

Literature, &c.

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LANSDOWN.

OR THE FIELD OF GENTLE BLOOD.

A True Tale of the Great Civil War.

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Chapter I.

THE PRESENTIMENT.

THERE is in all England, perhaps in all the world, nothing more beautiful, in its own peculiar style of beauty, than the coast of Devonshire and Cornwall.

The mixture of the soft and sublime, of the terrible, the grand, and the magnificent, with all that is calm, and sweet, and lovely, is here found in perfection.

Inland, the smoothest slopes of green-sward, the gentlest vales of velvet, the brightest and most musical of streamlets; seaward, the grandest and most striking scenes of bare black rock, and wild and stormy ocean.

The surges, such as sweep no other shore, rolling in unstemmed and unbroken, with a sweep of three thousand miles from the vast Atlantic; bursting, even in mildest calms, with a roar that may be heard leagues inland, over the perilous reefs, and through the fearful caverns, which characterize the coast of iron.

And in all Cornwall there is nothing that even now more takes the eye, and fills the soul of the traveller with strange dreams of beauty and romance, than the gray ruins of the old castle of Trevoze.

It is now rent asunder, from turret to foundation stone, by huge shattered gaps, breaches wrought by a hand more deadly than that even of pitiless and unsparring time—the hand of human fury, the thunders of man's warfare.

So strangely scattered and dislocated now are its gray walls and turrets, that as you gaze at it, you fancy it will give, and thunder down the black cliffs seaward, an avalanche of giant masonry.

But in the times of which I write, and they are not so far removed from us to account for such devastation, it was as fair, as well ordered, as yet and as happy an abode, as any in the compass of the four seas that gird Great Britain.

Built at the time when every man's house was indeed his castle, perched on a mighty headland, towering five hundred feet above the level of the stormy sea, it had been once a pile of turrets, with dongon-keep, and gatehouse, barbican, balisade, and fosse, and draw-bridge.

But all the grimness and the gloom of warfare had long vanished from its happy precincts.

Ages had passed since England had known an intestine foe; and spacious oriel windows admitted the fair sunshine, and free breath of heaven, in place of arrow-slit, crenelle, and loop-hole. A graceful sylvan wilderness, full of green trees and rare exotic shrubs, had supplanted the steep glaucis; the yawning moat was smoothed and leveled, and glittered with the gay hues of my lady's garden. The scarped and rampired hill, which had frowned of old so fiercely over the broad bright river to the landward, now fell in an easy sweep of shady terraces, with sculptured urns and marble staircases, and silvery fountains, and many a flowery bower, and many a mazy hedgerow, down to the sweet green lawn that lay along the margin of the lovely stream, which had been once prized only for the security it gave.

It was a lovely summer evening in the year 1643 when in, what was called in the quaint parlance of the day, a fair summer parlor, of that noble castle a little group was collected, which might have given play to all the glorious genius that guided the immortal pencil of Antony Vandyck.

The room in itself was a study for a painter. Situate in a projecting tower, at the southwestern angle the castle, of which it occupied the whole ground floor, it commanded three views that might at once be pronounced unequalled.

Three of its sides, it was exactly square in form: were occupied by three rich oriel windows, reaching almost from the floor to the ceiling, with stone-mullions exquisitely carved, and panes glowing with every hue that a lost art could convey the clear crystal.

The western window looked out over the boundless ocean, heaving its long and lazy undulations in, five hundred feet below, soft, purple and unbroken. Far in the west the great sun was sinking below the horizontal line, casting a flood of glory upward to the resplendent zenith, and tipping every cloud with gold and crimson, shooting his long last rays over the ridgy surface of the sea, till it presented one long range of flame-croeting elevations, with vales of living amethyst between them.

Southward, a second oriel commanded the the frith or arm into which fell the gentle stream I have mentioned, after it had wound in a semicircle about the castle gardens. Beyond this clear still basin, now tranquil and transparent as a vast mirror, a smooth green hill sloped upward, with a small village clustering along its base, and a fine grove of oak and elm crowning its summit, above which the tall lance-like spire of the old village church seemed to point man the road to heaven.

The third window overlooked the green terraces, which I have described already; and be-

yond these a lovely pastoral country stretched out for leagues and leagues of verdant pastures, and wild heaths, and noble forest tracts, till it was bounded, far away in the blue distance by a fantastic line of hazy elevations.

The fourth side of the room contained the door, which communicated with the rest of the building, and the vast open fire-place, adorned by a chimney-piece of the most elaborate and splendid workmanship.

