there had been a silent intelligence for some time between the shopmen.

‘And what did thou say?’ asked Philip, doggedly unwilling, even yet, to give up his purposed visit.

‘Say! why, what could a say, but that we’d come? There was summat up, for sure; and summat as he thought we should be glad on. I could tell it fra’ t’ look on his face.’

‘I don’t think as I can go,’ said Philip, feeling just then as if the long-hoped-for partnership was as nothing compared to his plan. It was always distasteful to him to have to give up a project, or to disarrange an intended order of things, such was his nature; but to-day it was absolute pain to yield his own purpose.

‘Why, man alive?’ said Coulson, in amaze at his reluctance.

‘I didn’t say I mightn’t go,’ said Philip, weighing consequences, until called off to attend to customers.

In the course of the afternoon, however, he felt himself more easy in deferring his visit to Haytersbank till the next evening. Charley Kinraid entered the shop, accompanied by Molly Brunton and her sisters; and though they all went towards Hester’s side of the shop, and Philip and Coulson had many people to attend to, yet Hepburn’s sharpened ears caught much of what the young women were saying. From that he gathered that Kinraid had promised them new year’s gifts, for the purchase of which they were come; and after a little more listening he learnt that Kinraid was returning to Shields the next day, having only come over to spend a holiday with his relations, and being tied with ship’s work at the other end. They all talked together lightly and merrily, as if his going or staying was almost a matter of indifference to himself and his cousins. The principal thought of the young women was to secure the articles they most fancied; Charley Kinraid was (so Philip thought) especially anxious that the youngest and prettiest should be pleased. Hepburn watched him perpetually with a kind of envy of his bright, courteous manner, the natural gallantry of the sailor. If it were but clear that Sylvia took as little thought of him as he did of her, to all appearance, Philip could even have given him praise for manly good looks, and a certain kind of geniality of disposition which made him ready to smile pleasantly at all strangers, from babies upwards.

Page 117

As the party turned to leave the shop they saw Philip, the guest of the night before; and they came over to shake hands with him across the counter; Kinraid's hand was proffered among the number. Last night Philip could not have believed it possible that such a demonstration of fellowship should have passed between them; and perhaps there was a slight hesitation of manner on his part, for some idea or remembrance crossed Kinraid's mind which brought a keen searching glance into the eyes which for a moment were fastened on Philip's face. In spite of himself, and during the very action of hand-shaking, Philip felt a cloud come over his face, not altering or moving his features, but taking light and peace out of his countenance.

Molly Brunton began to say something, and he gladly turned to look at her. She was asking him why he went away so early, for they had kept it up for four hours after he left, and last of all, she added (turning to Kinraid), her cousin Charley had danced a hornpipe among the platters on the ground.

Philip hardly knew what he said in reply, the mention of that *pas seul* lifted such a weight off his heart. He could smile now, after his grave fashion, and would have shaken hands again with Kinraid had it been required; for it seemed to him that no one, caring ever so little in the way that he did for Sylvia, could have borne four mortal hours of a company where she had been, and was not; least of all could have danced a hornpipe, either from gaiety of heart, or even out of complaisance. He felt as if the yearning after the absent one would have been a weight to his legs, as well as to his spirit; and he imagined that all men were like himself.

CHAPTER XIV

PARTNERSHIP

As darkness closed in, and the New Year's throng became scarce, Philip's hesitation about accompanying Coulson faded away. He was more comfortable respecting Sylvia, and his going to see her might be deferred; and, after all, he felt that the wishes of his masters ought to be attended to, and the honour of an invitation to the private house of Jeremiah not to be slighted for anything short of a positive engagement. Besides, the ambitious man of business existed strongly in Philip. It would never do to slight advances towards the second great earthly object in his life; one also on which the first depended.

So when the shop was closed, the two set out down Bridge Street to cross the river to the house of Jeremiah Foster. They stood a moment on the bridge to breathe the keen fresh sea air after their busy day. The waters came down, swollen full and dark, with rapid rushing speed from the snow-fed springs high up on the moorland above. The close-packed houses in the old town seemed a cluster of white roofs irregularly piled

against the more unbroken white of the hill-side. Lights twinkled here and there in the town, and were slung from stern and bow of the ships in the harbour.

