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Aylwin

By

THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON

WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION

LONDON: HURST & BLACKETT, LIMITED

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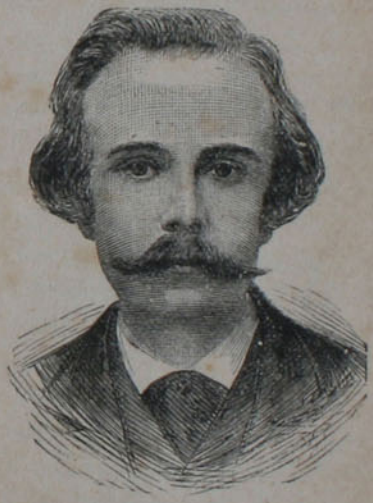
Aylwin

By

Theodore Watts-Dunton

Author of "The Coming of Love: Rhona Boswell's Story"

WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION



London

HURST AND BLACKETT, LIMITED

13 Great Marlborough Street

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INTRODUCTION.

THOUGH written many years ago this story was, for certain personal reasons easy to guess, withheld from publication—withheld, as *The Times* pointed out, because "with the *Dichtung* was mingled a good deal of *Wahrheit*." But why did I still delay in publishing it after these reasons for withholding it had passed away? This is a question that has often been put to me both in print and in conversation. And yet I should have imagined that the explanation was not far to seek. It was simply diffidence: in other words it was that infirmity which, though generally supposed to belong to youth, comes to a writer, if it comes at all, with years. Undoubtedly there was a time in my life when I should have leapt with considerable rashness into the brilliant ranks of our contemporary novelists. But this was before I had reached what I will call the diffident period in the life of a writer. And then, again, I had often been told by George Borrow, and also by my friend Francis Groome, the great living authority on Romany matters, that there was in England no interest in gypsies. Altogether then, had it not been for the unexpected success of "The Coming of Love," a story of gypsy life, it is doubtful whether I should not have delayed the publication of "Aylwin" until the great warder of the gates of day we call Death should close his portal behind me and shut me off from these dreams. However, I am very glad now that I did publish it; for it has brought around me a number of new friends—brought them at a time when new friends were what I yearned for—a time when, looking back through this vision of my life, I seem to be looking down an Appian way—a street of tombs—the tombs of those I loved. No wonder, then, that I was deeply touched by the kindness with which the Public and the Press received the story. And if here and there the great success of the book aroused at last the ire of some writer less favoured by fortune, goading him to be unjust to me, I could freely and heartily forgive him and wish him that sweetness of temper

which will come with the better success of his own next literary venture. But, after all, the severest critic of "Aylwin" is he who wrote it.

One critic did me the honour of remarking upon what he called the "absolute newness of the plot and incidents of 'Aylwin.'" He seems to have forgotten, however, that one incident—the most daring incident in the book—that of the rifling of a grave for treasure—is not new: it will at once remind folk-lorists of certain practices charged against our old Norse invaders. And students of Celtic and Gaelic literature are familiar with the same idea. Quite lately, indeed, Mr. Alfred Nutt, in his analysis of the Gaelic "Agallamh na Senorach," or "Colloquy of the Elders," has made some interesting remarks upon the subject.

As far as I remember, the only objection made to "Aylwin" by those critics who were really wishful to do the book justice was that I had imported into a story written for popular acceptance, too many speculations and broodings upon the gravest of all subjects — the subject of love at struggle with death. My answer to this is that although it did win a great popular acceptance, I never expected it to do so. I knew the book to be an expression of idiosyncrasy, and no man knows how much or how little his idiosyncrasy is in harmony with the temper of his time, until his book has been given to the world. It was the story of "Aylwin" that was born of the speculations upon Love and Death; it was not the speculations that were pressed into the story; without these speculations there could have been no story to tell. Indeed the chief fault which *I* myself should find with "Aylwin," if my business were to criticise it, would be that it gives not too little but too much prominence to the strong incidents of the story—a story written as a comment on love's warfare with death —written for no other purpose than to shew that, confronted as man is every moment by signs of the fragility and the brevity of human life, the great marvel connected with him is not that his thoughts dwell frequently upon the unknown country beyond Orion where the beloved dead are loving us still, but that he can find time and patience to think upon anything else—a story written further to show how terribly despair becomes intensified when a man has lost—or thinks he has lost—a woman whose love was the only light of his world—when his soul is torn from his body, as it were, and whisked off on the wings of the "viewless winds" right away beyond the furthest star, till the universe hangs beneath his feet a trembling point of twinkling light, and at last

even this dies away and his soul cries out for help in that utter darkness and loneliness.

It was to depict this phase of human emotion that both "Aylwin" and its sequel, "The Coming of Love," were written. They were missives from the lonely watch tower of the writer's soul, sent out into the strange and busy battle of the world—sent out to find, if possible, another soul or two to whom the watcher was, without knowing it, akin.

And now as to my two gypsy heroines, the Sinfi Lovell of "Aylwin" and the Rhona Boswell of "The Coming of Love." Although Borrow belonged to a different generation from mine, I enjoyed his intimate friendship in his later years—during the time when he lived in Hereford Square; and since his death I have written a good deal about him—both in prose and in verse—in the *Athenæum*, in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and in other places. When, some seven or eight years ago, I brought out an edition of "Lavengro" (in Messrs. Ward, Lock and Co.'s Minerva Library), I prefaced that delightful book by a few desultory remarks upon Borrow's gypsy characters. On that occasion I gave a slight sketch of the most remarkable "Romany Chi" that had ever been met with in the part of East Anglia known to Borrow and myself —Sinfi Lovell. I described her playing on the crwth; I discussed her exploits as a boxer, and I contrasted her in many ways with the glorious Anglo-Saxon road-girl Isopel Berners.

Since the publication of "Aylwin" and "The Coming of Love" I have received very many letters from English and American readers enquiring whether "the gypsy girl described in the introduction to 'Lavengro' is the same as the Sinfi Lovell of 'Aylwin'," and also whether "the Rhona Boswell that figures in the prose story is the same as the Rhona of 'The Coming of Love'"? The evidence of the reality of Rhona so impressed itself upon the reader that on the appearance of Rhona's first letter in the *Athenæum*, where the poem was printed in fragments, I got among other letters one from the sweet poet and adorable woman Jean Ingelow, who was then very ill, near her death indeed, urging me to tell her whether Rhona's love letter was not a versification of a real letter from a real gypsy to her lover. As it was obviously impossible for me to answer the queries individually, I take this opportunity of saying that the Sinfi of "Aylwin" and the Sinfi described in my introduction to

"Lavengro" are one and the same character—the character alluded to in the now famous sonnet describing "the walking lord of gypsy lore," Borrow, by his most intimate friend Dr. Gordon Hake.

"And he, the walking lord of gypsy lore!
How often 'mid the deer that grazed the Park,
Or in the fields and heath and windy moor,
Made musical with many a soaring lark,
Have we not held brisk commune with him there,
While Lavengro, then towering by your side,
With rose complexion and bright silvery hair,
Would stop amid his swift and lounging stride
To tell the legends of the fading race—
As at the summons of his piercing glance,
Its story peopling his brown eyes and face,
While you called up that pendant of romance
To Petulengro with his boxing glory
Your Amazonian Sinfi's noble story!"

Now that so many of the gryengroes (horse-dealers), who form the aristocracy of the Romany race, have left England for America, it is natural enough that to some readers of "Aylwin" and "The Coming of Love" my pictures of Romany life seem a little idealized. *The Times* in a kindly notice of "The Coming of Love" said that the kind of gypsies there depicted are a very interesting people, "unless the author has flattered them unduly." Those who best knew the gypsy women of that period will be the first to aver that I have not flattered them unduly. But I have fully discussed this matter, and given a somewhat elaborate account of Sinfi Lovell and Rhona Boswell, in the introduction to the fifth edition of "The Coming of Love."

I have been asked for a portrait for this edition. Some years ago there appeared in the *Weekly Graphic* the early portrait of me, here reproduced on the title page. It was taken not very long before the time when "Aylwin" was written. Besides being strikingly good as a likeness, the portrait is so associated with the one period of my life round which all the subsequent years seem to have been revolving, that I requested the publisher of the *Graphic* to allow me to purchase the block. That gentleman was so kind as to give it to me; and now, after years of change, I find a happy use for it, for since the publication of "Aylwin" I have frequently been asked where that early portrait could be obtained.

THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON.

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"'Aylwin' is as unique in prose as 'The Coming of Love' was in poetry."—*Pall Mall Gazette.*

"I take the significance of 'Aylwin' to be this—it teaches a profound moral lesson, not by dictation, but by dramatic and pictorial expression—the lesson that the heart through suffering sees where the intellect is blinded."—*The Contemporary Review*,—Dr. Robertson Nicoll.

"That Sinfi Lovell is from life we cannot for a moment doubt. Mr. Watts-Dunton has seized on what Borrow has practically passed by—the mystical side of the Gypsy character."—*Daily Chronicle.*

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"Mr. Watts-Dunton's speciality is as an expounder of the Romantic movement, and in 'Aylwin,' a poetic romance, he has endeavoured to carry into scenes of contemporary life those principles of purely Romantic art which have heretofore found expression solely in pictures of the past. In the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, he founded a school of criticism which discarded conventional authority, and sought to test all literary effects by the light of first principles merely."—*Celebrities of the Century.*

Aylwin

"Quoth Ja'afar, bowing low his head:—'Bold is the donkey-driver, O Ka'dee! and bold the ka'dee who dares say what he will believe, what disbelieve—not knowing in any wise the mind of Allah—not knowing in any wise his own heart, and what it shall some day suffer.'"

I

The Cymric Child

I

"THOSE who in childhood have had solitary communings with the sea know the sea's prophecy. They know that there is a deeper sympathy between the sea and the soul of man than other people dream of. They know that the water seems nearer akin than the land to the spiritual world, inasmuch as it is one and indivisible, and has motion, and answers to the mysterious call of the winds, and is the writing tablet of the moon and stars. When a child who, born beside the sea, and beloved by the sea, feels suddenly, as he gazes upon it, a dim sense of pity and warning; when there comes, or seems to come, a shadow across the waves, with never a cloud in the sky to cast it; when there comes a shuddering as of wings that move in dread or ire, then such a child feels as if the blood-hounds of calamity are let loose upon him or upon those he loves; he feels that the sea has told him all it dares tell or can. And, in other moods of fate, when beneath a cloudy sky the myriad dimples of the sea begin to sparkle as though the sun were shining bright upon them, such a child feels, as he gazes at it, that the sea is telling him of some great joy near at hand, or, at least, not far off."

One lovely summer afternoon a little boy was sitting on the edge of the cliff that skirts the old churchyard of Raxton-on-Sea. He was sitting on the grass close to the brink of the indentation cut by the water into the horse-shoe curve called by the fishermen Mousetrap Cove; sitting there as still as an image of a boy in stone, at the forbidden spot where the wooden fence proclaimed the crumbling hollow crust to be specially dangerous—sitting and looking across the sheer deep gulf below.

Flinty Point on his right was sometimes in purple shadow and sometimes shining in the sun: Needle Point on his left was sometimes in purple shadow and sometimes shining in the sun; and beyond these headlands spread now the wide purple, and now the wide sparkle of the open sea. The very gulls, wheeling as close to him as they dared, seemed to be frightened at the little boy's peril. Straight ahead he was gazing, however—gazing so intently that his eyes must have been seeing very much or else very little of that limitless world of light and coloured shade. On account of certain questions connected with race that will be raised in this narrative, I must dwell a little while upon the child's personal appearance, and especially upon his colour. Natural or acquired, it was one that might be almost called unique; as much like a young Gypsy's colour as was compatible with respectable descent, and yet not a Gypsy's colour. A deep undertone of "Romany brown" seemed breaking through that peculiar kind of ruddy golden-glow which no sunshine can give till it has itself been deepened and coloured and enriched by the responsive kisses of the sea.

Moreover, there was a certain something in his eyes that was not Gypsy-like—a something which is not uncommonly seen in the eyes of boys born along that coast, whether those eyes be black or blue or grey: a something which cannot be described, but which seems like a reflex of the daring gaze of that great land-conquering and daring sea. Very striking was this expression as he momentarily turned his face landward to watch one of the gulls that had come wheeling up the cliffs towards the flinty grey tower of the church—the old deserted church, whose graveyard the sea had already half washed away. As his eyes followed the bird's movements, however, this daring sea-look seemed to be growing gradually weaker and weaker.

At last it faded away altogether, and by the time his face was turned again towards the sea, the look I have tried to describe was supplanted by such a gaze as that gull would give were it hiding behind a boulder with a broken wing. A mist of cruel trouble was covering his eyes, and soon the mist had grown into two bright glittering pearly tears, which, globing and trembling, larger and larger, were at length big enough to drown both eyes: big enough to drop, shining, on the grass; big enough to blot out altogether the most brilliant picture that sea and sky could make. For that little boy had begun to learn a lesson which life was going to teach him fully—the lesson that shining sails in the sunny wind, and black trailing bands of smoke passing here and there along the horizon, and silvery gulls dipping playfully into the green and silver waves (nay, all the beauties and all the wonders of the world), make but a blurred picture to eyes that look through the lens of tears. However, with a brown hand brisk and angry, he brushed away these tears, like one who should say, "This kind of thing will never do."

Indeed, so hardy was the boy's face—tanned by the sun, hardened and bronzed by the wind, reddened by the brine—that tears seemed entirely out of place there. The meaning of those tears must be fully accounted for, and if possible fully justified, for this little boy is to be the hero of this story. In other words, he is Henry Aylwin: that is to say, myself; and those who know me now in the full vigour of manhood, a lusty knight of the alpenstock of some repute, will be surprised to know what troubled me. They will be surprised to know that owing to a fall from the cliff I was for about two years a cripple.

This is how it came about. Rough and yielding as were the paths, called "gangways," connecting the cliffs with the endless reaches of sand below, they were not rough enough, or yielding enough, or in any way dangerous enough for me.

So I used to fashion "gangways" of my own; I used to descend the cliff at whatsoever point it pleased me, clinging to the lumps of sandy earth with the prehensile power of a spider-monkey. Many a warning had I had from the good fishermen and sea-folk, that some day I should fall from top to bottom—fall and break my neck. A laugh was my sole answer to these warnings: for, with the possession of perfect health, I had inherited that instinctive belief in good luck which perfect health will often engender.

However, my punishment came at last. The coast, which is yielding gradually to the sea, is famous for sudden and gigantic landslips. These landslips are sometimes followed, at the return of the tide, by a further fall, called a "settlement." The word "settlement" explains itself, perhaps. No matter how smooth the sea, the return of the tide seems on that coast to have a strange magnetic power upon the land, and the *débris* of a landslip will sometimes, though not always, respond to it by again falling and settling into new and permanent shapes.

Now, on the morning after a great landslip, when the coastguard, returning on his beat, found a cove where, half-an-hour before, he had left his own cabbages growing, I, in spite of all warnings, had climbed the heap of *débris* from the sands, and while I was hallooing triumphantly to two companions below — the two most impudent-looking urchins, barefooted and unkempt, that ever a gentleman's son forgathered with—a great mass of loose earth settled, carrying me with it in its fall. I was taken up for dead.

It was, however, only a matter of broken ribs and a damaged leg. And there is no doubt that if the local surgeon had not been allowed to have his own way, I should soon have been cured. As it was I became a cripple. The great central fact—the very pivot upon which all the wheels of my life have since been turning—is that for two years during the impressionable period of childhood I walked with crutches.