The walls were covered with wainscoting of black oak, every panel encircled with wreaths of fruit and flowers, carved by Gibbons; the ceiling was richly fretted with interesting beams of the same beautiful material, and the whole was so brightly polished, that it reflected objects almost as clearly as if the room had been walled and roofed with looking glasses.

The floor was covered with the softest Turkey carpets; the tables and cabinets, inlaid with tortoiseshell and ivory and silver, were strewn with instruments of music, drawings and books, and objects of *virtu*; bronze statues copied from the antique, vases of porcelain, filled with the choicest flowers, miniatures, in enamel, carvings in ivory, and every thing that can charm the eye, instruct the mind, or delight the senses.

It was in this charming, this *home* apartment—for every thing that it contained, indicated its constant use, and the absence of all study or pretension in its details—that the group, of which I have spoken, was collected on that lovely evening.

This group consisted of three persons, a beautiful young woman, a gentleman in the prime of life, and as sweet a fair haired boy, of some four or five years old, as ever gladdened the eyes of affectionate and anxious parents.

The lady, who at the utmost could not have been above twenty-two or twenty-three years of age, was seated on an easy chair, placed within the recess of the western oriel which was raised one step from the floor of the room, and was looking out with a sad and wistful eye over the fading tints of the great ocean, and the sink-light of the glorious luminary. And yet it might well be, that though her eyes seemed to take in the whole of that gorgeous scene, her mind indeed hardly noted it at all; for she was listening, with rapt and profound attention, to the fine manly voice, now somewhat saddened and depressed, of the gentleman who stood beside her.

The face and form of that lady combined all that can be conceived of physical and intellectual loveliness—a bright rich sunny face, full of light, life and varying expression; charming more from the play than from the regularity of feature, with bright limped eyes of the purest azure, veiled by the longest and the blackest lashes, with a profusion of redundant ringlets of the darkest yet sunniest auburn, falling down on a neck and shoulders, white as the living alabaster.

Her figure, graceful, and tall, and delicate, and slender, yet rounded to the fairest proportions of ripe glowing womanhood.

She seemed a creature framed only for mirth, love and enjoyment; born to herself happy, and a source of happiness to all within the sphere of her sweet influence.

And yet alas! who shall judge of the future, who pronounce of the capabilities, the destinies of the human heart, save He alone who holds the keys of all things, who disposes of all as he will, from the fate of a boundless empire to the affections of a peasant girl.

You could not look on that bright lady's face without discovering on the instant, that her heart in its wonted mood must be as light as the music of the summer wind; yet now her beautiful soft eyes were suffused and dim, although she suffered not the tears to burst forth. And her soft bosom heaved with emotions, that had nothing in them put present agony and future apprehension; and yet the expression of her lovely face was one of high and hopeful confidence, cheering the partner of her soul in his hour of trouble, not yielding to the gloom which his words were calculated to diffuse around him.

She was dressed magnificently, in the becoming costume of the day, when the eyes of the gently born were trained from the cradles upward to sights of harmony and beauty; when a taste for the picturesque was a part and parcel of human nature; and when the garb of the gentry was as different from the hideous and utilitarian deformities of modern costume as were the generous devotions, the high honor, the proud humility, the gentle courage, the grand chivalry of the noble soul, in those days, from the narrow-minded, hard, uncharitable, money-making, practical spirit, which has now supplanted them.

There was no talk of equality in those days, but there was its substance!—there were no manufactures in these days, but no poor-houses?—no merchant princes, but no starving artificers?—no raving radical philanthropists!—no yell of down with the church, the nobles, and the land-holders—but no beggars, no misery, no famine in the land.

But even then alas! the causes were in progress, which were in time to produce these consequences; and it was on these causes even now that the conversation turned, which had so darkened that bright lady's aspect.

The gentleman who leaned on the back of her chair, talking to her in a low earnest voice, full of deep thought and deep affection, might have been perhaps ten years her senior, and was of a fine specimen of vigorous manhood, as was she of the softer beauties of her sex.

A broad capacious forehead, through which all fine imaginations, all grand aspirations, all noble conscientiousness wove the great tissue of

a truly noble soul—a dark eye, now soft and pensive as the dove's, now keen and penetrating as the eagle's, a fair aquiline nose, and a mouth full at once of softness and firm resolution—such was his countenance—a countenance as clearly indicative of high qualities and of superior mind, as the face of a human being can be, of that which is within and passes show.