Page 118

The air was very still, settling in for a frost; so still that all distant sounds seemed near: the rumble of a returning cart in the High Street, the voices on board ship, the closing of shutters and barring of doors in the new town to which they were bound. But the sharp air was filled, as it were, with saline particles in a freezing state; little pungent crystals of sea salt burning lips and cheeks with their cold keenness. It would not do to linger here in the very centre of the valley up which passed the current of atmosphere coming straight with the rushing tide from the icy northern seas. Besides, there was the unusual honour of a supper with Jeremiah Foster awaiting them. He had asked each of them separately to a meal before now; but they had never gone together, and they felt that there was something serious in the conjuncture.

They began to climb the steep heights leading to the freshly-built rows of the new town of Monkshaven, feeling as if they were rising into aristocratic regions where no shop profaned the streets. Jeremiah Foster's house was one of six, undistinguished in size, or shape, or colour; but noticed in the daytime by all passers-by for its spotless cleanliness of lintel and doorstep, window and window frame. The very bricks seemed as though they came in for the daily scrubbing which brightened handle, knocker, all down to the very scraper.

The two young men felt as shy of the interview with their master under such unusual relations of guest and host, as a girl does of her first party. Each rather drew back from the decided step of knocking at the door; but with a rebuffing shake at his own folly, Philip was the one to give a loud single rap. As if they had been waited for, the door flew open, and a middle-aged servant stood behind, as spotless and neat as the house itself; and smiled a welcome to the familiar faces.

'Let me dust yo' a bit, William,' said she, suiting the action to the word. 'You've been leanin' again some whitewash, a'll be bound. Ay, Philip,' continued she, turning him round with motherly freedom, 'yo'll do if yo'll but gi' your shoon a polishin' wipe on yon other mat. This'n for takin' t' roughest mud off. Measter allays polishes on that.'

In the square parlour the same precise order was observed. Every article of furniture was free from speck of dirt or particle of dust; and everything was placed either in a parallel line, or at exact right-angles with every other. Even John and Jeremiah sat in symmetry on opposite sides of the fire-place; the very smiles on their honest faces seemed drawn to a line of exactitude.

Such formality, however admirable, was not calculated to promote ease: it was not until after supper—until a good quantity of Yorkshire pie had been swallowed, and washed down, too, with the best and most generous wine in Jeremiah's cellar—that there was the least geniality among them, in spite of the friendly kindness of the host and his

brother. The long silence, during which mute thanks for the meal were given, having come to an end, Jeremiah called for pipes, and three of the party began to smoke.

Page 119

Politics in those days were tickle subjects to meddle with, even in the most private company. The nation was in a state of terror against France, and against any at home who might be supposed to sympathise with the enormities she had just been committing. The oppressive act against seditious meetings had been passed the year before; and people were doubtful to what extremity of severity it might be construed. Even the law authorities forgot to be impartial, but either their alarms or their interests made too many of them vehement partisans instead of calm arbiters, and thus destroyed the popular confidence in what should have been considered the supreme tribunal of justice. Yet for all this, there were some who dared to speak of reform of Parliament, as a preliminary step to fair representation of the people, and to a reduction of the heavy war-taxation that was imminent, if not already imposed. But these pioneers of 1830 were generally obnoxious. The great body of the people gloried in being Tories and haters of the French, with whom they were on tenter-hooks to fight, almost unaware of the rising reputation of the young Corsican warrior, whose name would be used ere a dozen years had passed to hush English babies with a terror such as that of Marlborough once had for the French.

At such a place as Monkshaven all these opinions were held in excess. One or two might, for the mere sake of argument, dispute on certain points of history or government; but they took care to be very sure of their listeners before such arguments touched on anything of the present day; for it had been not unfrequently found that the public duty of prosecuting opinions not your own overrode the private duty of respecting confidence. Most of the Monkshaven politicians confined themselves, therefore, to such general questions as these: 'Could an Englishman lick more than four Frenchmen at a time?' 'What was the proper punishment for members of the Corresponding Society (correspondence with the French directory), hanging and quartering, or burning?' 'Would the forthcoming child of the Princess of Wales be a boy or a girl? If a girl, would it be more loyal to call it Charlotte or Elizabeth?'