It must not be supposed that my tears—the tears which at this moment were blotting out the light and glory of the North Sea in the sun—came from the pain I was suffering. They came from certain terrible news, which even my brother Frank had been careful to keep from me, but which had fallen from the lips of my father—the news that I was not unlikely to be a cripple for life. From that moment I had become a changed being, solitary and sometimes morose. I would come and sit staring at the ocean, meditating on things in general, but chiefly on things connected with cripples, asking myself, as now, whether life would be bearable on crutches.

At my heart were misery and anger and such revolt as is, I hope, rarely found in the heart of a child. I had sat down outside the rails at this most dangerous point along the cliff, wondering whether or not it would crumble beneath me. For this lameness coming to me, who had been so active, who had been, indeed, the little athlete and pugilist of the sands, seemed to have isolated me from my fellow-creatures to a degree that is inconceivable to me now,

A stubborn will and masterful pride made me refuse to accept a disaster such as many a nobler soul than mine has, I am conscious, borne with patience. My nature became soured by asking in vain for sympathy at home; my loneliness drove me — silent, haughty, and aggressive — to haunt the churchyard, and sit at the edge of the cliff, gazing wistfully at the sea and the sands which could not be reached on crutches. Like a wounded sea-gull, I retired and took my trouble alone.

How could I help taking it alone when none would sympathise with me? My brother Frank called me "The Black Savage," and I half began to suspect myself of secret impulses of a savage kind. Once I heard my mother murmur, as she stroked Frank's rosy cheeks and golden curls, "My poor Henry is a strange, proud boy!" Then, looking from my crutches to Frank's beautiful limbs, she said, "How providential that it was not the elder! Providence is kind." She meant kind to the House of Aylwin. I often wonder whether she guessed that I heard her. I often wonder whether she knew how I had loved her.

This is how matters stood with me on that summer afternoon, when I sat on the edge of the cliff in a kind of dull, miserable dream. Suddenly, at the moment when the huge mass of clouds had covered the entire surface of the water between Flinty Point and Needle Point with their rich purple shadow, it seemed to me that the waves began to sparkle and laugh in a joyful radiance which they were making for themselves. And at that same moment an unwonted sound struck my ear from the churchyard behind me — a strange sound indeed in that deserted place — that of a childish voice singing.

Was, then, the mighty ocean writing symbols for an unhappy child to read? My father, from whose book, *The Veiled Queen*, the extract with which this chapter opens is taken, would, unhesitatingly, have answered "Yes."

"Destiny, no doubt, in the Greek drama concerns itself only with the great," says he, in that wonderful book of his. "But who are the great? With the unseen powers, mysterious and imperious, who govern while they seem not to govern all that is seen, who are the great? In a world where man's loftiest ambitions are to higher intelligences childish dreams, where his highest knowledge is ignorance, where his strongest strength is to heaven a derision—who are the great? Are they not the few men and women and children on the earth who greatly love?"

II

So sweet a sound as that childish voice I had never heard before. I held my breath and listened.

Into my very being that child-voice passed, and it was a new music and a new joy. I can give the reader no notion of it, because there is not in nature anything with which I can compare it. The blackcap has a climacteric note, just before his song collapses and dies, so full of pathos and tenderness that often, when I had been sitting on a gate in Wilderness Road, it had affected me more deeply than any human words. But here was a note sweet and soft as that, and yet charged with a richness no blackcap's song had ever borne, because no blackcap has ever felt the joys and sorrows of a young human soul.

The voice was singing in a language which seemed strange to me then, but has been familiar enough since:

"Bore o'r cwmwl aur,
Eryri oedd dy gaer,
Brenhin o wyllt a gwar,
Gwawr ysbrydau."*

Intense curiosity now made me suddenly forget my troubles. I scrambled back through the trees not far from that spot and looked around. There, sitting upon a grassy grave, beneath one of the windows of the church, was a little girl, somewhat younger than myself apparently. With her head bent back she was gazing up at the sky and singing, while one of her little hands was pointing to a tiny cloud that hovered like a golden feather over her head. The sun, which had suddenly become very bright, shining on her glossy hair (for she was bare-headed) gave it a metallic lustre, and it was difficult to say what was the colour, dark bronze or black. So completely absorbed was she in watching the cloud to which her strange song or incantation seemed addressed, that she did not observe me when I rose and went towards her. Over her head, high up in the blue, a lark that was soaring towards the same gauzy cloud was singing, as if in rivalry. As I slowly approached the child, I could see by her forehead (which in the sunshine gleamed like a globe of pearl), and especially by her complexion, that she was uncom-

* Morning of the golden cloud,
Eryri was thy castle,
King of the wild and tame,
Glory of the spirits of air!
Eryri—the Place of Eagles, *i.e.* Snowdon.

monly lovely, and I was afraid lest she should look down before I got close to her, and so see my crutches before her eyes encountered my face. She did not, however, seem to hear me coming along the grass (so intent was she with her singing) until I was close to her, and throwing my shadow over her. Then she suddenly lowered her head and looked at me in surprise. I stood transfixed at her astonishing beauty. No other picture has ever taken such possession of me. In its every detail it lives before me now. Her eyes (which at one moment seemed blue grey, at another violet) were shaded by long black lashes, curving backward in a most peculiar way, and these matched in hue her eyebrows, and the tresses that were tossed about her tender throat and were quivering in the sunlight.

All this picture I did not take in at once ; for at first I could see nothing but those quivering, glittering, changeful eyes turned up into my face. Gradually the other features (especially the sensitive full-lipped mouth) grew upon me as I stood silently gazing. Here seemed to me a more perfect beauty than had ever come to me in my loveliest dreams of beauty beneath the sea. Yet it was not her beauty perhaps, so much as the look she gave me, that fascinated me, melted me.

As she gazed in my face there came over hers a look of pleased surprise, and then, as her eyes passed rapidly down my limbs and up again, her face was not overshadowed with the look of disappointment which I had waited for—yes, waited for, like a pinioned criminal for the executioner's uplifted knife ; but the smile of pleasure was still playing about the little mouth, while the tender young eyes were moistening rapidly with the dews of a kind of pity that was new to me, a pity that did not blister the pride of the lonely wounded sea-gull, but soothed, healed, and blessed.

Remember that I was a younger son—that I was swarthy—that I was a cripple—and that my mother—had Frank. It was as though my heart must leap from my breast towards that child. Not a word had she spoken, but she had said what the little maimed "fighting Hal" yearned to hear, and without *knowing* that he yearned.

I restrained myself, and did not yield to the feeling that impelled me to throw my arms round her neck in an ecstasy of wonder and delight. After a second or two she again threw back her head to gaze at the golden cloud.

"Look!" said she, suddenly clapping her hands, "it's over both of us now."

"What is it?" I said.

"The Dukkeripen," she said, "the Golden Hand. Sinfi and Rhona both say the Golden Hand brings luck : what *is* luck?"

I looked up at the little cloud which to me seemed more like a golden feather than a golden hand. But I soon bent my eyes down again to look at her.

While I stood looking at her, the tall figure of a man came out of the church. This was Tom Wynne. Besides being the organist of Raxton "New Church," Tom was also (for a few extra shillings a week) custodian of the "Old Church," this deserted pile within whose precincts we now were. Tom's features wore an expression of virtuous indignation which puzzled me and evidently frightened the little girl. He locked the door, and walked unsteadily towards us. He seemed surprised to see me there, and his features relaxed into a bland civility.

"This is (hiccup) Master Aylwin, Winifred," he said.

The child looked at me again with the same smile. Her alarm had fled.

"This is my little daughter Winifred," said Tom with a pompous bow.

I was astonished. I never knew that Wynne had a daughter, for intimate as he and I had become, he had actually never mentioned his daughter before.

"My *only* daughter," Tom repeated.

He then told me, with many hiccups, that, since her mother's death (that is to say from her very infancy), Winifred had been brought up by an aunt in Wales. "Quite a lady, her aunt is," said Tom proudly, "and Winifred has come to spend a few weeks with her father."

He said this in a grandly paternal tone—a tone that seemed meant to impress upon her how very much obliged she ought to feel to him for consenting to be her father ; and, judging from the look the child gave him, she *did* feel very much obliged.

Suddenly, however, a thought seemed to come back upon Tom, a thought which my unexpected appearance on the scene had driven from his drunken brain. The look of virtuous indignation returned, and staring at the little girl through glazed eyes, he said with the tremulous and tearful voice of a deeply injured parent,

"Winifred, I thought I heard you singing one of them heathen Gypsy songs that you learnt of the Gypsies in Wales."

"No, father," said she, "it was the song they sing in Shire-Carnarvon about the golden cloud over Snowdon and the spirits of the air."

"Yes," said Tom, "but a little time ago you were singing a Gypsy song—a downright heathen Gypsy song. I heard it

about half an hour ago when I was in the church."

The beautiful little head drooped in shame.

"I'm s'prised at you, Winifred. When I come to think whose daughter you are,—mine!—I'm s'prised at you," continued Tom, whose virtuous indignation waxed with every word.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" said the child. "I won't do it any more."

This contrition of the child's only fanned the flame of Tom's virtuous indignation.

"Here am I," said he, "the most (hiccup) respectable man in two parishes,—except Master Aylwin's father, of course,—here am I, the organ-player for the Christianest of all the Christian churches along the coast, and here's my daughter sings heathen songs just like a Gypsy or a tinker. I'm s'prised at you, Winifred."

I had often seen Tom in a dignified state of liquor, but the pathetic expression of injured virtue that again overspread his face so changed it that I had some difficulty myself in realising how entirely the tears filling his eyes and the grief at his heart were of alcoholic origin. And as to the little girl, she began to sob piteously.

"Oh dear, oh dear, what a wicked girl I am!" said she.

This exclamation, however, aroused my ire against Tom; and as I always looked upon him as my special paid henchman, who, in return for such services as supplying me with tiny boxing-gloves, and fishing-tackle, and bait, during my hale days, and tame rabbits now that I was a cripple, mostly contrived to possess himself of my pocket-money, I had no hesitation in exclaiming,

"Why, Tom, you know you're drunk, you silly old fool!"

At this Tom turned his mournful and reproachful gaze upon me, and began to weep anew. Then he turned and addressed the sea, uplifting his hand in oratorical fashion:—

"Here's a young gentleman as I've been more than a father to—yes, more than a father to—for when did his own father ever give him a ferret-eyed rabbit, a real ferret-eyed rabbit thoroughbred?"

"Why, I gave you one of my five-shilling pieces for it," said I; "and the rabbit was in a consumption and died in three weeks."

But Tom still addressed the sea.

"When did his own father give him," said he, "the longest thigh-bone that the sea ever washed out of Raxton churchyard?"

"Why, I gave you *two* of my five-shilling pieces for *that*," said I, "and next day you went and borrowed the bone, and sold it over again to Dr. Munro for a quart of beer."

"When did his own father give him a beautiful skull for a money-box, and make an oak lid to it, and keep it for him because his mother wouldn't have it in the house?"

"Ah, but where's the money that was in it, Tom? Where's the money?" said I, flourishing one of my crutches, for I was worked up to a state of high excitement when I recalled my own wrongs and Tom's frauds, and I forgot his relationship to the little girl. "Where are the bright new half-crowns that were *in* the money-box when I left it with you—the half-crowns that got changed into pennies, Tom? Where are *they?* What's the use of having a skull for a money-box if it's got no money in it? That's what *I* want to know, Tom!"

"Here's a young gentleman," said Tom, "as I've done all these things for, and how does he treat me? He says, 'Why, Tom, you know you're drunk, you silly old fool.'"

At this pathetic appeal the little girl sprang up and turned towards me with the ferocity of a young tigress. Her little hands were tightly clenched, and her eyes seemed positively to be emitting blue sparks. Many a bold boy had I encountered on the sands before my accident, and many a fearless girl, but such an impetuous antagonist as this was new. I leaned on my crutches, however, and looked at her unblenchingly.

"You wicked English boy, to make my father cry," said she, as soon as her anger allowed her to speak. "If you were not lame I'd—I'd—I'd hit you."

I did not move a muscle, but stood lost in a dream of wonder at her amazing loveliness. The fiery flush upon her face and neck, the bewitching childish frown of anger corrugating the brow, the dazzling glitter of the teeth, the quiver of the full scarlet lips above and below them, turned me dizzy with admiration.

Her eyes met mine, and slowly the violet flames in them began to soften. Then they died away entirely as she murmured,

"You wicked English boy, if you hadn't—beautiful—beautiful eyes, I'd kill you."

By this time, however, Tom had entirely forgotten his grievance against me, and gazed upon Winifred in a state of drunken wonderment.

"Winifred," he said, in a tone of sorrowful reproach, "how dare you speak like that to Master Aylwin, your father's best friend, the only friend your poor father's got in the world, the friend as I give ferret-eyed rabbits to, and tame hares, and beautiful skulls? Beg his pardon this instant, Winifred. I own

on your knees and beg my friend's pardon this instant, Winifred."

The poor little girl stood dazed, and was actually sinking down on her knees on the grass before me.

I cried out in acute distress,

"No, no, no, no, Tom, pray don't let her—dear little girl!—beautiful little girl!"

"Very well, Master Aylwin," said Tom, grandly, "she sha'n't if you don't like, but she *shall* go and kiss you and make it up."

At this the child's face brightened, and she came and laid her little red lips upon mine. Velvet lips, I feel them now, soft and warm—I feel them while I write these lines.

Tom looked on for a moment, and then left us, blundering away towards Raxton, most likely to a beer-house.

He told the child that she was to go home and mind the house until he returned. He gave her the church key to take home. We two were left alone in the churchyard, looking at each other in silence, each waiting for the other to speak. At last she said, demurely, "Good-bye; father says I must go home."

And she walked away with a business-like air towards the little white gate of the churchyard, opening upon what was called "The Wilderness Road." When she reached the gate she threw a look over her shoulder as she passed through. It was that same look again—wistful, frank, courageous. I immediately began to follow her, although I did not know why. When she saw this she stopped for me. I got up to her, and then we proceeded side by side in perfect silence along the dusty narrow road, perfumed with the scent of wild rose and honeysuckle. Suddenly she stopped and said,

"I have left my hat on the tower," and laughed merrily at her own heedlessness.

She ran back with an agility which I thought I had never seen equalled. It made me sad to see her run so fast, though once how it would have delighted me! I stood still; but when she reached the church porch she again looked over her shoulder, and again I followed her:—I did not in the least know why. That look I think would have made me follow her through fire and water—it *has* made me follow her through fire and water. When I reached her she put the great black key in the lock. She had some difficulty in turning the key, but I did not presume to offer such services as mine to so superior a little woman. After one or two fruitless efforts with both her hands, each attempt accompanied with a little laugh and a little merry glance in my face, she turned the key and pushed open the door. We both passed into the ghastly old church, through the green glass windows of which the sun was shining, and illuminating the broken remains of the high-backed pews on the opposite side. She ran along towards the belfry, and I soon lost her, for she passed up the stone steps, where I knew I could not follow her.

In deep mortification I stood listening at the bottom of the steps—listening to those little feet crunching up the broken stones—listening to the rustle of her dress against the narrow stone walls, until the sounds grew fainter and fainter, and then ceased.

Presently I heard her voice a long way up, calling out, "Little boy, if you go outside you will see something." I guessed at once that she was going to exhibit herself on the tower, where, before my accident, I and my brother Frank were so fond of going. I went outside the church and stood in the graveyard, looking up at the tower. In a minute I saw her on it. Her face was turned towards me, gilded by the golden sunshine. I could, or thought I could, even at that distance, see the flash of the bright eyes looking at me. Then a little hand was put over the parapet, and I saw a dark hat swinging by its strings, as she was waving it to me. Oh! that I could have climbed those steps and done that! But that exploit of hers touched a strange chord within me. Had she been a boy, I could have borne it in a defiant way; or had she been any other girl than this, my heart would not have sunk as it now did when I thought of the gulf between her and me. Down I sat upon a grave, and looked at her with a feeling quite new to me.