He wore a long and curled moustache on his upper lip, and on his chin the small pointed beard, which has taken the name of the great painter of the day. Both these were several shades darker than his hair, which fell down in heavy masses, naturally curled down his neck to the shoulder of his doublet.

This garment was not much dissimilar in shape to the sack-coats of the present day, sloped out a little so as to follow the natural lines of the figure, but constraining the motions of the body in no respect, nor giving it that angular and rigid appearance, which is the natural result of the stunted and rectangular cut of modern clothing.

It had no collar, however; and was moreover shorter than any article of dress now in use, coming down in fact barely to the haunches, so as to fall short of the saddle, when the wearer was on horseback.

To compensate, however, for the plainness of the cut, and the absence of all flaps or lap-pets, it was composed of a rich cut-velvet, of a of a bright violet ground, all overrun with black arabesques and garlands, and over it there fell down, from the wearer's throat to his shoulder, a collar of superb thread-lace of Valenciennes, such as a duchess would now covet for her birth-day suit. The full loose sleeves were adorned with triple ruffles of the same costly fabric. A broad embroidered belt of the same colors with his dress, but richly fringed with gold, crossed his tight breast and supported the heavy gold-hilted sword of the period, on his left hip. Loose trunk breeches of the same material with his doublet, stockings of white silk with clocks wrought with violet and gold, and shoes with large silk rosettes, completed his gorgeous costume, and as he stood, with his left hand gently carressing her fair shoulder, while in his right he held his fringed gloves negligently by his side, it would have been in vain to seek a more perfect specimen of the true cavalier of King Charles.

The little boy, their only son, who was, in after days, destined to play a high part in the history of his country, combined much of his mother's loveliness with his father's manly strength and vigorous countenance.

His eyes were bright blue, fringed with the long dark lashes of his mother, but the broad solid brow, the aquiline nose, the firm, resolute mouth were the father's; and so were the long, bright, brown curls that floated down in silky masses over his neck and shoulders.

He, too, was clad in the rich garb of the day, and was romping merrily unconscious of the anxieties which weighed so heavily upon his parents, with as beautiful a white deer greyhound as ever graced a lady's bower.

'Dear Bevil,' said the sweet young wife as her husband ceased speaking, looking up affectionately into his eyes—'Why should you now be so sad and dispondent? Ever before, when I have buckled on thy sword and sent you forth to do battle for your king and your God against these base and brutish fanatics, as every gentleman should do, you have gone forth gay and cheerful, and confident of victory, and of a glad return to dear Trevoze and your own Adelaide. Why should you see things now with an eye so jaundiced and so sad?'

'Because, my Adelaide,' he replied, with a mournful smile, raising her beautiful hand to his lips, 'because I see that there is no hope of peace, nor of any permanent and sure victory. When first I took horse for the king, I believed, with many a noble gentleman, that the first charge of our noble horse would strike such panic into the heart of the tapsters and serving-men and canting hypocrites who form the bulk of their armies, that we should have an easy victory. And further, I held it certain that one victory would terminate the strife. Well, Adelaide, our horse did win the day! but what has that victory done? nothing, utterly, absolutely nothing! The war will rage on for years; and though for years the king shall win every battle, still in the end the war shall be with this tyrannical, usurping Parliament. How can it be otherwise? when on the king's side we lose in every skirmish those whom we cannot possibly replace—the best, the noblest, and the bravest of the realm—the wisest, the most moderate, the most patriotic—they losing, on the contrary, what they can spare right easily, base fanatics, neither good soldiers nor good men. This it is Adelaide, that makes me sad and heart-sick. The feeling that in the end our noble constitution shall be overthrown; our generous, accomplished, pious, learned gentry robbed of their rights to benefit the mean, the grasping, money-making middle classes—that in the end our brave, hardy, honest, noble independent yeomanry and peasantry shall be changed into miserable mechanics and starved manufacturers.'

'You do, indeed, take a dark and a sad view of things, dear Bevil. But you look over the gloomier side, while I,' she added, with a gay, cheery smile, 'look over to the bright and gay. I shut the eyes of my mind to the coming storm, but revel in the pleasant anticipation of the sunshine. And, therefore, I am now resolved to believe nothing, to hear nothing but of your riding forth chivalrous and assured of success to do battle for the right; of your returning in a little space to delight me and our little John with stirring tales, that

make my heart bound and fill my eyes with happy tears, of your success in the fight, and of your mercy when the fight is over. I will believe, I will hear of no conclusion to the war, but of a generous and free pacification—of an abandonment on the king's part of those prerogatives, which even you think he would extend unduly, and a repentance on the Parliament's side of their arrogant and disloyal usurpation. Never fear, Bevil Greenvil, never fear. The Lord never deserts his people. And you shall see our England happier and richer, greater and more powerful tenfold, than ever has been before in the reigns of her most famous monarchs! You shall see it, dear Bevil; and then we shall laugh only at these sorrowful forebodings.'

