

THE FOGGY NIGHT AT OFFORD.

CHAPTER II.—Continued. Raby was unacquainted with the episode in his mother's early life, therefore, the fish that rose to, and dyed his face, was caused only by a greeting of a stranger; to these sensitive natures, it is sure to do so, whether they be man or woman. The bright color only served to render him more like Maria Raby, and Sir Arthur, in spite of the rose feeling her treatment had left, felt his heart warm to her son. A wish half crossed his mind that that son was his—his heir; he had no son, only daughters. Raby was astonished at the warmth of his greeting. Sir Arthur clasped and held his hand; he turned with him to inspect the painting he was engaged on. It was a self-created landscape, betraying great imaginative power and genius; but genius, as yet, only half cultivated.

from the Continent, and were as yet free from visitors. Lady Saxonybury was in ill health, and Mrs. Ashton, the eldest married daughter, was staying with them while her husband was abroad. In a chair, a little behind Miss Saxonybury, as if conscious of the difference between them—there was a distance—sat Raby Raby. It was said the house was free from visitors, but he was scarcely regarded as such. Sir Arthur, in the plenitude of his heart, had invited him to come and stay a couple of months at Saxonybury; the country air would renovate him; he could have the run of the picture-gallery, and copy some of its chief treasures. And Raby came. Sir Arthur's early secret was safe with himself, and he could only explain that his interest in Raby Raby was but that which he would take an rising artist. So the family, even the servants, looked upon him with a patronizing eye, as one who had "come to paint." Raby had accepted Sir Arthur's invitation with a glow of gratification—the far-famed Saxonybury gallery was anticipated enough for him. He forgot to think where the funds could come from to make a suitable appearance as Sir Arthur Saxonybury's guest; but the painter Coram delicately furnished. "It is but a loan," said he; you can repay me with the first proceeds that your pencil shall receive.

Thus Raby went to Saxonybury. And there had he been now for half his allotted time, drinking in the wondrous beauties which it had been as well that he had not drunk in. The elegance that surrounded him, and to which he had been lately a stranger—the charms of the society he was thrown amongst once again, as an equal for the time being—the gratification of the eye and mind, and the pomp and pride of courtly life; all this was but too congenial to the exalted taste of Raby Raby, and he was in danger of forgetting the stern realities of life, to become lost in a false Elysium. He was thrown much with Maria Saxonybury—for more than he need have been. The fault was hers. A great admirer of beauty, like her father, and possessing a high reverence for genius, the exquisite face of Raby Raby attracted her admiration as it had never yet been attracted; whilst his eager aspirations, and love for the fine arts, were perfectly consonant to her own mind. His companionship soon grew excessively pleasing, and she gave her days up to it without restraint, absorbed in the pleasure of the moment. Nothing more of all people in the world, Maria Saxonybury was the last to think seriously of one beneath her. So, leaving consequences to take care of themselves, or to be remedied by time, she dwelt only on the present. She would fit about when he was at work in the picture-gallery, she would linger by his side in the gardens, one or other of the little Ashtons generally being their companion; in short, it seemed that the object of Maria's life, just now, was to be with the artist-visitor. Even this night, when her father and sister had gone out to dinner, she had excused herself: she would stay at home with her mother, she said; but Lady Saxonybury was in her chamber, and Maria remained in the drawing-room with Mr. Raby. It is probable that Lady Saxonybury, if she thought of him at all, believed him to be painting then. Was it in remembrance of some one else that Sir Arthur had named his youngest child "Maria"? But they sometimes called by her other name, Elizabeth.

"Do you admire this picture?" she suddenly inquired, holding out one of grass-green silk, with gold beads, tassels, and slides; a marvel of prettiness. Raby rose and took it from her, and turned it about in his white and slender hands. Those remarkable hands! feeble to look at, elegant in structure, always restless; so strongly characteristic of genius, as well as of delicacy of constitution. "It is quite a gem," he said, in answer. "You may have it in place of your ugly one," continued Miss Saxonybury; "that trifling porte-monnaie, of grim leather, I saw you with, the other day. I made this for somebody else, who does not seem in a hurry to come for it: so I will give it to you." A rush of suspicious emotion flew to his face, and her eyes fell beneath the eloquent gaze of his. "How shall I thank you?" he said. "It shall be to me an everlasting remembrance." "That's in return for the pretty sketch you gave me yesterday," she went on. "One you took at Rome, and filled in from memory." "You mistake, Miss Saxonybury. I said I drew it from description. I have never been to Rome. That is a pleasure to come."