This was a phase of cripplehood I had not contemplated. She soon left the tower, and made her appearance at the church door again. After locking it, which she did by thrusting a piece of stick through the handle of the key, she came and stood over me. But I turned my eyes away and gazed across the sea, and tried to deceive myself into believing that the waves, and the gulls, and the sails dreaming on the sky-line, and the curling clouds of smoke that came now and then from a steamer passing Dullingham Point were interesting me deeply. There was a remoteness about the little girl now, since I had seen her unusual agility, and I was trying to harden my heart against her. Loneliness I felt was best for me. She did not speak, but stood looking at me. I turned my eyes round and saw that she was looking at my crutches, which were lying beside me aslant the green hillock where I sat. Her face had turned grave and pitiful.

"Oh! I forgot," she said. "I wish I had not run away from you now."

"You may run where you like for what I care," I said. But the words were very

shaky, and I had no sooner said them than I wished them back. She made no reply for some time, and I sat plucking the wild flowers near my hands, and gazing again across the sea. At last she said,

"Would you like to come in our garden? It's such a nice garden."

I could resist her no longer. That voice would have drawn me had she spoken in the language of the Toltecs or the lost Zamzummin. To describe it would of course be impossible. The novelty of her accent, the way in which she gave the "h" in "which," "what," and "when," the Welsh rhythm of her intonation, were as bewitching to me as the *timbre* of her voice. And let me say here, once for all, that when I sat down to write this narrative, I determined to give the English reader some idea of the way in which, whenever her emotions were deeply touched, her talk would run into soft Welsh diminutives; but I soon abandoned the attempt in despair. I found that to use colloquial Welsh with effect in an English context is impossible without wearying English readers and disappointing Welsh ones.

Here, indeed, is one of the great disadvantages under which this book will go out to the world. While a story-teller may reproduce, by means of orthographical devices, something of the effect of Scottish accent, Irish accent, or Manx accent, such devices are powerless to represent Welsh accent.

I got up in silence, and walked by her side out of the churchyard towards her father's cottage, which was situated between the new church and the old, and at a considerable distance from the town of Raxton on one side, and the village of Graylingham on the other. Her eager young limbs would every moment take her ahead of me, for she was as vigorous as a fawn. But by the time she was half a yard in advance, she would recollect herself and fall back; and every time she did so that same look of tenderness would overspread her face.

At last she said, "What makes you stare at me so, little boy?"

I blushed and turned my head another way, for I had been feasting my eyes upon her complexion, and trying to satisfy myself as to what it really was like. Indeed, I thought it quite peculiar then, when I had seen so few lovely faces, as I always did afterwards, when I had seen as many as most people. It was, I thought, as though underneath the sunburn the delicate pink tint of the hedge-rose had become mingled with the bloom of a ripening peach, and yet it was like neither peach nor rose. But this tone, whatever it was, did not spread higher than the eyebrows. The forehead was different. It had a singular kind of pearly look, and her long slender throat was almost of the same tone: no, not the same, for there was a transparency about her throat unlike that of the forehead. This colour I was just now thinking looked something like the inside of a certain mysterious shell upon my father's library shelf.

As she asked me her question she stopped, and looked straight at me, opening her eyes wide and round upon me. This threw a look of innocent trustfulness over her bright features which I soon learnt was the chief characteristic of her expression and was altogether peculiar to herself. I knew it was very rude to stare at people as I had been staring at her, and I took her question as a rebuke, although I still was unable to keep my eyes off her. But it was not merely her beauty and her tenderness that had absorbed my attention. I had been noticing how intensely she seemed to enjoy the delights of that summer afternoon. As we passed along that road, where sea-scents and land-scents were mingled, she would stop whenever the sunshine fell full upon her face; her eyes would sparkle and widen with pleasure, and a half-smile would play about her lips, as if someone had kissed her. Every now and then she would stop to listen to the birds, putting up her finger, and with a look of childish wisdom say, "Do you know what that is? That's a blackbird—that's a thrush—that's a goldfinch. Which eggs do you like best—a goldfinch's or a bullfinch's? *I* know which *I* like best."

III

WHILE we were walking along the road a sound fell upon my ears which in my hale days never produced any very unpleasant sensations, but which did now. I mean the cackling of the field people of both sexes returning from their day's work. These people knew me well, and they liked me, and I am sure they had no idea that when they ran past me on the road their looks and nods gave me no pleasure, but pain; and I always tried to avoid them. As they passed us they somewhat modified the noise they were making, but only to cackle, chatter, and bawl and laugh at each other the louder after we were left behind.

"Don't you wish," said the little girl meditatively, "that men and women had voices more like the birds?"

The idea had never occurred to me before, but I understood in a moment what she meant, and sympathised with her. Nature

of course has been unkind to the lords and ladies of creation in this one matter of voice.

"Yes, I do," I said.

"I'm so glad you do," said she. "I've so often thought what a pity it is that God did not let men and women talk and sing as the birds do. I believe He did let 'em talk like that in the Garden of Eden, don't you?"

"I think it very likely," I said.

"Men's voices are so rough mostly and women's voices are so sharp mostly, that it's sometimes a little hard to love 'em as you love the birds"

"It is," I said.

"Don't you think the poor birds must sometimes feel very much distressed at hearing the voices of men and women, especially when they all talk together?"

The idea seemed so original and yet so true that it made me laugh; we both laughed. At that moment there came a still louder, noisier clamour of voices from the villagers.

"The rooks mayn't mind," said the little girl, pointing upwards to the large rookery close by, whence came a noise marvellously like that made by the field workers. "But I'm afraid the blackbirds and thrushes can't like it. I do so wonder what they say about it."

After we had left the rookery behind us and the noise of the villagers had grown fainter, we stood and listened to the blackbirds and thrushes. She looked so joyous that I could not help saying, "Little girl, I think you're very happy, ain't you?"

"Not quite," she said, as though answering a question she had just been putting to herself. "There's not enough wind."

"Then do *you* like wind?" I said in surprise and delight.

"Oh, I love it!" she said rapturously. "I can't be quite happy without wind, can *you*? I like to run up the hills in the wind and sing to it. That's when I am happiest. I couldn't live long without the wind."

Now it had been a deep-rooted conviction of mine that none but the gulls and I really and truly liked the wind. "Fishermen are muffs," I used to say; "they talk about the wind as though it were an enemy, just because it drowns one or two of 'em now and then. Anybody can like sunshine; muffs can like sunshine; it takes a gull or a man to like the wind!"

Such had been my egotism. But here was a girl who liked it! We reached the gate of the garden in front of Tom's cottage, and then we both stopped, looking over the neatly-kept flower-garden and the white thatched cottage behind it, up the walls of which the grape-vine leaves were absorbing the brilliance of the sunlight and softening it. Wynne was a gardener as well as an organist, and had gardens both in the front and at the back of his cottage, which was surrounded by fruit-trees. Drunkard as he was, his two passions, music and gardening, saved him from absolute degradation and ruin. His garden was beautifully kept, and I have seen him deftly pruning his vines when in such a state of drink that it was wonderful how he managed to hold a pruning knife. Winifred opened the gate, and we passed in. Wynne's little terrier, Snap, came barking to meet us.

There was an air of delicious peacefulness about the garden. This also tended to soften that hardness of temper which only cripples who have once rejoiced in their strength can possibly know, I hope.

"I like to see you look so," said the little girl, as I melted entirely under these sweet influences. "You looked so cross before that I was nearly afraid of you."

And she took hold of my hand, not hesitatingly, but frankly. The little fingers clasped mine. I looked at them. They were much more sun-tanned than her face. The little rosy nails were shaped like filbert nuts.

"Why were you not *quite* afraid of me?" I asked.

"Because," said she, "under the crossness I saw that you had great love-eyes like Snap's all the while. *I* saw it!" she said, and laughed with delight at her great wisdom. Then she said with a sudden gravity, "You didn't mean to make my father cry, did you, little boy?"

"No," I said.

"And you love him?" said she.

I hesitated, for I had never told a lie in my life. My business relations with Tom had been of an entirely unsatisfactory character, and the idea of any one's loving the beery scamp presented itself in a ludicrous light. I got out of the difficulty by saying,

"I mean to love Tom very much, if I can."

The answer did not appear to be entirely satisfactory to the little girl, but it soon seemed to pass from her mind.

That was the most delightful afternoon I had ever spent in my life. We seemed to become old friends in a few minutes, and in an hour or two she was the closest friend I had on earth. Not all the little shoeless friends in Raxton, not all the beautiful seagulls I loved, not all the sunshine and wind upon the sands, not all the wild bees in Graylingham Wilderness, could give the companionship this child could give. My flesh tingled with delight. (And yet all the

while I was not Hal the conqueror of ragamuffins, but Hal the cripple!)

"Shall we go and get some strawberries?" she said, as we passed to the back of the house. "They are quite ripe."

But my countenance fell at this. I was obliged to tell her that I could not stoop.

"Ah! but *I* can, and I will pluck them and give them to you. I should like to do it. *Do* let me, there's a good boy."

I consented, and hobbled by her side to the verge of the strawberry-beds. But when I foolishly tried to follow her, I stuck ignominiously, with my crutches sunk deep in the soft mould of rotten leaves. Here was a trial for the conquering hero of the coast. I looked into her face to see if there was not, at last, a laugh upon it. That cruel human laugh was my only dread. To everything but ridicule I had hardened myself; but against that I felt helpless.

I looked into her face to see if she was laughing at my lameness. No: her brows were merely knit with anxiety as to how she might best relieve me. This surpassingly beautiful child, then, had evidently accepted me—lameness and all—crutches and all—as a subject of peculiar interest.

How I loved her as I put my hand upon her firm little shoulders, while I extricated first one crutch and then another, and at last got upon the hard path again!

When she had landed me safely, she returned to the strawberry-bed, and began busily gathering the fruit, which she brought to me in her sunburnt hands, stained to a bright pink by the ripe fruit. Such a charm did she throw over me, that at last I actually consented to her putting the fruit into my mouth.

She then told me with much gravity that she knew how to "cure crutches." There was, she said, a famous "crutches-well" in Wales, kept by St. Winifred (most likely an aunt of hers, being of the same name), whose water could "cure crutches." When she came from Wales again she would "be sure to bring a bottle of crutches-water." She told me also much about Snowdon (near which she lived), and how, on misty days, she used to "make believe that she was the Lady of the Mist, and that she was going to visit the Tywysog o'r Niwl, the Prince of the Mist; it was *so* nice!"

I do not know how long we kept at this, but the organist returned and caught her in the very act of feeding me. To be caught in this ridiculous position, even by a drunken man, was more than I could bear, however, and I turned and left.

As I recall that walk home along Wilderness Road, I live it as thoroughly as I did then. I can see the rim of the sinking sun burning fiery red low down between the trees on the left, and then suddenly dropping out of sight. I can see on the right the lustre of the high-tide sea. I can hear the "che-eu-chew, che-eu-chew," of the wood-pigeons in Graylingham Wood. I can smell the very scent of the bean flowers drinking in the evening dews. I did not feel that I was going home as the sharp gables of the Hall gleamed through the chestnut-trees. My home for evermore was the breast of that lovely child, between whom and myself such a strange delicious sympathy had sprung up. I felt there was no other home for me.

"Why, child, where *have* you been?" said my mother, as she saw me trying to slip to bed unobserved, in order that happiness such as mine might not be brought into coarse contact with servants. "Child, where *have* you been, and what has possessed you? Your face is positively shining with joy, and your eyes, they alarm me, they are so unnaturally bright. I hope you are not going to have an illness."

I did not tell her, but went to my room, which now was on the ground floor, and sat watching the rooks sailing home in the sunset till the last one had gone, and the voices of the blackbirds grew less clamorous, and the trees began to look larger and larger in the dusk.

IV

THE next day I was again at Wynne's cottage, and the next, and the next. We two, Winifred and I, used to stroll out together through the narrow green lanes, and over the happy fields, and about the Wilderness and the wood, and along the cliffs, and then down the gangway at Flinty Point (the only gangway that was firm enough to support my crutches, Winifred aiding me with the skill of a woman and the agility of a child), and then along the flints below Flinty Point. She rapidly fell into my habits. She was an adept in finding birds' nests and wild honey; and though she would not consent to my taking the eggs, she had not the same compunction about the honey, and she only regretted with me that we could not be exactly like St. John, as Graylingham Wilderness yielded no locusts to eat with the honey. Winifred, though the most healthy of children, had a passion for the deserted church on the cliffs, and for the desolate churchyard.

It was one of those flint and freestone churches that are sprinkled along the coast. Situated as it was at the back of a curve cut by the water into the end of a peninsula

running far into the sea, the tower looked in the distance like a lighthouse. I observed after the first day of our meeting that Winifred never would mount the tower steps again. And I knew why. So delicate were her feelings, so acute did her kind little heart make her, that she would not mount steps which I could never mount.

Not that Winifred looked upon me as her little lover. There was not much of the sentimental in her. Once when I asked her on the sands if I might be her lover, she took an entirely practical view of the question, and promptly replied "certumly," adding, however, like the wise little woman I always found her, that she "wasn't *quite* sure she knew what a lover was, but if it was anything *very* nice she should certumly like *me* to be it."

It was the child's originality of manner that people found so captivating. One of her many little tricks and ways of an original quaintness was her habit of speaking of herself in the third person, like the merest baby. "Winifred likes this," "Winifred doesn't like that," were phrases that had an irresistible fascination for me.

Another fascinating characteristic of hers was connected with her superstitions. Whenever on parting with her I exclaimed, as I often did, "Oh, what a lovely day we have had, Winifred!" she would look expectantly in my eyes, murmuring, "And—and——" This meant that I was to say, "And shall have many more such days," as though there were a prophetic power in words.

She talked with entire seriousness of having seen in a place called Fairy Glen in Wales the Tylwyth Teg. And when I told her of Oberon and Titania, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, whose acquaintance I had made through *Lamb's Tales from Shakspeare*, she said that one bright moonlight night she, in the company of two of her Gypsy playmates, Rhona Boswell and a girl called Sinfi, had visited this same Fairy Glen, when they saw the Fairy Queen alone on a ledge of rock, dressed in a green kirtle with a wreath of golden leaves about her head.

Another subject upon which I loved to hear her talk was that of the "Knockers" of Snowdon, the guardians of undiscovered copper mines, who sometimes by knocking on the rocks gave notice to individuals they favoured of undiscovered copper, but these favoured ones were mostly children who chanced to wander up Snowdon by themselves. She had, she said, not only heard but seen these Knockers. They were thickset dwarfs, as broad as they were long. One Knocker, an elderly female, had often played with her on the hills. Knockers' Llyn, indeed, was very much on Winifred's mind. When a golden cloud, like the one to which she was singing her song at the time I first saw her, shone over a person's head at Knockers' Llyn, it was a sign of good fortune. She was sure that it was so, because the Welsh people believed it, and so did the Gypsies.

Not a field or a hedgerow was unfamiliar to us. We were most learned in the structure of birds' nests, in the various colours of birds' eggs, and in insect architecture. In all the habits of the wild animals of the meadows we were most profound little naturalists.

Winifred could in the morning, after the dews were gone, tell by the look of a buttercup or a daisy what kind of weather was at hand, when the most cunning peasant was deceived by the hieroglyphics of the sky, and the most knowing seaman could "make nothing of the wind."