'Never!' he answered, with a deep sigh, 'never shall I see that.'

'Nay, now, false knight,' she continued, still earnest, if possible, to jest or charm him from his melancholy, 'why, when I lay my commands on you to be merry, why are you still thus obstinately sad and mournful? why do you heave such a sigh, and cry never?'

'For two reasons, dearest,' he replied. 'First, that the happy things which you predict will never come to pass. I do not doubt, indeed, that when these storms and troubles shall have overpassed, our England shall indeed be greater, and more wealthy, and more powerful—for, under popular governments, such things obtain a mighty impulse and grow very rapidly. But happiness is not the child of liberty, much less of commercial greatness. Content, content, and a calm, peaceful country life, these are the parents of true happiness—not that fierce strife, that struggle for success and wealth, which renders the rich richer, and the poor poorer and more wretched. But, Adelaide, there is a second reason—and a stronger, that even if these things should be, I shall not live to see them.'

'Oh! Bevil, now you are unkind,' she cried, the big tears coming to her eyes, and flowing down her lovely face. 'It is unkind to speak thus to me.'

'No, dearest, not unkind. There is a heavy gloom upon me, a fixed presentiment that tells me we shall conquer in the next battle, but that I shall not live to see the conquest.'

'Dreams! Bevil, dreams!' returned the sweet young woman, with a sunny smile, for partly she indeed disbelieved such revelations of the future, and partly she desired to banish them from her husband's soul. 'I am almost ashamed of you, my husband, that you should give way thus to vain and empty superstition; you, whom I have so often heard combating such false notions with all the eloquence of your rich dialect, all the powers of your clear mind. But you are not yourself; you have been pondering so sadly and so long over the state of our unhappy country, that your fancy is saddened, and you give ear to its suggestions, as you would scorn to do at any other time.'

'It may be so,' he replied. 'I hope it is so. For though I hold myself always, I trust, prepared to meet his call, to obey his bidding, yet, Adelaide, my heart bleeds when I think of leaving thee and that dear; and his eyes lingered fondly on the fair boy, as he spoke. 'Heaven knows that I would not needlessly afflict or terrify thee, dearest; but there is something that I would fain say to thee before I go forth to join the king.'

'Then say it—say it—dear, dear Bevil. It will not afflict me, it will not terrify me, to hear anything which you think it right to say to me. Who, if not I, has the right to counsel and console you?'

'You have indeed ever done so. It is but a short word I have to say. Should I fall, as I think I shall, whether in this next battle, or any time during the war, you must train our John up to the same course of loyalty which our family have run ever. Teach him, if the king needs his blood, to pour it out like water.'

'Fear nothing, Bevil,' she replied, 'whether it be God's will to spare you to us many years, or to take you hence even now, and her voice faltered sorely as she spoke, but by a mighty effort she conquered her emotion and proceeded—'John Greenvil shall learn no creed of church or state, but such as shall become a Greenvil. For, mark me, Bevil, and believe me, weak woman as I am, I would pour out my life like water that the king should enjoy his own. And if it shall be, as you fancy, that death awaits you on the field of honor, fear me not; I will send our son on the same path, to seek honor where his father found it, and, should he also fall likewise for that high, holy cause, I will say, like old Northumberland we read of, 'I would rather have my dead son here, than any living son in England!'

But the effort was too great for her; the terrible excitement was too much for her delicate frame; she burst into a flood of passionate weeping, and fell upon her husband's bosom. He clasped her in his arms, kissed her fair cold brow, nor was ashamed to mingle his own tears with hers in that long rapturous ecstasy, half anguish, and half bliss.

After awhile she raised herself from his arms, smiling through her tears, and said:

'Come, Bevil, we will have no more of this—no more sadness on this last night of yours at home; let us go and walk once more in this lovely sunset, around your favorite garden, and then return to supper, some of our friends, Sir Nicholas Slanning, with his fair young wife, and Trevanion, with his three sisters, and Sir John Berkley, who is to wed the youngest, are coming hither—and we will have some music. They must not see you sad, or they will fancy it is my weakness made you so.'