"As it is for me," observed Maria. "I was there once, when a little girl, but I remember nothing of it. A cross woman, half governess, half maid, was hired to talk Italian to us, as I had recollection of the place. Last year and the year before, when we were waiting our time in Paris and at the baths of Germany, doing mamma more harm than good, I urged them to go on to Rome, but nobody listened to me. I have an idea that I shall be disappointed wherever I do go; we always are, when we expect so much." "Always, always," murmured Raby. "I long to see some of those features I am familiar with from paintings," added Miss Saxonybury. "The remains of the Caesars' palaces—the real Grand St. Peter's—the beautiful Alban Hills—and all Rome's other glories. I grow impatient sometimes, and tell papa there will be nothing left for me to see: that Sallust's garden will be a heap of stinging nettles—I dare say it is nothing else; and Cecilia Metella's tomb destroyed." And thus they conversed till it grew dark, and the servants came in to light the chandeliers. Miss Saxonybury remembered her mother then, and rose to go to her, to see why she had not come down.

When Maria returned, the room was empty, and she stood in the bow of the window and looked out. It was the custom at Saxonybury House to leave the curtains of this window open on a favorable night; for the moonlight landscape, outside, was indeed fair to look upon. Mr. Raby was then walking on the terrace; his step was firm and self-possessed, his head raised: it was only in the presence of his fellow-creatures that Raby Raby was a shy and awkward man. He saw her, and approached the window. "I have been studying the Folly all this time," he said; "fancying it must look like those ruined Roman temples we have been speaking of; as they must look in the light and shade of the moonlight." "Does it?" she answered, laughing. "I will go and look, too." Miss Saxonybury stepped on to the terrace, and he gave her his arm. Did she feel the violent beating of his heart, as her bracelet lay against it? They walked, in the shade cast by the house, to the railings at the end of the terrace, and there came in view of the fanciful building in question, "Lady Saxonybury's Folly." It rose, high and white, on the opposite hills, amid a grove of dark trees. "I do not like the building by day," he observed; "but as it looks now, I cannot fancy anything more classically beautiful in the Eternal City, even when it was in its zenith."

"It does look beautiful," she mused. "And the landscape, as it lies around, is equally so; look at its different points, showing out. You have not seen many scenes more gratifying to the imagination eye than this, Mr. Raby." "I shall never see a second Saxonybury," was the impulsive answer. "Take it for all in all, I shall never see—but look at this side," he abruptly broke off, turning in the opposite direction. "Oh, I don't care to look there. It is all dark." "I only like the bright side of things." "Has it ever struck you that these two aspects, the light and the dark of a moonlight night, are a type of human fortunes? While some favored spirits bask in brightness, others must be cast, and remain, in the depths of shade." "No. I never thought about it. My life has been all brightness." "May it ever remain so!" he whispered with a deep sigh; but Miss Saxonybury turned to the pleasant side again. "What a fine painting this view would make!" she exclaimed. "I wonder papa has never had it done. One of your favorite scenes, Mr. Raby, all poetry and moonlight, interspersed with a dash of melancholy. Some of our artists are too fond of depicting melancholy scenes." "We depict scenes as we find them. You know the eyes see with its own hue. There may be a gangrene over the gladiolus sunshine." "Artists ought to be always glad: living as they do, amidst ideal beauties; may, creating them." "Ideal! That was a fitting word, Miss Saxonybury. We live in the toil and drudgery of the work; others, who but see the picture when it is completed, in the ideal. When you stand and admire some favorite painting do you ever cast a thought to the weary hours of labor which created it?" "No doubt the pursuit of art has its inconveniences, but you great painters must bear within your own recompense."

"In a degree, yes," answered Raby, the expression "you great painters" echoing joyfully on his ear. "The consciousness of possessing that rare gift, genius, is ample recompense—save in moments of despondency." "And yet you talk of melancholy and gangrene, Mr. Raby, and such like unpleasant topics!" "The lives of great men are frequently marked by unhappiness," observed Raby. "In saying 'great men, I mean men inwardly great, men of genius, of imaginative intellect. Look at some of our dead poets—at what is said of them." "I think their fault lay in looking at the dark side of things, instead of the bright," laughed Maria. "Like yourself at present. You will keep turning to that gloomy point, where the scenery is all obscure, nothing bright but the great moon itself; and that shines right in your face." "They could not look otherwise than they did," he argued, his own tone sounding melancholy enough. "Well, well, I suppose it is the fate of genius," returned Maria. "I was reading lately, in a French work, some account of the life of Leonardo da Vinci. He was not a happy man." "He was called Da Vinci the Unhappy. How many of his brethren might have been called so!" "Were I you, I should not make up my mind to be one of them; I should be quite the contrary," said Maria, gaily. "Fancy goes a great way in this life. And so," she added, after a pause, "you think some of the queer old temples in Italy must look like that?" pointing to the Folly. "How I wish I could see them!" "How I wish we could see them!" he murmured—"that we could see them together!" Perhaps he wondered whether he had said to much. She did not check him only turned, and began to move back towards the drawing-room, her arm within his.

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