The Fosters were quite secure enough of their guests this evening to have spoken freely on politics had they been so inclined. And they did begin on the outrages which had been lately offered to the king in crossing St James's Park to go and open the House of Lords; but soon, so accustomed were their minds to caution and restraint, the talk dropped down to the high price of provisions. Bread at 1_s_. 3_d_. the quartern loaf, according to the London test. Wheat at 120_s_. per quarter, as the home-baking northerners viewed the matter; and then the conversation died away to an ominous silence. John looked at Jeremiah, as if asking him to begin. Jeremiah was the host, and had been a married man. Jeremiah returned the look with the same meaning in it. John, though a bachelor, was the elder brother. The great church bell, brought from the Monkshaven monastery centuries ago, high up on the opposite hill-side, began to ring nine o'clock; it was getting late. Jeremiah began:

Page 120

'It seems a bad time for starting any one on business, wi' prices and taxes and bread so dear; but John and I are getting into years, and we've no children to follow us: yet we would fain draw out of some of our worldly affairs. We would like to give up the shop, and stick to banking, to which there seemeth a plain path. But first there is the stock and goodwill of the shop to be disposed on.'

A dead pause. This opening was not favourable to the hopes of the two moneyless young men who had been hoping to succeed their masters by the more gradual process of partnership. But it was only the kind of speech that had been agreed upon by the two brothers with a view of impressing on Hepburn and Coulson the great and unusual responsibility of the situation into which the Fosters wished them to enter. In some ways the talk of many was much less simple and straightforward in those days than it is now. The study of effect shown in the London diners-out of the last generation, who prepared their conversation beforehand, was not without its parallel in humbler spheres, and for different objects than self-display. The brothers Foster had all but rehearsed the speeches they were about to make this evening. They were aware of the youth of the parties to whom they were going to make a most favourable proposal; and they dreaded that if that proposal was too lightly made, it would be too lightly considered, and the duties involved in it too carelessly entered upon. So the *role* of one brother was to suggest, that of the other to repress. The young men, too, had their reserves. They foresaw, and had long foreseen, what was coming that evening. They were impatient to hear it in distinct words; and yet they had to wait, as if unconscious, during all the long preamble. Do age and youth never play the same parts now? To return. John Foster replied to his brother:

'The stock and goodwill! That would take much wealth. And there will be fixtures to be considered. Philip, canst thee tell me the exact amount of stock in the shop at present?'

It had only just been taken; Philip had it at his fingers' ends. 'One thousand nine hundred and forty-one pounds, thirteen shillings and twopence.'

Coulson looked at him in a little dismay, and could not repress a sigh. The figures put into words and spoken aloud seemed to indicate so much larger an amount of money than when quickly written down in numerals. But Philip read the countenances, nay, by some process of which he was not himself aware, he read the minds of the brothers, and felt no dismay at what he saw there.

'And the fixtures?' asked John Foster.

'The appraiser valued them at four hundred and thirty-five pounds three and sixpence when father died. We have added to them since, but we will reckon them at that. How much does that make with the value of the stock?'

'Two thousand one hundred and seventy-six pounds, sixteen shillings and eightpence,' said Philip.

Page 121

Coulson had done the sum quicker, but was too much disheartened by the amount to speak.

'And the goodwill?' asked the pitiless John. 'What dost thee set that at?'

'I think, brother, that that would depend on who came forward with the purchase-money of the stock and fixtures. To some folks we might make it sit easy, if they were known to us, and those as we wished well to. If Philip and William here, for instance, said they'd like to purchase the business, I reckon thee and me would not ask 'em so much as we should ask Millers' (Millers was an upstart petty rival shop at the end of the bridge in the New Town).

'I wish Philip and William was to come after us,' said John. 'But that's out of the question,' he continued, knowing all the while that, far from being out of the question, it was the very question, and that it was as good as settled at this very time.

No one spoke. Then Jeremiah went on:

'It's out of the question, I reckon?'

He looked at the two young men. Coulson shook his head. Philip more bravely said,—

'I have fifty-three pounds seven and fourpence in yo'r hands, Master John, and it's all I have i' the world.'