Her life, in fact, had been spent in the open air.

There were people staying at the Hall, and they and Frank engrossed all my mother's attention. At least, she did not appear to notice my absence from home.

My brother Frank, however, was not so unobservant (he was two years older than myself). Early one morning, before breakfast, curiosity led him to follow me, and he came upon us in Graylingham Wood as we were sitting under a tree close to the cliff, eating the wild honey we had found in the Wilderness.

He stood there swinging a ground-ash cane, and looking at her in a lordly, patronising way, the very personification no doubt of boyish beauty. I became troubled to see him look so handsome. The contrast between him and a cripple was not fair, I thought, as I observed an expression of passing admiration on little Winifred's face. Yet I thought there was not the pleased smile with which she had first greeted me, and a weight of anxiety was partially removed, for it had now become quite evident to me that I was as much in love as any swain of eighteen—it had become quite evident that without Winifred the poor little shattered sea-gull must perish altogether. She was literally my world.

Frank came and sat down with us, and made himself as agreeable as possible. He tried to enter into our play, but we were too slow for him; he soon became restless and impatient. "Oh bother!" he said, and got up and left us.

I drew a sigh of relief when he was gone.

"Do you like my brother, Winifred?" I said.

"Yes," she said.

"Why?"

"Because he is so pretty and so nimble. I believe he could run up——" and then she stopped; but I knew what the complete sentence would have been. She was going to say: "I believe he could run up the gangways without stopping to take breath."

Here was a stab; but she did not notice the effect of her unfinished sentence. Then a question came from me involuntarily.

"Winifred," I said, "do you like him as well as you like me?"

"Oh no," she said, in a tone of wonderment that such a question should be asked.

"But *I* am not pretty and——"

"Oh, but you *are!*" she said eagerly, interrupting me.

"But," I said, with a choking sensation in my voice, "I am lame," and I looked at the crutches lying among the ferns beside me.

"Ah, but I like you all the better for being lame," she said, nestling up to me.

"But you like nimble boys," I said, "such as Frank."

She looked puzzled. The anomaly of liking nimble boys and crippled boys at the same time seemed to strike her. Yet she felt it *was* so, though it was difficult to explain it.

"Yes, I *do* like nimble boys," she said at last, plucking with her fingers at a blade of grass she held between her teeth. "But I think I like lame boys better, that is if they are—if they are—*you*."

I gave an exclamation of delight. But she was two years younger than I, and scarcely, I suppose, understood it.

"He is very pretty," she said meditatively, "but he has not got love-eyes like you and Snap, and I don't think I could love any little boy so very, *very* much now who wasn't lame."

She loved me in spite of my lameness; she loved me because I was lame, so that if I had not fallen from the cliffs, if I had sustained my glorious position among the boys of Raxton and Graylingham as "Fighting Hal," I might never have won little Winifred's love. Here was a revelation of the mingled yarn of life, that I remember struck me even at that childish age.

I began to think I might, in spite of the undoubted crutches, resume my old place as the luckiest boy along the sands. She loved me because I was lame! Those who say that physical infirmity does not feminise the character have not had my experience. No more talk for me that morning. In such a mood as that there can be no talk. I sat in a silent dream, save when a sweet sob of delight would come up like a bubble from the heaving waters of my soul. I had passed into that rare and high mood when life's afflictions are turned by love to life's deepest, holiest joys. I had begun early to learn and know the gamut of the affections.

"When you leave me here and go home to Wales you will never forget me, Winnie?"

"Never, never!" she said, as she helped me from the ferns which were still as wet with dew as though it had been raining. "I will think of you every night before I go to sleep, and always end my prayers as I did that first night after I saw you so lonely in the churchyard."

"And how is that, Winnie?" I said, as she adjusted my crutches for me.

"After I've said 'Amen,' I always say, 'And, dear Lord Jesus, don't forget to love dear Henry, who can't get up the gangways without me,' and I will say that every night as long as I live."

From that morning I considered her altogether mine. Her speaking of me as the "dear little English boy," however, as she did, marred the delight her words gave me. I had from the first observed that the child's strongest passion was a patriotism of a somewhat fiery kind. The word English in her mouth seemed sometimes a word of reproach: it was the name of the race that in the past had invaded her sacred Snowdonia.

I afterwards learnt that her aunt was answerable for this senseless prejudice.

"Winnie," I said, "don't you wish I was a Welsh boy?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "Don't you?"

I made no answer.

She looked into my face and said, "And yet I don't think I could love a Welsh boy as I love you."

She then repeated to me a verse of a Welsh song, which of course I did not understand a word of until she told me what it meant in English.

It was an address to Snowdon, and ran something like this—

"Mountain-wild Snowdon for me!
Sweet silence there for the harp,
Where loiter the ewes and the lambs
In the moss and the rushes,
Where one's song goes sounding up!
And the rocks re-echo it higher and higher
In the height where the eagles live."

In this manner about six weeks slid away, and Winnie's visit to her father came to an end. I ask, how can people laugh at the sorrows of childhood? The bitterness of

my misery as I sat with that child on the eve of her departure for Wales (which to me seemed at the extreme end of the earth) was almost on a par with anything I have since suffered, and that is indeed saying a great deal. It was in Wynne's cottage, and I sat on the floor with her wet cheeks close to mine, saying, "She leaves me alone." Tom tried to console me by telling me that Winifred would soon come back.

"But when?" I said.

"Next year," said Tom.

He might as well have said next century, for any consolation it gave me. The idea of a year without her was altogether beyond my grasp. It seemed infinite.

Week after week passed, and month after month, and little Winifred was always in my thoughts. Wynne's cottage was a sacred spot to me, and the organist the most interesting man in the world. I never tired of asking him questions about her, though he, as I soon found, knew scarcely anything concerning her and what she was doing, and cared less; for love of drink had got thoroughly hold of him.

Letters were scarce visitants to him, and I believe he never used to hear from Wales at all.

V

At the end of the year she came again, and I had about a year of happiness. I was with her every day, and every day she grew more necessary to my existence.

It was at this time that I made the acquaintance of Winnie's friend Rhona Boswell, a charming little Gypsy girl. Graylingham Wood and Rington Wood, like the entire neighbourhood, were favourite haunts of a superior kind of Gypsies called Griengroes, that is to say, horse-dealers. Their business was to buy ponies in Wales and sell them in the Eastern Counties and the East Midlands. Thus it was that Winnie had known many of the East Midland Gypsies in Wales. Compared with Rhona Boswell, who was more like a fairy than a child, Winnie seemed quite a grave little person. Rhona's limbs were always on the move, and the movement sprang always from her emotions. Her laugh seemed to ring through the woods like silver bells, a sound that it was impossible to mistake for any other. The laughter of most Gypsy girls is full of music and of charm, and yet Rhona's laughter was a sound by itself, and it was no doubt this which afterwards when she grew up attracted my kinsman, Percy Aylwin, towards her. It seemed to emanate not from her throat merely, but from her entire frame. If one could imagine a strain of merriment and fun blending with the ecstatic notes of a skylark soaring and singing, one might form some idea of the laugh of Rhona Boswell. Ah, what days they were! Rhona would come from Gypsy Dell, a romantic place in Rington Manor some miles off, especially to show us some newly devised coronet of flowers that she had been weaving for herself. This induced Winnie to weave for herself a coronet of sea-weeds, and an entire morning was passed in grave discussion as to which coronet excelled the other.

A year had made a great difference in Winnie, a much greater difference than it had made in me. Her aunt, who was no doubt a well-informed woman, had been attending to her education. In a single year she had taught her French so thoroughly that Winnie was in the midst of Dumas' *Monte Cristo*. And apart from education in the ordinary acceptation of the word, the expansion of her mind had been rapid and great.

Her English vocabulary was now far above mine, far above that of most children of her age. This I discovered was owing to the fact that a literary English lady of delicate health, Miss Dalrymple, whose slender means obliged her to leave the Capel Curig Hotel, had been staying at the cottage as a lodger. She had taken the greatest delight in educating Winnie. Of course Winnie lost as well as gained by this change. She was a little Welsh rustic no longer, but a little lady unusually well equipped, as far as education went, for taking her place in the world.

She understood fully now what I meant when I told her that we were betrothed, and again showed the mingling of child-wisdom and poetry which characterised her by suggesting that we should be married on Snowdon, and that her wedding-dress should be the green kirtle and wreath of the fairies, and that her bridesmaids should be her Gypsy friends, Sinfi Lovell and Rhona Boswell. This I acceded to with alacrity.

It was now that I fully realised for the first time her extraordinary gift of observation and her power of describing what she had observed in the graphic language that can never be taught save by the teacher Nature herself. In a dozen picturesque words she would flash upon my very senses the scene that she was describing. So vividly did she bring before my eyes the scenery of North Wales, that when at last I went there it seemed quite familiar to me. And so in describing individuals, her pictures of them were like photographs.

Graylingham Wood was our favourite haunt. This place and the adjoining piece of waste land, called the Wilderness, had for us all the charms of a primeval forest. Here in the early spring we used to come and watch the first violet uplifting its head from the dark green leaves behind the mossy boles, and listen for the first note of the blackcap, the nightingale's herald, and the first *coo* of the wood-pigeons among the bare and newly-budding trees. And here, in the summer, we used to come as soon as breakfast was over with as many story-books as we could carry, and sit on the grass and revel in the wonders of the *Arabian Nights*, the *Tales of the Genii*, and the *Seven Champions of Christendom*, till all the leafy alleys of the wood were glittering with armed knights and Sindbads and Aladdins. The story of Camaralzaman and Badoura was, I think, Winnie's chief favourite. She could repeat it almost word for word. The idea of the two lovers being carried to each other by genii through the air and over the mountain tops had an especial fascination for her. I was Camaralzaman and she Badoura, and the genii would carry me to her as she sat by Knockers' Llyn, or, as she called it, Llyn Coblynau, on the lower slopes of Snowdon.

But above all, there was the sea on the other side of the wood, of the presence of which we were always conscious—the sea, of which we could often catch glimpses between the trees, lending a sense of freedom and wonder and romance such as no landscape can lend. Our great difficulty of course was in connection with my lameness. Few children would have tried to convey a pair of crutches and a lame leg down the cliff to the long level brown sands that lay, farther than the eye could reach, stretched beneath miles on miles of brown crumbling cliffs, whose jagged points and indentations had the kind of spectral look peculiar to that coast. For, alas! the holy water Winifred brought did not "cure the crutches." Yet we used to master the difficulty, always selecting the firmer gangway at Flinty Point, and always waiting, before making the attempt, until there was no one near to see us toiling down. Once down on the hard sands just below the Point, we were happy, paddling and enjoying ourselves till the sunset told us that we must begin our herculean labour of hoisting the leg and crutches up the gangway back to the wood. I have performed many athletic feats since my cure, but nothing comparable to the feat of climbing with crutches up those paths of yielding sand. To myself, now, it seems almost incredible that it was ever achieved, nor could it have been done without the aid of so active and courageous a friend as Winifred.

We knew Nature in all her moods. In every aspect we found the sea, the wood, and the meadows, happy and beautiful—in winter as in summer, in storm as in sunshine. In the foggy days of November, in the sharp winds of March, in the snows and sleet and rain of February, we used to hear other people complain of the bad weather; we used to hear them fret for change. But we despised them for their ignorance where we were so learned. There was no bad weather for us. In March, what so delicious as breasting together the brave wind, and feeling it tingle our cheeks and beat our ears till we laughed at each other with joy? In rain, what so delicious as to stand under a tree or behind a hedge and listen to the drops pattering overhead among the leaves, and see the fields steaming up to meet them? Then again the soft falling of snow upon the lonely fields, while the very sheep looked brown against the whiteness gathering round them. All beautiful to us two, and beloved!

VI

"BUT where was this little boy's mother all this time?" you naturally ask; "where was his father? In a word, who was he? and what were his surroundings?"

I will answer these queries in as brief a fashion as possible.

My father, Philip Aylwin, belonged to a branch of an ancient family which had been satirically named by another branch of the same family "The Proud Aylwins."

It is a singular thing that it was the proud Aylwins who had a considerable strain of Gypsy blood in their veins. My great-grandfather had married Fenella Stanley, the famous Gypsy beauty, about whom so much was written in the newspapers and magazines of that period. She had previously when a girl of sixteen married a Lovell who died and left a child. Fenella's portrait in the character of the Sibyl of Snowdon was painted by the great portrait painter of that time.

This picture still hangs in the portrait gallery of Raxton Hall.

As a child it had an immense attraction for me, and no wonder, for it was original to actual eccentricity. It depicted a dark young woman of dazzling beauty standing at break of day among mountain scenery, holding a musical instrument of the guitar kind, but shaped like a violin, upon the lower strings

of which she was playing with the thumb of the left hand.

Through the misty air were seen all kinds of shadowy shapes, whose eyes were fixed on the player. I used to stand and look at this picture by the hour together, fascinated by the strange beauty of the singer's face and the mysterious, prophetic expression in the eyes.

And I used to try to imagine what tune it was that could call from the mountain air the "flower-sprites" and "sunshine elves" of morning on the mountain.

Fenella Stanley seems in her later life to have set up as a positive seeress, and I infer from certain family papers and diaries in my possession that she was the very embodiment of the wildest Romany beliefs and superstitions.

I first became conscious of the mysterious links which bound me to my Gypsy ancestress by reading one of her letters to my great-grandfather, who had taught her to write: nothing apparently could have taught her to spell. It was written during a short stay she was making away from him in North Wales. It described in the simplest (and often the most uncouth) words that Nature-ecstasy which the Romanies seem to feel in the woodlands. It came upon me like a revelation, for it was the first time I had ever seen embodied in words the sensations which used to come to me in Graylingham Wood or on the river that ran through it. After long basking among the cowslips, or beneath the whispering branches of an elm, whose shade I was robbing from the staring cows around, or lying on my back in a boat on the river, listening to the birds and the insect hum and all the magic music of summer in the woodlands, I used all at once to feel as though the hand of a great enchantress were being waved before me and around me. The wheels of thought would stop; all the senses would melt into one, and I would float on a tide of unspeakable joy, a tide whose waves were waves neither of colour, nor perfume, nor melody, but new waters born of the mixing of these; and, through a language deeper than words and deeper than thoughts, I would seem carried at last close to an actual consciousness—a consciousness which, to my childish dreams, seemed drawing me close to the bosom of a mother whose face would brighten into that of Fenella.

My father lived upon moderate means in the little seaside town of Raxton. My mother was his second wife, a distant cousin of the same name. She was not one of the "Proud Aylwins," and yet she must have had more pride in her heart than all the "Proud Aylwins" put together. Her feeling in relation to the strain of Gypsy blood in the family into which she had married was that of positive terror. She associated the word "Gypsy" with everything that is wild, passionate and lawless.

One great cause undoubtedly of her partiality for Frank and her dislike of me was that Frank's blue-eyed Saxon face showed no sign whatever of the Romany strain, while my swarthy face did.

As I write this, she lives before me with more vividness than my father, for the reason that her character during my childhood, before I came to know my father thoroughly —before I came to know what a marvellous man he was—seemed to be a thousand times more vivid than his. With her bright grey eyes, her patrician features, I shall see her while memory lasts. The only differences that ever arose between my father and my mother were connected with the fact that my father had had a former wife. Now and then (not often) my mother would lose her stoical self-command, and there would come from her an explosion of jealous anger, stormy and terrible. This was on occasions when she perceived that my father's memory retained too vividly the impression left on it of his love for the wife who was dead—dead, but a rival still. My father lived in mortal fear of this jealousy. Yet my mother was a devoted and a fond wife. I remember in especial the flash that would come from her eyes, the fiery flush that would overspread her face, whenever she saw my father open a certain antique silver casket which he kept in his escritoire when at home, and carried about with him when travelling. The casket (I soon learned) contained mementoes of his first wife, between whom and himself there seems to have been a deep natural sympathy such as did not exist between my mother and him. This first wife he had lost under peculiarly painful circumstances, which it is necessary that I should briefly narrate. She had been drowned before his very eyes in that cove beneath the church which I have already described.

This semicircular indentation at the end of the peninsula or headland on which the church stood was specially dangerous in two ways. It was a fatal spot where sea and land were equally treacherous. On the sands the tide, and on the cliffs the landslip, imperilled the lives of the unwary. Half, at least, of the churchyard had been condemned as "dangerous," and this very same spot was the only one on the coast where the pedestrian along the sands ran any serious risk of being entrapped by the tide; for the peninsula on which the church stood jutted out for a con-

siderable distance into the sea, and then was scooped out in the form of a boot-jack, and so caught the full force of the waves. One corner, as already mentioned, was called Flinty Point, the other Needle Point, and between these two points there was no gangway within the semicircle up the wall of cliff. Indeed, within the cove the cliff was perpendicular, or rather overhanging, as far as such crumbling earth would admit of its overhanging. To reach a gangway, a person inside the cove would have to leave the cliff wall for the open sands, and pass round either Needle Point or Flinty Point. Hence the cove was sometimes called Mousetrap Cove, because when the tide reached so high as to touch these two points, a person on the sands within the cove was caught as in a mousetrap, and the only means of extrication was by boat from the sea. It was the irresistible action of the sea upon the peninsula (called Church Headland) that had doomed church and churchyard to certain destruction.

Dangerous as was this cove, there was something peculiarly fascinating about it. The black, smooth, undulating boulders that dotted the sand here and there formed the most delightful seats upon which to meditate or read. It was a favourite spot with my father's first wife, who had been a Swiss governess. She was a great reader and student, but it was not till after her death that my father became one. The poor lady was fond of bringing her books to the cove, and pursuing her studies or meditations with the sound of the sea's chime in her ears. My father, at that time I believe a simple, happy country squire, but showing strong signs of his Romany ancestry, had often warned her of the risk she ran, and one day he had the agony of seeing her from the cliff locked in the cove, and drowning before his eyes ere a boat could be got, while he and the coastguard stood powerless to reach her.

The effect of this shock demented my father for a time. How it was that he came to marry again I could never understand. During my childhood he had, as far as I could see, no real sympathy with anything save his own dreams. In after years I came to know the truth. He was kind enough in disposition, but he looked upon us, his children, as his second wife's property, his dreams as his own. Once every year he used to go to Switzerland and stay there for several weeks; and, as the object of these journeys was evidently to revisit the old spots made sacred to him by reminiscences of his romantic love for his first wife, it may be readily imagined that they were not looked upon with any favour by my mother. She never accompanied him on these occasions, nor would she let Frank do so—another proof of the early partiality she showed for my brother. As I was of less importance, my father (previous to my accident) used to take me, to my intense delight and enjoyment; but during the period of my lameness he went to Switzerland alone.

It was during one of my childish visits to Switzerland that I learnt an important fact in connection with my father and his first wife—the fact that since her death he had become a mystic and had joined a certain sect of mystics founded by Lavater.

This is how I came to know it. My attention had been arrested by a book lying on my father's writing-table—a large book called "*The Veiled Queen*, by Philip Aylwin"—and I began to read it. The statements therein were of an astounding kind, and the idea of a beautiful woman behind a veil completely fascinated my childish mind. And the book was full of the most amazing stories collected from all kinds of outlandish sources. One story, called "The Flying Donkey of the Ruby Hills," riveted my attention so much that it possessed me, and even now I feel that I can repeat every word of it. It was a story of a donkey-driver, who, having lost his wife Alawiyah, went and lived alone in the ruby hills of Badakhshan, where the Angel of Memory fashioned for him out of his own sorrow and tears an image of his wife. This image was mistaken by a townsman named Hasan for his own wife, and Ja'afar was summoned before the Ka'dee. Afterwards, when *The Veiled Queen* came into my possession, I noticed that this story was quoted for motto on the title-page:

"'Then,' quoth the Ka'dee, laughing until his grinders appeared, 'rather, by Allah, would I take all the punishment thou dreadest, thou most false donkey-driver of the Ruby Hills, than believe this story of thine—this mad, mad story, that she with whom thou wast seen was not the living wife of Hasan here (as these four legal witnesses have sworn), but thine own dead spouse, Alawiyah, refashioned for thee by the Angel of Memory out of thine own sorrow and unquenchable fountain of tears.'

"Quoth Ja'afar, bowing low his head: 'Bold is the donkey-driver, O Ka'dee! and bold the Ka'dee who dares say what he will believe, what disbelieve—not knowing in any wise the mind of Allah—not knowing in any wise his own heart and what it shall some day suffer.'"

This story so absorbed me that when my father re-entered the house I was perfectly unconscious of his presence. He took the

book from me, saying that it was not a book for children. It possessed my mind for some days. What I had read in it threw light upon certain conversations in French and German which I had heard between my father and his Swiss friends, and the fact gradually dawned upon me that he believed himself to be in direct communication with the spirit of his dead wife. This so acted upon my imagination that I began to feel that she was actually alive, though invisible. I told Frank when I got home that we had another mother in Switzerland, and that our father went to Switzerland to see her.

Having at that time a passionate love for my mother (a love none the less passionate because somewhat coldly returned), I felt great anger against this resuscitated rival; but Frank only laughed and called me a stupid little fool.

Luckily Frank forgot my story in a minute, and it never reached my mother's ears.

Some years after this an odd incident occurred. The idea of a veiled lady had, as I say, fascinated me. One Raxton fair-day I induced Winnie to be photographed on the sands, wearing a crown of sea-flowers in imitation of Rhona Boswell's famous wild-flower coronet, and a necklace of sea-weed, with Frank and another boy lifting from her head a long white veil of my mother's. My father accidentally saw this photograph, and was so taken with it that he adorned the title-page of the third edition of *The Veiled Queen* with a small wood-cut of it.

These vagaries of my father's had an influence upon my destiny of the most tragic, yet of the most fantastic kind.

He had the reputation, I believe, of being one of the most learned mystics of his time. He was a fair Hebrew scholar, and also had a knowledge of Sanscrit, Arabic, and Persian. His passion for philology was deep-rooted. He was a no less ardent numismatist. Moreover, he was deeply versed in amulet-lore. He wrote a treatise upon "amulets" and their inscriptions. All this was *after* the death of his first wife. He had a large collection of amulets, Gnostic gems and abraxas stones. That he really believed in the virtue of amulets will be pretty clearly seen as my narrative proceeds. Indeed the subject of amulets and love-tokens became a mania with him. After his death it was said that his collection of amulets, Egyptian, Gnostic, and other, was rarer, and his collection of St. Helena coins larger, than any other collection in England.

Though my mother did not know of the spiritualistic orgies in Switzerland, she knew that my father was a spiritualist. And this vexed her, not only because she conceived it to be visionary folly, but because it was "low." She knew that it led him to join a newly-formed band of Latter-Day mystics which had been organised at Raxton, but luckily she did not know that through them he believed himself to be holding communication with his first wife. The members of this body were tradespeople of the town, and I quite think that in my mother's eyes all tradespeople were low.

As to her indifference towards me,—that is easily explained. I was an incorrigible lttle bohemian by nature. She despaired of ever changing me. During several years this indifference distressed me, though it in no way diminished my affection for her. At last, however, I got accustomed to it and accepted it as inevitable. But the remarkable thing was that Frank's affection for his mother was of the most languid kind. He was an open-hearted boy, and never took advantage of my mother's favouritism. Thus I was left entirely to my own resources. My little love-idyl with Winifred was for a long time unknown to my mother, and no amount of ocular demonstration could have made it known (in such a dream was he) to my father.

On one occasion, however, my mother, having been struck by her beauty at church, told Wynne to bring her to the house, little thinking what she was doing. Accordingly, Winifred came one evening and charmed my mother, charmed the entire household, by her grace of manner. My mother, upon whom what she called "style" made a far greater impression than anything else, pronounced her to be a perfect little lady, and I heard her remark that she wondered how the child of such a scapegrace as Wynne could have been so reared.

Unfortunately I was not old enough to disguise the transports of delight that set my heart beating and my crippled limbs trembling as I saw Winifred gliding like a fairy about the house and gardens, and petted even by my proud and awful mother. My mother did not fail to notice this, and before long she had got from Frank the history of our little loves, and even of the "cripple water" from St. Winifred's Well. I partly heard what Frank was telling her, and I was the only one to notice the expression of displeasure that overspread her features. She did not, however, show it to the child, but she never invited her there again, and from that evening was much more vigilant over my movements, lest I should go to Wynne's cottage. I still, however, continued to meet Winifred in Graylingham Wood during her stay with her father; and

at last, when she again left me, I felt desolate indeed.

I wrote her a letter, and took it to him to address. He was very fond of showing his penmanship, which was remarkably good. He had indeed been well educated, though from his beer-house associations he had entirely caught the rustic accent. I saw him address it, and took it myself to the post-office at Rington, where I was not so well known as at Raxton, but I never got any reply.

And who was Tom Wynne? Though the organist of the new church at Raxton, and custodian of the old deserted church on the cliffs, he was the local ne'er do well, drunkard, and scapegrace. He was, however, a well-connected man, reduced to his present position by drink. He had lived in Raxton until he returned to Wales which was his birthplace — having obtained there some appointment the nature of which I never could understand. In Wales he had got married; and there his wife had died shortly after the birth of Winnie. It was no doubt through his intemperate habits that he lost his post in Wales. It was then that he again came to Raxton, leaving the child with his sister-in-law.

Raxton stands on that part of the coast where the land-springs most persistently disintegrate the hills and render them helpless against the ravages of the sea. Perhaps even within the last few centuries the spot called Mousetrap Cove, scooped out of the peninsula on which the old church stands, was dry land. The old Raxton church at the end of this peninsula had, not many years since, to be deserted for a new one, lest it should some day carry its congregation with it when it slides, as it soon will slide, into the sea. But as none had dared to pull down the old church, a custodian had to be found who for a pittance would take charge of it and of the important monuments it contains. Such a custodian was found in Wynne, who lived in the cottage already described on the Wilderness Road. Along this road (which passed both the new church and the old) I was frequently journeying, and Wynne's tall burly form and ruddy face were, even before I knew Winnie, a certain comfort to me.

He was said to be the last remnant of an old family that once owned much land in the neighbourhood, and he was still the recipient of a small pension. My father used to say that Wynne's family was even exceptionally good, that it laid claim to being descended from a still older Welsh family. But my mother scorned the idea, and always treated the organist as belonging to the lower classes. It was Wynne who had taught me swimming. It was really he, and not my groom, who had taught me how to ride a horse along the low-tide sands so as not to distress him or damage his feet.

It was about this time that my uncle Aylwin of Alvanley, my mother's brother, who had quarrelled with her, became reconciled to her, and came to Raxton. He at once recommended that a friend of his, a famous London surgeon, should be consulted about my lameness. I accordingly went with him to London to be placed under the treatment of the eminent man. Had this been done earlier, what a world of suffering might have been spared me! The man of science pronounced my ailment to be quite curable.

He performed an operation upon the leg, and after a long and careful course of treatment in town, advised that I should go to Margate for a long stay, and avail myself of that change of air. I went, accompanied by my mother and brother, and stayed there several months. My father used to come to see us once a month or so, stay for a week, and then go back.

As the surgeon had prophesied, I made such advance that I was after a while able to walk with tolerable ease without my crutches, by the aid of a walking-stick; and as time went on, the tonic effect of Margate air, aiding the remedies prescribed by the surgeon, worked such a change in me that I was pronounced well, and the doctor said I might return home. I returned to Raxton a cripple no longer.

I returned cured, I say. But how entangled is this web of our life! How almost impossible is it that good should come unmixed with evil, or evil unmixed with good! At Margate, where the bracing air did more, I doubt not, towards my restoration to health than all the medicines, — at Margate my brother drank in his death-poison.

During the very last days of our stay he caught scarlet fever. In a fortnight he was dead. The shock to me was very severe. It laid my mother prostrate for months.

I was now by the death of Frank the representative of our branch of the family, and a little fellow of uncomfortable importance My uncle Aylwin of Alvanley, being childless, was certain to leave me his large estates, for he had dropped entirely away from the Aylwins of Rington Manor, and also from the branch of the Aylwin family represented by my kinsman Cyril.

II

The Moonlight Cross of the Gnostics

I

My mother had some prejudice against a public school, and I was sent to a large and important private one at Cambridge.

And so, with Winifred on my mind, I went one damp winter's morning to Dullingham, our nearest railway station, on my way to Cambridge.

As concerns my school-days I feel that all that will interest the reader is this : as I rode through mile upon mile of the flat, wide-stretching country, I made to myself a vow in connection with Winifred,—a vow that when I left school I would do a certain thing in relation to her, though Fate itself should say, "This thing shall not be done." I did not know then, as I know now, how weak is human will enmeshed in that web of Circumstance that has been a-weaving since the beginning of the world.

I left school without the slightest notion as to what my future course in life was to be. I was to take my rich uncle's property. That was understood now. And although my mother never talked of the matter, I could see in the pensive gaze she bent on me an ever-present consciousness of a future for me more golden still.

But now I formed a new intimacy, and one of a very singular kind—an intimacy with my father, who suddenly woke up to the fact that I was no longer a child. It occurred on my making some pertinent inquiries about a certain Gnostic amulet representing the Gorgon's head, a prize of which he had lately become the happy possessor. On his telling me that the Arabic word for amulet was *hamalet*, and that the word meant "that which is suspended," I said in a perfectly thoughtless way that very likely one of the learned societies to which he belonged might be able to trace some connection between "hamalet" and the "Hamlet" of Shakspeare. These idle and ignorant words of mine fell, as I found, upon a mind ripe to receive them. He looked straight before him at the bust of Shakspeare on the bookshelves as he always looked when his rudderless imagination was well launched, and I heard him mutter, "Hamlet—the Amleth of Saxo-Grammaticus,—hamalet 'that which is suspended.' The world, to Hamlet's metaphysical mind, *was* 'suspended' in the wide region of Nowhere—in an infinite ocean of Nothing. Why did I not think of this before? Strange that this child should hit upon it." Then looking at me as though he had just seen me for the first time in his life, he said, "How old are you, child?" "Eighteen, father," I said. "Eighteen *years?*" he asked. "Yes, father," I said with some pique. "Did you suppose I meant eighteen months?" "Only eighteen years," he muttered, "a mere baby, in short; and yet he has hit upon what we Shakspearians have been boggling over for many years—the symbolical meaning involved in Hamlet's name. Henry, I prophesy great things for you."

An intimacy was cemented between us at once. One of the results of this conversation was my father's elaborate paper, read before one of his societies, in which he maintained that Shakspeare's *Hamlet* was a metaphysical poem, the great central idea of which was involved in the name Hamlet, Amleth, or Hamalet—the idea that the universe, suspended in the wide region of Nowhere, lies, an amulet, upon the breast of the Great Latona,—a paper that was the basis of his reputation in "the higher criticism."