'It's a pity,' said John, and again they were silent. Half-past nine struck. It was time to be beginning to make an end. 'Perhaps, brother, they have friends who could advance 'em the money. We might make it sit light to them, for the sake of their good service?'

Philip replied,—

'There's no one who can put forwards a penny for me: I have but few kin, and they have little to spare beyond what they need.'

Coulson said—

'My father and mother have nine on us.'

'Let alone, let alone!' said John, relenting fast; for he was weary of his part of cold, stern prudence. 'Brother, I think we have enough of this world's goods to do what we like wi' our own.'

Jeremiah was a little scandalized at the rapid melting away of assumed character, and took a good pull at his pipe before he replied—

'Upwards of two thousand pounds is a large sum to set on the well-being and well-doing of two lads, the elder of whom is not three-and-twenty. I fear we must look farther a-field.'

'Why, John,' replied Jeremiah, 'it was but yesterday thee saidst thee would rather have Philip and William than any men o' fifty that thee knowed. And now to bring up their youth again them.'

'Well, well! t' half on it is thine, and thou shall do even as thou wilt. But I think as I must have security for my moiety, for it's a risk—a great risk. Have ye any security to offer? any expectations? any legacies, as other folk have a life-interest in at present?'

No; neither of them had. So Jeremiah rejoined—

'Then, I suppose, I mun do as thee dost, John, and take the security of character. And it's a great security too, lads, and t' best o' all, and one that I couldn't ha' done without; no, not if yo'd pay me down five thousand for goodwill, and stock, and fixtures. For John Foster and Son has been a shop i' Monkshaven this eighty years and more; and I dunnot think there's a man living—or dead, for that matter—as can say Fosters wronged him of a penny, or gave short measure to a child or a Cousin Betty.'

Page 122

They all four shook hands round with the same heartiness as if it had been a legal ceremony necessary to the completion of the partnership. The old men's faces were bright with smiles; the eyes of the young ones sparkled with hope.

'But, after all,' said Jeremiah, 'we've not told you particulars. Yo're thanking us for a pig in a poke; but we had more forethought, and we put all down on a piece o' paper.'

He took down a folded piece of paper from the mantel-shelf, put on his horn spectacles, and began to read aloud, occasionally peering over his glasses to note the effect on the countenances of the young men. The only thing he was in the habit of reading aloud was a chapter in the Bible daily to his housekeeper servant; and, like many, he reserved a peculiar tone for that solemn occupation—a tone which he unconsciously employed for the present enumeration of pounds, shillings, and pence.

'Average returns of the last three years, one hundred and twenty-seven pounds, three shillings, and seven penny and one-sixth a week. Profits thereupon thirty-four per cent.—as near as may be. Clear profits of the concern, after deducting all expenses except rent—for t' house is our own—one thousand two hundred and two pound a year.'

This was far more than either Hepburn or Coulson had imagined it to be; and a look of surprise, almost amounting to dismay, crept over their faces, in spite of their endeavour to keep simply motionless and attentive.

'It's a deal of money, lads, and the Lord give you grace to guide it,' said Jeremiah, putting down his paper for a minute.

'Amen,' said John, shaking his head to give effect to his word.

'Now what we propose is this,' continued Jeremiah, beginning afresh to refer to his paper: 'We will call t' value of stock and fixtures two thousand one hundred and fifty. You may have John Holden, appraiser and auctioneer, in to set a price on them if yo' will; or yo' may look over books and bills; or, better still, do both, and so check one again t'other; but for t' sake o' making the ground o' the bargain, I state the sum as above; and I reckon it so much capital left in yo'r hands for the use o' which yo're bound to pay us five per cent. quarterly—that's one hundred and seven pound ten per annum at least for t' first year; and after it will be reduced by the gradual payment on our money, which must be at the rate of twenty per cent., thus paying us our principal back in five years. And the rent, including all back yards, right of wharfage, warehouse, and premises, is reckoned by us to be sixty-five pound per annum. So yo' will have to pay us, John and Jeremiah Foster, brothers, six hundred and twelve pound ten out of the profits of the first year, leaving, at the present rate of profits, about five hundred and eighty-nine pound ten, for the share to be divided between yo'.'