Shortly after this my father and I spent the autumn in various parts of Switzerland. One night, when we were sitting outside the chalet in the full light of the moon, I was the witness of a display of passion on the part of one whom I had always considered to be a dreamy book-worm—a passionless, eccentric mystic—that simply amazed me. A flickering tongue from the central fires suddenly breaking up through the soil of an English vegetable garden could hardly have been a more unexpected phenomenon to me than what occurred on that memorable night.

The incident I am going to relate showed me how rash it is to suppose that you have really fathomed the personality of any human creature. The mementoes of his first wife, which accompanied him whithersoever he went, absorbed his attention in Switzerland, and especially in the little place where she was born, far more than they had done at home. He was for ever peeping furtively into his escritoire to enjoy the sight of them, and then looking over his shoulder to see if he was being watched by my mother, though she was far away in Raxton Hall. On the night in question he showed me the silver casket containing certain of these mementoes—mementoes which I felt almost too intimate to be shown even to his son.

"And now, Henry," said he, "I am going to show you something that no one else has ever seen since she died—the most sacred possession I have upon this earth." He then opened his shirt and his vest, and showed me lying upon his naked bosom a beautiful jewelled cross of a considerable size. "This," said he, lifting it up, "is an ancient Gnostic amulet. It is called the 'Moonlight Cross' of the Gnostics. I gave it to her on the night of our betrothal. She was a Roman Catholic. It is made of precious stones cut in facets, with rubies and diamonds and beryls so cunningly set that, when the moonlight falls on them, the cross flashes almost as brilliantly as when the sunlight falls on them and is kindled into living fire. These deep-coloured crimson rubies—almost as clear as diamonds—are not of the ordinary kind. They are true 'Oriental rubies,' and the jewellers would tell you that the mine which produced them has been lost during several centuries. But look here when I lift it up; the most wonderful feature of the jewel is the skill with which the diamonds are cut. The only shapes generally known are what are called the 'brilliant' and the 'rose,' but here the facets are arranged in an entirely different way, and evidently with the view of throwing light into the very hearts of the rubies, and producing this peculiar radiance."

He lifted the amulet again (which was suspended from his neck by a beautifully worked cord made of soft brown hair) into the rays from the moon. The light the jewel emitted was certainly of a strange and fascinating kind. The cross had been worn with the jewelled front upon his bosom instead of the smooth back, and the sharp facets of the cross had lacerated the scarred flesh underneath in a most cruel manner. He saw me shudder and understood why.

"Oh, I like that!" he said with an ecstatic smile. "I like to feel it constantly on my bosom. It cannot cut deep enough for me. This is her hair," he said, taking the hair-cord between his fingers and kissing it.

"How do you manage to exist, father," I said, "with that heavy sharp-edged jewel on your breast? you who cannot bear the gout with patience?"

"Exist? I could not exist *without* it. The gout is pain—this is not pain; it is joy, bliss, heaven! When I am dead it must lie for ever on my breast as it lies now, or I shall never rest in my grave.'

He had been talking about amulets in the most quiet and matter-of-fact way during that morning; but the moment he produced this cross a strange change came over his face, something like the change that will come over a dull wood-fire when blown by the wind into a bright life of flame.

"Ha!" he muttered to himself, as his eyes widened and sparkled with a look of intense eagerness and his hand shook, sending the light of the beautiful jewel all about the room, "it is a sad pity he was not *her* son. How I should have loved him then! I like him now very much: but how I should have loved him then, for he is a brave boy. Oh, if I had only been born brave like him!" Then, suddenly recollecting himself, he closed his vest, and said; "Don't tell your mother, Hal; don't tell your mother that I have shown you this." Then he took it out again. "She who is dead cherished it," he continued, half to himself—"she cherished it above all things. She died, boy, and I couldn't help her. She used to wear the cross in the bosom of her dress; and there she was in the cove kissing it when the tide swept over her. I ought to have jumped down and died with her. *You* would have done it, Hal; your eyes say so. Oh, to be an Aylwin without the Aylwin courage!"

After a little time he said: "This has lain on her bosom, Hal, her bosom! It has been kissed by her, Hal, oh, a thousand thousand times! It had her last kiss. When I took it from the cold body which had been recovered, this cross seemed to be warm with her life and love."

And then he wept, and his tears fell thick upon his bosom and upon the amulet. The truth was clear enough now. The appalling death of his first wife, his love for her, and his remorse for not having jumped down the cliff and died with her, had affected his brain. He was a monomaniac, and all his thoughts were in some way clustered round the dominant one. He had studied amulets because the "Moonlight Cross" had been cherished by her; he came to Switzerland every year because it was associated with her; he had joined the spiritualist body in the mad hope that *perhaps* there might be something in it, perhaps there might be a power that could call her back to earth. Even the favourite occupation of his life, visiting cathedrals and churches and taking rubbings from monumental brasses, had begun after her death; it had come from the fact (as I soon learned) that *she* had taken interest in monumental brasses, and had begun the collection of rubbings.

And yet this martyr to a mighty passion bore the character of a dreamy student; and his calm, unfurrowed face, on common occasions, expressed nothing but a rather dull kind of content! Here was a revelation of what, afterwards, was often revealed to me, that human personality is the crowning

wonder of this wonderful universe, and that the forces which turn fire-mist into stars are not more inscrutable than is human character. He lifted up his head and gazed at me through his tears.

"Hal," he said, "do you know why I have shown you this? It *must*, MUST be buried with me at my death; and there is no one upon whose energy, truth, courage, and strength of will I can rely as I can upon yours. You must give me your word, Hal, that you will see it and this casket containing her letters buried with me."

I hesitated to become a party to such an undertaking as this. It savoured of superstition, I thought. Now, having at that very time abandoned all the superstitions and all the mystical readings of the universe which as a child I had inherited from ancestors, Romany and English, having at that very time begun to take a delight in the wonderful revelations of modern science, my attitude towards superstition — towards all supernaturalism—oscillated between anger and simple contempt.

"But," I said, "you surely will not have this beautiful old cross buried?" And as I looked at it, and the light fell upon it, there came from it strange flashes of fire, showing with what extraordinary skill the rubies and diamonds had been adjusted so that their facets should catch and concentrate the rays of the moon.

"Yes," he said, taking the cross again in his hand and fondling it passionately, "it must never be possessed by any one after me."

"But it might be stolen, father—stolen from your coffin."

"That would indeed be a disaster," he said with a shudder. Then a look of deadly vengeance overspread his face and brought out all its Romany characteristics as he said: "But with it there will be buried a curse written in Hebrew and English—a curse upon the despoiler, which will frighten off any thief who is in his senses."

And he showed me a large parchment scroll, folded exactly like a title deed, with the following curse and two verses from the 109th Psalm written upon it in Hebrew and English. The English version was carefully printed by himself in large letters:—

"He who shall violate this tomb,—he who shall steal this amulet, hallowed as a love-token between me and my dead wife,—he who shall dare to lay a sacrilegious hand upon this cross, stands cursed by God, cursed by love, and cursed by me, Philip Aylwin, lying here. 'Let there be no man to pity him, nor to have compassion upon his fatherless children . . . . Let his children be vagabonds, and beg their bread: let them seek it also out of desolate places.'—Psalm cix. So saith the Lord. Amen."

"I have printed the English version in large letters," he said, "so that any would-be despoiler must see it and read it at once by the dimmest lantern light."

"But, father, I said, "is it possible that you, an educated man, really believe in the efficacy of a curse?"

"If the curse comes straight from the heart's core of a man, as this curse comes from mine, Hal, how can it fail to operate by the mere force of will? The curse of a man who loved as I love upon the wretch who should violate a love-token so sacred as this —why, the disembodied spirits of all who have loved and suffered would combine to execute it!"

"Spirits!" I said. "Really, father, in times like these to talk of spirits!"

"Ah, Henry!" he replied, "I was like you once. I could once be content with Materialism — I could find it supportable once; but, should you ever come to love as I have loved (and, for your own happiness, child, I hope you never may), you will find that Materialism is intolerable, is hell itself, to the heart that has known a passion like mine. You will find that it is madness, Hal, madness, to believe in the word 'never'! you will find that you *dare* not leave untried any creed, howsoever wild, that offers the heart a ray of hope. Every object she cherished has become spiritualized, sublimated, has become alive—alive as this amulet is alive. See, the lights are no natural lights." And again he held it up.

"If on my death-bed," he continued, "I thought that this beloved cross and these sacred relics would ever get into other hands —would ever touch other flesh—than mine, I should die a maniac, Hal, and my spirit would never be released from the chains of earth."

It was the superstitious tone of his talk that irritated and hardened me. He saw it, and a piteous expression overspread his features.

"Don't desert your poor father," he said. "What I want is the word of an Aylwin that those beloved relics shall be buried with me. If I had *that*, I should be content to live, and content to die. Oh, Hal!"

He threw such an imploring gaze into my face as he said "Oh, Hal!" that, reluctant as I was to be mixed up with superstition, I promised to execute his wishes: I promised also to keep the secret from all the world during his life, and after his death to share it

with those two only from whom, for family reasons, it could not be kept—my uncle Aylwin of Alvanley and my mother. He then put away the amulet, and his face resumed the look of placid content it usually wore. He was feeling the facets of the mysterious "Moonlight Cross"!

The most marvellous thing is this, however: his old relations towards me were at once resumed He never alluded to the subject of his first wife again, and I soon found it difficult to believe that the conversation just recorded ever took place at all. Evidently his monomania only rose up to a passionate expression when fanned into sudden flame by talking about the cross. It was as though the shock of his first wife's death had severed his consciousness and his life in twain.

II

NATURALLY this visit to Switzerland cemented our intimacy, and it was on our return home that he suggested my accompanying him on one of his "rubbing expeditions."

"Henry," he said, "your mother has of late frequently discussed with me the question of your future calling in life. She suggests a Parliamentary career. I confess that I find questions about careers exceedingly disturbing."

"There is only one profession I should like, father," I said, "and that is a painter's." In fact, the passion for painting had come on me very strongly of late. My dreams had from the first been of wandering with Winnie in a paradise of colour, and these dreams had of late been more frequent: the paradise of colour had been growing richer and rarer.

He shook his head gravely and said, "No, my dear; your mother would never allow it."

"Why not?" I said; "is painting low too?"

"Cyril Aylwin is low, at least so your mother and aunt say, especially your aunt. I have not perceived it myself, but then your mother's perceptive faculties are extraordinary—quite extraordinary."

"Did the lowness come from his being a painter, father?" I asked.

"Really, child, you are puzzling me. But I have observed you now for some weeks, and I quite believe that you would make one of the best rubbers who ever held a ball. I am going to Salisbury next week, and you shall then make your *début*."

This was in the midst of a very severe winter we had some years ago, when all Europe was under a coating of ice.

"But, father," I said, "sha'n't we find it rather cold?"

"Well," said my father, with a bland smile, "I will not pretend that Salisbury Cathedral is particularly warm in this weather, but in winter I always rub in knee-caps and mittens. I will tell Hodder to knit you a full set at once."

"But, father," I said, "Tom Wynne tells me that rubbing is the most painful of all occupations. He even goes so far sometimes as to say that it was the exhaustion of rubbing for you which turned him to drink."

"Nothing of the kind," said my father. "All that Tom needed to make him a good rubber was enthusiasm. I am strongly of opinion that without enthusiasm rubbing is of all occupations the most irksome, except perhaps for the quadrumana (who seem more adapted for this exercise), the most painful for the spine, the most cramping for the thighs, the most numbing for the fingers. It is a profession, Henry, demanding, above every other, enthusiasm in the operator. Now Tom's enthusiasm for rubbing as an art was from the first exceedingly feeble."

I was on the eve of revolting, but I remembered what there was lacerating his poor breast, and consented. And when I heard hints of our "working the Welsh churches" my sudden enthusiasm for the rubber's art astonished even my father.

"My dear," he said to my mother at dinner one day, "what do you think? Henry has developed quite a sudden passion for rubbing."

I saw an expression of perplexity and mystification overspread my mother's sagacious face.

"And in the spring," continued my father, "we are going into Wales to rub."

"Into Wales, are you?" said my mother, in a tone of that soft voice whose meaning I knew so well.

My thoughts were continually upon Winifred, now that I was alone in the familiar spots. I had never seen her nor heard from her since we parted as children. She had only known me as a cripple. What would she think of me now? Did she ever think of me? She had not answered my childish letter, and this had caused me much sorrow and perplexity.

We did not go into Wales after all. But the result of this conversation took a shape that amazed me. I was sent to stay with my Aunt Prue in London in order that I might attend one of the Schools of Art. Yes, my mother thought it was better for me even to run the risk of becoming bohemianised like Cyril Aylwin, than to brood over Winnie or

the scenes that were associated with our happy childhood.

In London I was an absolute stranger. We had no town house. On the few occasions when the family had gone to London, it was to stay in Belgrave Square with my Aunt Prue, who was an unmarried sister of my mother's.

"Since the death of the Prince Consort, to go no further back," she used to say, "a dreadful change has come over the tone of society; the love of bohemianism, the desire to take up any kind of people, if they are amusing, and still more if they are rich, is levelling everything. However, I'm nobody now; *I* say nothing."

What wonder that from my very childhood my aunt took a prejudice against me, and predicted for me a career "as deplorable as Cyril Aylwin's," and sympathised with my mother in her terror of the Gypsy strain in my father's branch of the family?

Her tastes and instincts being intensely aristocratic, she suffered a martyrdom from her ever present consciousness of this disgrace. She had seen very much more of what is called Society than my mother had ever an opportunity of seeing. It was not, however, aristocracy, but Royalty that won the true worship of her soul.

Although she was immeasurably inferior to my mother in everything, her influence over her was great, and it was always for ill. I believe that even my mother's prejudice against Tom Wynne was largely owing to my aunt, who disliked my relations towards Wynne simply because he did not represent one of the great Wynne families. But the remarkable thing was that, although my mother thus yielded to my aunt's influence, she in her heart despised her sister's ignorance and her narrowness of mind. She often took a humorous pleasure in seeing my aunt's aristocratic proclivities baffled by some vexing *contretemps* or by some slight passed upon her by people of superior rank, especially by those in the Royal circle.

There have been so many descriptions of art schools, from the famous "Gandish's" down to the very moment at which I write, that I do not intend to describe mine.

It would be very far from my taste to use a narrative like this, a narrative made sacred by the spiritual love it records, as a means of advertising efforts of such modest pretensions as mine when placed in comparison with the work of the illustrious painters my friendship with whom has been the great honour of my life. And if I allude here to the fact of my being a painter, it is in order that I may not be mistaken for another Aylwin, my cousin Percy, who in some unpublished poems of his which I have seen has told how a sailor was turned into a poet by love—love of Rhona Boswell. In the same way, these pages are written to tell how I was made a painter by love of her whom I first saw in Raxton churchyard, her who filled my being as Beatrice filled the being of Dante when "the spirit of life, which hath its dwelling in the secretest chamber of the heart, began to tremble so violently that the least pulses of his body shook therewith."

III

TIME went by, and I returned to Raxton. Just when I had determined that, come what would, I would go into Wales, Wynne one day told me that Winnie was coming to live with him at Raxton, her aunt having lately died. "The English lady," said he, "who lived with them so long and eddicated Winifred, has gone to live at Carnarvon to get the sea air."

This news was at once a joy and a perplexity.

Wynne, though still the handsomest and finest man in Raxton, had sunk much lower in intemperance of late. He now generally wound up a conversation with me by a certain stereotyped allusion to the dryness of the weather, which I perfectly understood to mean that he felt thirsty, and that an offer of half-a-crown for beer would not be unacceptable. He was a proud man in everything except in reference to beer. But he seemed to think there was no degradation in asking for money to get drunk with, though to have asked for it to buy bread would, I suppose, have wounded his pride. I did not then see so clearly as I now do the wrong of giving him those half-crowns. His annuity he had long since sold.

Spite of all his delinquencies, however, my father liked him; so did my uncle Aylwin of Alvanley. But my mother seemed positively to hate him. It was the knowledge of this that caused my anxiety about Winifred's return. I felt that complications must arise.

At this time I used to go to Dullingham every day. The clergyman there was preparing me for college.

On the Sunday following the day when I got such momentous news from Wynne, I was met suddenly, as my mother and I were leaving the church after the service, by the gaze of a pair of blue eyes that arrested my steps as by magic, and caused the church and the churchgoers to vanish from my sight.

The picture of Winifred that had dwelt in

my mind so long was that of a beautiful child. The radiant vision of the girl before me came on me by surprise and dazzled me. Tall and slim she was now, but the complexion had not altered at all; the eyes seemed young and childlike as ever.

When our eyes met she blushed, then turned pale, and took hold of the top of a seat near which she was standing. She came along the aisle close to us, gliding and slipping through the crowd, and passed out of the porch. My mother had seen my agitation, and had moved on in a state of haughty indignation. I had no room, however, at that moment for considerations of any person but one. I hurried out of the church, and, following Winifred, grasped her gloved hand.

"Winifred, you are come," I said; "I have been longing to see you."

She again turned pale and then blushed scarlet. Next she looked down me as if she had expected to see something which she did not see, and when her eyes were upraised again something in them gave me a strange fancy that she was disappointed to miss my crutches.

"Why didn't you write to me from Wales, Winifred? Why didn't you answer my letter years ago?"

She hesitated, then said,

"My aunt wouldn't let me, sir."

"Wouldn't let you answer it! and why?"

Again she hesitated,

"I—I don't know, sir."

"You *do* know, Winifred. I see that you know, and you shall tell me. Why didn't your aunt let you answer my letter?"

Winifred's eyes looked into mine beseechingly. Then that light of playful humour, which I remembered so well, shot like a sunbeam across and through them as she replied—

"My aunt said we must both forget our pretty dream."

Almost before the words were out, however the sunbeam fled from her eyes and was replaced by a look of terror. I now perceived that my mother, in passing to the carriage, had lingered on the gravel-path close to us, and had, of course, overheard the dialogue. She passed on with a look of hate. I thought it wise to bid Winifred good-bye and join my mother.

As I stepped into the carriage I turned round and saw that Winifred was again looking wistfully at some particular part of me—looking with exactly that simple, frank, "objective" expression with which I was familiar.

"I knew it was the crutches she missed," I said to myself as I sat down by my mother's side; "she'll have to love me now because I am *not* lame."

I also knew something else: I must prepare for a conflict with my mother. My father, at this time in Switzerland, had written to say that he had been suffering acutely from an attack of what he called "spasms." He had "been much subject to them of late, but no one considered them to be really dangerous."

During luncheon I felt that my mother's eyes were upon me. After it was over she went to her room to write in answer to my father's letter, and then later on she returned to me.

"Henry," she said, "my overhearing the dialogue in the churchyard between you and Wynne's daughter was, I need not say, quite accidental, but it is perhaps fortunate that I did overhear it."

"Why fortunate, mother? You simply heard her say that her aunt in Wales had forbidden her to answer a childish letter of mine written many years ago."

"In telling you which, the girl, I must say, proclaimed her aunt to be an exceedingly sensible and well conducted woman," said my mother.

"On that point, mother," I said, "you must allow me to hold a different opinion. I, for my part, should have said that Winifred's story proclaimed her aunt to be a worthy member of a flunkey society like this of ours—a society whose structure, political and moral and religious, is based on an adamantine rock of paltry snobbery."

It was impossible to restrain my indignation.

"I am aware, Henry," replied my mother calmly, "that it is one of the fashions of the hour for young men of family to adopt the language of Radical newspapers. In a country like this the affectation does no great harm, I grant, and my only serious objection to it is that it implies in young men of one's own class a lack of originality which is a little humiliating. I am aware that your cousin, Percy Aylwin, of Rington Manor, used to talk in the same strain as this, and ended by joining the Gypsies. But I came to warn you, Henry, I came to urge you not to injure this poor girl's reputation by such scenes as that I witnessed this morning."

I remained silent. The method of my mother's attack had taken me by surprise. Her sagacity was so much greater than mine, her power of fence was so much greater, her stroke was so much deadlier, that in all our encounters I had been conquered.

"It is for the girl's own sake that I speak

to you," continued my mother. "She was deepiy embarrassed at your method of address, and well she might be, seeing that it will be, for a long time to come, the subject of discussion in all the beerhouses which her father frequents."

"You speak as though she were answerable for her father's faults," I said, with heat.

"No," said my mother; "but *your* father is the owner of Raxton Hall, which to her and her class is a kind of Palace of the Cæsars. You belong to a family famous all along the coast; you are well known to be the probable heir of one of the largest landowners in England; you *may* be something more important still; while she, poor girl, what is she that you should rush up to her before all the churchgoers of the parish and address her as Winifred? The daughter of a penniless, drunken reprobate. Every attention you pay her is but a slur upon her good name."

"There is not a lady in the county worthy to unlace her shoes," I cried, unguardedly. Then I could have bitten off my tongue for saying so.

"That may be," said my mother, with the quiet irony peculiar to her; "but so monstrous are the customs of England, Henry, so barbaric is this society you despise, that she, whose shoes no lady in the county is worthy to unlace, is in an anomalous position. Should she once again be seen talking familiarly with you, her character will have fled, and fled for ever. It is for you to choose whether you are set upon ruining her reputation."

I felt that what she said was true. I felt also that Winifred herself had recognized the net of conventions that kept us apart in spite of that close and tender intimacy which had been the one great fact of our lives. In a sense I was far more a child of Nature than Winifred herself, inasmuch as, owing to my remarkable childish experience of isolation, I had imbibed a scepticism about the sanctity of conventions such as is foreign to the nature of woman, be she ever so unsophisticated, as Winifred's shyness towards me had testified.

As a child I had been neglected for the firstborn. I had enjoyed through this neglect an absolute freedom with regard to associating with fisher-boys and all the shoeless, hatless "sea-pups" of the sands, and now, when the time had come to civilize me, my mother had found it was too late. I was bohemian to the core. My childish intercourse with Winifred had been one of absolute equality, and I could not now divest myself of this relation. These were my thoughts as I listened to my mother's words.

My great fear now, however, was lest I should say something to compromise myself, and so make matters worse. Before another word upon the subject should pass between my mother and me I must see Winifred—and then I had something to say to her which no power on earth should prevent me from saying. So I merely told my mother that there was much truth in what she had said, and proceeded to ask particulars about my father's recent illness. After giving me these particulars she left the room, perplexed, I thought, as to what had been the result of her mission.

IV

I REMAINED alone for some time. Then I told the servants that I was going to walk along the cliffs to Dullingham Church, where there was an evening service, and left the house. I hastened towards the cliffs, and descended to the sands, in the hope that Winifred might be roaming about there, but I walked all the way to Dullingham without getting a glimpse of her. The church service did not interest me that evening. I heard nothing and saw nothing. When the service was over I returned along the sands, sauntering and lingering in the hope that, late as it was now growing, the balmy evening might have enticed her out.

The evening grew to night, and still I lingered. The moon was nearly at the full, and exceedingly bright. The tide was down. The scene was magical; I could not leave it. I said to myself, "I will go and stand on the very spot where Winifred stood when she lisped 'certumly' to the proposal of her little lover."

It was not, after all, till this evening that I really knew how entirely she was a portion of my life.

I went and stood by the black boulder where I had received the little child's prompt reply. There was not a grain left, I knew, of that same sand which had been hallowed by the little feet of Winifred, but it served my mood just as well as though every grain had felt the beloved pressure. For that the very sands had loved the child, I half believed.

I said to myself, as I sat down upon the boulder, "At this very moment she is here, she is in Raxton. In a certain little cottage there is a certain little room." And then I longed to leave the sands, to go and stand in front of Wynne's cottage and dream there. But that would be too foolish. "I must get

home," I thought. "The night will pass somehow, and in the morning I shall, as sure as fate, see her flitting about the sands she loves, and then what I have sworn to say to her I will say, and what I have sworn to do I will do, come what will."

Then came the puzzling question, how was I to greet her when we met? Was I to run up and kiss her, and hear her say, "Oh, I'm *so* pleased!" as she would sometimes say when I kissed her of yore? No; her deportment in the morning forbade *that*. Or was I to raise my hat and walk up to her saying, "How do you do, Miss Wynne? I'm glad to see you back, Miss Wynne," for she was now neither child nor young woman, she was a "girl." Perhaps I had better rush up to her in a bluff hearty way, and say: "How do you do, Miss Winifred? Delighted to see you back to Raxton." Finally, I decided that circumstances must guide me entirely, and I sat upon the boulder meditating.

After a while I saw, or thought I saw, in the far distance, close to the waves, a moving figure among the patches of rocks and stones (some black and some white) that break the continuity of the sand on that shore at low water.

When the figure got nearer I perceived it to be a woman, a girl, who, every now and then, was stooping as if to pick up something from the pools of water left by the ebbing tide imprisoned amid the encircling rocks. At first I watched the figure, wondering in a lazy and dreamy way what girl could be out there so late.

But all at once I began to catch my breath and gasp. The sea-smells had become laden with a kind of paradisal perfume, ineffably sweet, but difficult to breathe all of a sudden. My heart too—what was amiss with that? And why did the muscles of my body seem to melt like wax? The lonely wanderer by the sea could be none other than Winifred.

"It is she!" I said. "There is no beach-woman or shore-prowling girl who, without raising an arm to balance her body, without a totter or a slip, could step in that way upon stones some of which are as slippery as ice with gelatinous weed and slime, while others are as sharp as razors. To walk like that the eye must be my darling's, that is to say, an eye as sure as a bird's; the ball of the foot must be the ball of a certain little foot I have often had in my hand wet with sea-water and gritty with sand. For such work a mountaineer or a cragsman, or Winifred, is needed." Then I recalled her love of marine creatures, her delight in seaweed, of which she would weave the most astonishing chaplets and necklaces coloured like the rainbow, "seaweed boas" and seaweed turbans, calling herself the princess of the sea (as indeed she was), and calling me her prince. "Yes," said I, "it is certainly she;" and when at last I espied a little dog by her side, Tom Wynne's little dog Snap (a descendant of the original Snap of our never-to-be-forgotten seaside adventures)—when I espied all these things I said, "Then the hour is come."

By this time my heart had settled down to a calmer throb, the paradisal scent had become more supportable, and I grew master of myself again. I was going towards her, when I stayed my steps, for she was already making her way, entirely unconscious of my presence, towards the boulder where I sat.

"I know what I will do," I said; "I will fling myself flat on the sands behind the boulder and watch her. I will observe her without being myself observed."

I was in the mood when one tries sportfully to deceive one's self as to the depth and intensity of the emotion within. Perhaps I would and perhaps I would not speak to her at all that night; but if I did speak, I would say and do what (on that day when I set out for school) I had sworn to say and do.

So there I lay hidden by the boulder and watched her. She made the circuit of each pool that lay across her path towards the cliffs,—made it apparently for the childish enjoyment of balancing herself on the stones and snapping her fingers at the dog, who looked on with philosophic indifference at such a frivolous waste of force. Yes, though a tall girl of seventeen, she was the same incomparable child who had coloured my life and stirred the entire air of my imagination with the breezes of a new heaven. The voice of the tumbling sea in the distance, the caresses of the tender breeze, the wistful gaze of the great moon overhead, were companionship enough for her—for her whose loveliness would have enchanted a world. She had no idea that there was at this moment stepping round those black stones the loveliest woman then upon the earth. If she had had that idea she would still have been the star of all womanhood, but she would not have been Winifred. A charm superior to all other women's charm she still would have had; but she would not have been Winifred.

When she left the rocks and came upon the clear sand, she stopped and looked at her sweet shadow in the moonlight. Then, with the self-pleasing playfulness of a kitten, she stood and put herself into all kinds of postures to see what varying silhouettes they would make on the hard and polished sand

(that shone with a soft lustre like satin); now throwing up one arm, now another, and at last making a pirouette, twirling her shawl round, trying to keep it in a horizontal position by the rapidity of her movements.

The interest of the philosophic Snap was aroused at last. He began wheeling and barking round her, tearing up the sand as he went like a little whirlwind. This induced Winifred to redouble her gymnastic exertions. She twirled round with the velocity of an engine wheel. At last, finding the enjoyment it gave to Snap, she changed the performance by taking off her hat, flinging it high in the air, catching it, flinging it up again and again, while the moving shadow it made was hunted along the sand by Snap with a volley of deafening barks. By this time she had got close to me, but she was too busy to see me. Then she began to dance—the very same dance with which she used to entertain me in those happy days. I advanced from my stone, dodging and slipping behind her, unobserved even by Snap, so intent were these two friends upon this entertainment, got up, one would think, for whatsoever sylphs or gnomes or water sprites might be looking on.

How could I address in the language of passion which alone would have expressed my true feelings, a dancing fairy such as this?

"Bravo!" I said, as she stopped, panting and breathless. "Why, Winifred, you dance better than ever!"

She leaped away in alarm and confusion; while Snap, on the contrary, welcomed me with much joy.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir," she said; not looking at me with the blunt frankness of childhood, as the little woman of the old days used to do, but drooping her eyes. "I didn't see you."

"But *I* saw *you*, Winifred; I have been watching you for the last quarter of an hour."

"Oh, you never have!" said she, in distress; "what could you have thought? I was only trying to cheer up poor Snap, who is out of sorts. What a mad romp you must have thought me, sir!"

"Why, what's the matter with Snap?"

"I don't know. Poor Snap!" (stooping down to fondle him, and at the same time to hide her face from me, for she was talking against time to conceal her great confusion and agitation at seeing me. *That* was perceptible enough).

Then she remembered she was hatless.

"Oh dear, where's my hat?" said she, looking round.

I had picked up the hat before accosting her, and it was now dangling behind me. I, too, began talking against time, for the beating of my heart began again at the thought of what I was going to say and do.

"Hat!" I said; "do *you* wear hats, Winifred? I should as soon have thought of hearing the Queen of the Tylwyth Teg ask for her hat as you, after such goings-on as those I have just been witnessing. You see I have not forgotten the Welsh you taught me."

"Oh, but my hat—where is it?" cried she, vexed and sorely ashamed. So different from the unblenching child who loved to stand hatless and feel the rain-drops on her bare head!

"Well, Winifred, I've found a hat on the sand," I said; "here it is."

"Thank you, sir," said she, and stretched out her hand for it

"No," said I, "I don't for one moment believe in its belonging to you, any more than it belongs to the Queen of the 'Fair People.' But if you'll let me put it on your head I'll give you the hat I've found," and with a rapid movement I advanced and put it on her head. I had meant to seize that moment for saying what I had to say, but was obliged to wait.

An expression of such genuine distress overspread her face, that I regretted having taken the liberty with her. Her bearing altogether was puzzling me. She seemed instinctively to feel as I felt, that raillery was the only possible attitude to take up in a situation so extremely romantic—a meeting on the sands at night between me and her who was neither child nor woman—and yet she seemed distressed at the raillery.

Embarrassment was rapidly coming between us.

There was a brief silence, during which Winifred seemed trying to move away from me.

"Did you—did you see me from the cliffs, sir, and come down?" said Winifred.

"Winifred," said I, "the polite thing to say would be 'Yes'; but you know 'Fighting Hal' never was remarkable for politeness, so I will say frankly that I did not come down from the cliffs on seeing you. But when I did see you, I wasn't very likely to return without speaking to you."