Page 123

The plan had, in all its details, been carefully arranged by the two brothers. They were afraid lest Hepburn and Coulson should be dazzled by the amount of profits, and had so arranged the sliding-scale of payment as to reduce the first year's income to what the elder men thought a very moderate sum, but what to the younger ones appeared an amount of wealth such as they, who had neither of them ever owned much more than fifty pounds, considered almost inexhaustible. It was certainly a remarkable instance of prosperity and desert meeting together so early in life.

For a moment or two the brothers were disappointed at not hearing any reply from either of them. Then Philip stood up, for he felt as if anything he could say sitting down would not be sufficiently expressive of gratitude, and William instantly followed his example. Hepburn began in a formal manner, something the way in which he had read in the York newspapers that honourable members returned thanks when their health was given.

'I can hardly express my feelings' (Coulson nudged him) 'his feelings, too—of gratitude. Oh, Master John! Master Jeremiah, I thought it might come i' time; nay, I've thought it might come afore long; but I niver thought as it would be so much, or made so easy. We've got good kind friends—we have, have we not, William?—and we'll do our best, and I hope as we shall come up to their wishes.'

Philip's voice quivered a little, as some remembrance passed across his mind; at this unusual moment of expansion out it came. 'I wish mother could ha' seen this day.'

'She shall see a better day, my lad, when thy name and William's is painted over t' shop-door, and J. and J. Foster blacked out.'

'Nay, master,' said William, 'that mun never be. I'd a'most sooner not come in for the business. Anyhow, it must be 'late J. and J. Foster,' and I'm not sure as I can stomach that.'

'Well, well, William,' said John Foster, highly gratified, 'there be time enough to talk over that. There was one thing more to be said, was there not, brother Jeremiah? We do not wish to have this talked over in Monkshaven until shortly before the time when yo' must enter on the business. We have our own arrangements to make wi' regard to the banking concern, and there'll be lawyer's work to do, after yo've examined books and looked over stock again together; may-be we've overstated it, or t' fixtures aren't worth so much as we said. Anyhow yo' must each on yo' give us yo'r word for to keep fra' naming this night's conversation to any one. Meantime, Jeremiah and I will have to pay accounts, and take a kind of farewell of the merchants and manufacturers with whom Fosters have had dealings this seventy or eighty year; and when and where it seems fitting to us we will take one of yo' to introduce as our successors and friends. But all that's to come. But yo' must each give us yo'r word not to name what has passed here to any one till further speech on the subject has passed between us.'

Page 124

Coulson immediately gave the promise. Philip's assent came lagging. He had thought of Sylvia living, almost as much as of the dead mother, whose last words had been a committal of her child to the Father of the friendless; and now that a short delay was placed between the sight of the cup and his enjoyment of it, there was an impatient chafing in the mind of the composed and self-restrained Philip; and then repentance quick as lightning effaced the feeling, and he pledged himself to the secrecy which was enjoined. Some few more details as to their mode of procedure—of verifying the Fosters' statements, which to the younger men seemed a perfectly unnecessary piece of business—of probable journeys and introductions, and then farewell was bidden, and Hepburn and Coulson were in the passage donning their wraps, and rather to their indignation being assisted therein by Martha, who was accustomed to the office with her own master. Suddenly they were recalled into the parlour.

John Foster was fumbling with the papers a little nervously: Jeremiah spoke—

'We have not thought it necessary to commend Hester Rose to you; if she had been a lad she would have had a third o' the business along wi' yo'. Being a woman, it's ill troubling her with a partnership; better give her a fixed salary till such time as she marries.'

He looked a little knowingly and curiously at the faces of the young men he addressed. William Coulson seemed sheepish and uncomfortable, but said nothing, leaving it as usual to Philip to be spokesman.

'If we hadn't cared for Hester for hersel', master, we should ha' cared for her as being forespoken by yo'. Yo' and Master John shall fix what we ought t' pay her; and I think I may make bold to say that, as our income rises, hers shall too—eh, Coulson?' (a sound of assent quite distinct enough); 'for we both look on her as a sister and on Alice like a mother, as I told her only this very day.'

END OF VOL. I.