"I am locked out," said Winifred, in explanation of her moonlight ramble. "My father went off to Dullingham with the key in his pocket while I and Snap were in the garden, so we have to wait till his return. Good night, sir," and she gave me her hand. I seemed to feel the fingers around my heart, and knew that I was turning very pale. "The same little sunburnt fingers," I said,

as I retained them in mine—"just the same, Winifred! But it's not 'good night' yet. No, no, it's not good night yet; and, Winifred, if you dare to call me 'sir' again, I declare I'll kiss you where you stand. I will, Winifred. I'll put my arms right round that slender waist and kiss you under that moon, as sure as you stand on these sands."

"Then I will not call you 'sir'," said Winifred, laughingly. "Certainly I will not call you 'sir,' if that is to be the penalty."

"Winifred," said I, "the last time that I remember to have heard you say 'certainly' was on this very spot. You then pronounced it 'certumly,' and that was when I asked you if I might be your lover. You said 'certumly' on that occasion without the least hesitation."

Winifred, as I could see, even by the moonlight, was blushing. "Ah, those childish days!" she said. "How delightful they were, sir!"

"'Sir' again!" said I. "Now, Winifred, I am going to execute my threat—I am indeed."

She put up her hands before her face and said,

"Oh, don't! please don't."

The action no doubt might seem coquettish, but the tone of her voice was so genuine, so serious—so agitated even—that I paused:—I paused in bewilderment and perplexity concerning us both. I observed that her fingers shook as she held them before her face. That she should be agitated at seeing me after so long a separation did not surprise me, I being deeply agitated myself. It was the *nature* of her emotion that puzzled me, until suddenly I remembered my mother's words.

I perceived then that, child of Nature as she still was, some one had given her a careful training which had transfigured my little Welsh rustic into a lady. She had not failed to apprehend the anomaly of her present position—on the moonlit sands with me. Though I could not break free from the old equal relations between us, Winifred had been able to do so.

"To her," I thought with shame, "my offering to kiss her at such a place and time must have seemed an insult. The very fact of my attempting to do so must have seemed to indicate an offensive consciousness of the difference of our social positions. It must have seemed to show that I recognised a distinction between the drunken organist's daughter and a lady."

I saw now, indeed, that she felt this keenly; and I knew that it was nothing but the sweetness of her nature, coupled with the fond recollection of the old happy days, that restrained that high spirit of hers, and prevented her from giving expression to her indignation and disgust.

All this was shown by the appealing look on her sweet, fond face, and I was touched to the heart.

"Winifred—Miss Wynne," I said, "I beg your pardon most sincerely. The shadow-dance has been mainly answerable for my folly. You did look so exactly the little Winifred, my heart's sister, that I felt it impossible to treat you otherwise than as that dear child-friend of years ago."

A look of delight broke over her face.

"I felt sure it was so," she said. "But it is a relief that you have said it." And the tears came to her eyes.

"Thank you, Winifred, for having pardoned me. I feel that you would have forgiven no one else as you have forgiven me. I feel that you would not have forgiven any one else than your old child-companion, whom on a memorable occasion you threatened to hit, and then had not the heart to do so."

"I don't think I *could* hit *you*," said she, in a meditative tone of perfect unconsciousness as to the bewitching import of her speech.

"Don't you think you could?" I said, drawing nearer, but governing my passion.

"No," said she, looking now for the first time with those wide-open confiding eyes which, as a child, were the chief characteristic of her face, "I don't think I could hit you, whatever you did."

"Couldn't you, Winifred?" I said, coming still nearer, in order to drink to the full the wonder of her beauty, the thrill at my heart bringing, as I felt, a pallor to my cheek. "Don't you think you could hit your old playfellow, Winifred?"

"No," she said, still gazing in the same dreamy, reminiscent way straight into my eyes as of yore. "As a child you were so delightful. And then you were so kind to me!"

At that word "kind" from *her* to *me* I could restrain myself no longer; I shouted with a wild laughter of uncontrollable passion as I gazed at her through tears of love and admiration and deep gratitude—gazed till I was blind. My throat throbbed till it ached: I could get out no more words; I could only gaze. At my shout Winifred stood bewildered and confused. She did not understand a mood like that. Having got myself under control, I said,

"Winifred, it is not my doing; it is Fate's doing that we meet here on this night, and that I am driven to say here what I had as a schoolboy sworn should be said whenever we should meet again."

"I think," said Winifred, pulling herself up with the dignity of a queen, "that if you have anything important to say to me it had better be at a more seasonable time than at this hour of night, and at a more seasonable place than on these sands."

"No, Winifred," said I, "the time is *now*, and the place is here—here on this very spot where, once on a time, you said 'certumly' when a little lover asked your hand. It is now and here, Winifred, that I will say what I have to say."

"And what is that, sir?" said Winifred, much perplexed and disturbed.

"I have to say, Winifred, that the man does not live and never *has* lived," said I, with suppressed vehemence, "who loved a woman as I love you."

"Oh, sir! oh, Henry!" returned Winifred, trembling, then standing still and whiter than the moon.

"And the reason why no man has ever loved a woman as I love you, Winifred, is because your match, or anything like your match has never trod the earth before."

"Oh, Henry, my dear Henry! you *must* not say such things to me, your poor Winifred."

"But that isn't all that I swore I'd say to you, Winifred."

"Don't say any more—not to-night, not to-night."

"What I swore I would ask you, Winifred, is this: will you be Henry's wife?"

She gave one hysterical sob, and swayed till she nearly fell on the sand, and said, while her face shone like a pearl,

"Henry's wife!"

She recovered herself and stood and looked at me; her lips moved, but I waited in vain—waited in a fever of expectation—for her answer. None came. I gazed into her eyes, but they now seemed filled with visions—visions of the great race to which she belonged—visions in which her English lover had no place. Suddenly, and for the first time, I felt that she who had inspired within me this all-conquering passion, though the penniless child of a drunken organist, was a daughter of Snowdon—a representative of the Cymric race that was once so mighty, and is still more romantic in its associations than all others. Already in the little talk I had had with her I began to guess what I realized before the evening was over, that owing to the influence of the English lady, Miss Dalrymple, who had lodged at the cottage with her, she was more than my own equal in culture, and could have held her own with almost any girl of her own age in England. It was only in her subjection to Cymric superstitions that she was benighted.

"Winnie," I murmured, "what have you to say?"

After a while her eyes seemed to clear of the visions, and she said,

"What changes have come upon us both, Henry, since that childish betrothal on the sands!"

"Happy changes for one of the child-lovers," I said—"happy changes for the one who was then a lonely cripple shut out from all sympathy save that which the other child-lover could give."

"And yet you then seemed happy, Henry—happy with Winnie to help you up the gangways. And how happy Winnie was! But now the child-lover is a cripple no longer: he is very, very strong—he is so strong that he could carry Winnie up the gangways in his arms, I think."

The thrill of natural pride which such recognition of my physical powers would otherwise have given me was quelled by a something in the tone in which she spoke.

"And he is powerful in every way," she went on, as if talking to herself. "He is a great rich Englishman to whom (as auntie was never tired of saying) that childish betrothal must needs seem a dream—a quaint and pretty dream."

"And so your aunt said that, Winnie. How far from the truth she was you see to-night."

"Yes, she thought you would forget all about me: and yet she could not have felt quite confident about it, for she made me promise that if you should not forget me—if you should ever ask me what you have just asked—she made me promise——"

"What, Winnie? what? She did not make you promise that you would refuse me?"

"That is what she asked me to promise."

"But you did not."

"I did not."

"No, no! you did not, Winnie. My darling refused to make any such cruel, monstrous promise as that."

"But I promised her that I would in such an event wait a year—at least a year—before betrothing myself to you."

"Shame! shame! What made her do this cruel thing? A year! wait for a year!"

"She brought forward many reasons, Henry, but upon two of them she was constantly dwelling."

"And what were these?"

"Well, the news of the death of your brother Frank of course reached us in Shire-Carnarvon, and how well I remember hearing my aunt say, 'Henry Aylwin will be one of the wealthiest landowners in England.' And I remember how my heart sank at her words, for I was always thinking of the dear little

lame boy with the language of suffering in his eyes and the deep music of sorrow in his voice."

"Your heart sank, Winnie, and why?"

"I felt as if a breath of icy air had blown between us, dividing us for ever. And then my aunt began to talk about you and your future."

After some trouble I persuaded Winnie to tell me what was the homily that this aunt of hers preached *à propos* of Frank's death. And as she talked I could not help observing what, as a child, I had only observed in a dim, semi-conscious way—a strange kind of double personality in Winnie. At one moment she seemed to me nothing but the dancing fairy of the sands, objective and unconscious as a young animal playing to itself, at another she seemed the mouthpiece of the narrow world-wisdom of this Welsh aunt. No sooner had she spoken of herself as a friendless, homeless girl, than her brow began to shine with the pride of the Cymry.

"My aunt," said she, "used to tell me that until disaster came upon my uncle, and they were reduced to living upon a very narrow income, he and she never really knew what love was—they never really knew how rich their hearts were in the capacity of loving."

"Ah, I thought so," I said bitterly. "I thought the text was,

'Love in a hut, with water and a crust.'"

"No," said Winifred firmly, "that was not the text. She believed that the wolf must not be very close to the door behind which love is nestling."

"Then what did she believe? In the name of common sense, Winnie, what did she believe?"

"She believed," said Winnie, her cheek flushing and her eyes brightening as she went on, "that of all the schemes devised by man's evil genius to spoil his nature, to make him self-indulgent, and luxurious, and tyrannical, and incapable of understanding what the word 'love' means, the scheme of showering great wealth upon him is the most perfect."

"Ah, yes, yes; the old nonsense. Easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of love. And in what way did she enlarge upon this most charitable theme?"

"She told me dreadful things about the demoralising power of riches in our time."

"Dreadful things! What were they, Winnie?"

"She told me how insatiable is the greed for pleasure at this time. She told me that the passion of vanity—'the greatest of all the human passions,' as she used to say—has taken the form of money-worship in our time, sapping all the noblest instincts of men and women, and in rich people poisoning even parental affection, making the mother thirst for the pleasures which in old days she would only have tried to win for her child. She told me stories—dreadful stories—about children with expectations of great wealth who watched the poor grey hairs of those who gave them birth, and counted the years and months and days that kept them from the gold which modern society finds to be more precious than honour, family, heroism, genius, and all that was held precious in less materialised times. She told me a thousand other things of this kind, and when I grew older she put into my hand what has been written on the subject."

"Good God! Has the narrow-minded tomfoolery got a literature?"

Winnie went on with her eloquent account of her aunt's doctrines, and to my surprise I found that there actually *was* a literature of the subject.

Winnie's bright eyes had actually pored over old and long Chartist tracts translated into Welsh, and books on the Christian Socialism of Charles Kingsley, and pamphlets on more recent kinds of Socialism.

As she went on I could not help murmuring now and then, "What surroundings for my Winnie!"

"And the result of all this was, Winnie, that your aunt asked you to promise not to marry a man demoralised by privileges and made contemptible by wealth."

"That is what she wanted me to promise; but as I have said, I did not. But I did promise to wait for a year and see what effect wealth would have upon you."

"Did your aunt not tell you also that the man who marries you can never be unmanned by wealth, because he will know that everything he can give is as dross when set against Winnie's love and Winnie's beauty? Did she not also tell you that!"

"Love and beauty!" said Winnie. "Even if a woman's beauty did not depend for its existence upon the eyes that look upon it, I should want to give more to my hero than love and beauty. I should want to give him help in the battle of life, Henry. I should want to buckle on his armour, and sharpen the point of his lance, and whet the edge of his sword. a rich man's armour is bank-notes, and Winnie knows nothing of such paper. His spear, I am told, is a bullion bar, and Winnie's fingers scarcely know the touch of gold."

"Then you agree, Winnie, with these strange views of your aunt?"

"I do partly agree with them now. Ever since I saw you to-day in the churchyard I have partly agreed with them."

"And why?"

"Because already prosperity or bodily vigour or something has changed your eyes and changed the tone of your voice."

"You mean that my eyes are no longer so full of trouble; and as to my voice—how should my voice not change, seeing that it was the voice of a child when you last listened to it?"

"It is impossible for me even now, after I have thought about it so much, to put into words that expression in your eyes which won me as a child. All I knew at the time was that it fascinated me. And as I now recall it, all I know is that your gaze then seemed full of something which I can give a name to now, though I did not understand it then—the pathos and tenderness and yearning, which come, as I have been told, from suffering, and that your voice seemed to have the same message. That expression and that tone are gone—they will, of course, never return to you now. Your life is, and will be, too prosperous for that. But still I hope and believe that in a year's time prosperity will not have worked in you any of the mischief that my aunt feared. For you have a noble nature, Henry, and to spoil you will not be easy. You will never be the dear little Henry I loved, but you will still be nobler and greater than other men, I think."

"Do you really mean that my lameness was a positive attraction to you? Do you really mean that the very change in me which I thought would strengthen the bond between us—my restoration to health—weakens it? That is impossible, Winnie."

She remained silent for a time, as though lost in thought, and then said, "I do not believe that any woman can understand the movements of her own heart where love is concerned. My aunt used to say I was a strange girl, and I am afraid I am strange and perverse. She used to say that in my affections I was like no other creature in the world."

"How should Winifred be like any other creature in the world?" I said. "She would not be Winifred if she were. But what did your aunt mean?"

"When I was quite a little child she noticed that I was neglecting a favourite mavis which I used to delight to listen to as he warbled from his wicker cage. She watched me, and found that my attention was all given to a wounded bird that I had picked up on the Capel Curig road. 'Winnie,' she said, 'nothing can ever win your love until it has first won your pity. A bird with a broken wing would be always more to you than a sound one!'"

"Your aunt was right," I said, "as no one should know better than I. For was it not the new kind of pity shining in those eyes of yours that revealed to me a new heaven in my loneliness? And when my brother Frank on that day in the wood stood over us in all the pride of his boyish strength, do I not remember the words you spoke?"

"What were they? I have quite forgotten them."

"You said, 'I don't think I could love any one very much who was not lame.'"

"Ah! did I really say that? It was quite true, Henry. I could admire your brother very much for being so handsome and strong and active, but he was too independent of love to win love from me. That child-love was the great educating experience of my life. It taught me the bliss of loving the afflicted—I mean the bliss of loving those to whom love comes as the very breath of heaven."

"Your aunt spoke the truth, indeed, when she said you were a strange girl. But is it really possible that on account of the blessings God has given me, health and wealth and strength—is it really possible that on account of those very blessings which most women find attractive in a man your heart is turned from me? A strange girl, indeed!" I murmured, lost in wonder at this new phase of the mystery of a woman's heart. "Who was the fool," I said to myself, "who said most women have no characters at all?"

For this conversation with Winnie first opened my eyes to the fact that, excepting in the merest superficials, there is a far greater variety in women than in men. In the deepest movements of the heart no two women are alike. Winnie's eccentricity of character was a revelation indeed. Ever since my return to bodily strength and agility I had been saying to myself, "If Winnie could only see me now! If Winnie could love me in those dark days that she turned to sunshine—when I was one of Destiny's own pariahs—if she could love me as a forlorn cripple hobbling upon crutches—what would be her feelings if she could see me now?"

As these thoughts came to me Winnie seemed to read them in my face, for she said, "Ah, yes, mine is indeed a strange eccentric nature. After I was separated from you my thoughts of you were always as the brave little cripple with the deep, yearning eyes, who could not get up the gangways without me. I used to think about you in Wales,