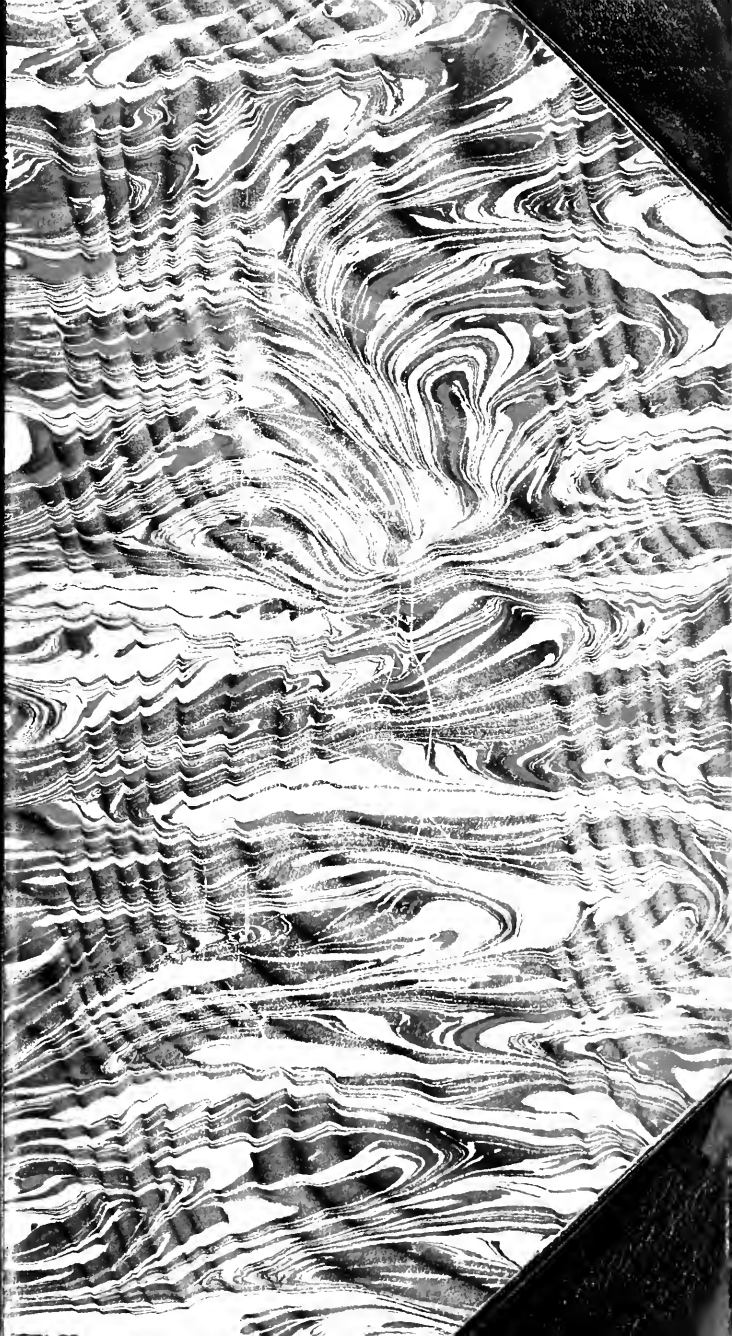


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# THE GOLDEN FLEECE









Phiomel received and opened the box.

# THE GOLDEN FLEECE

BY A. L. O. E.

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# THE GOLDEN FLEECE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### OWLS AND EAGLES.



“OWLS have, no doubt, their proper place in the social as well as the natural world, but of all birds under the sun—or moon—they are the last that I should have chosen as types of wisdom ; unless it be wisdom to prefer darkness to light, and to see, by choice, the night-side of everything in creation ! To my mind, the lark that soars singing towards the sun in summer, or the robin that whistles his merry lay in the winter, is more emblematic of wisdom than all the owls that ever hooted !” Such were the reflections of Meredith, as he quitted Burnesbey Abbey, and sauntered along the broad avenue bordered with ancient beeches.

“There goes one of your eagle-spirits, always for mounting and soaring, and leaving comfort and common sense a long way behind him!” This was the comment of Caleb Coffin upon his late visitor, as the new proprietor of Burnesbey Abbey stirred his fire (no matter what the weather might be, Caleb had always a fire), and then leaned back in his easy-chair, and rubbed his lean wrinkled hands. Caleb Coffin was an elderly man, wrapt in a gray dressing-gown, with a black velvet cap on his head, and a large pair of tortoise-shell spectacles resting upon a hooked nose. That beak-like nose, the goggle glasses, the round contour of the face, and the peculiar expression which it wore, gave Caleb a whimsical resemblance to the bird of Minerva. Though Mr. Coffin liked his fire, his warm dressing-gown, and his easy-chair, he was no valetudinarian, but a man in full vigour of body and mind—one disposed to enjoy life, much as an owl might be supposed to enjoy it, wrapping himself up in his feathery mantle, and screeching at the follies of the rest of the world. A sneer lurked in the corner of the lip overshadowed by the beak, a satirical gleam in the keen gray eyes that peered through the glasses, that bespoke the cynic. But if Caleb was a modern Diogenes, he had learned at least to line his tub with down.

The owner of Burnesbey Abbey had nothing of the air of a country gentleman, and had looked much more in his natural sphere at his office-desk in Threadneedle Street, than in the ancient mansion which he had lately inherited from a distant relation. The lord of the manor appeared as little suited to his new position, as his dusty ledger books would have been to one in his study panelled with carved oak, or a pane of ground glass from his office window to a place amongst the fine-stained diamonds of the mullioned casement behind him.

Meredith had been Coffin's ward, and had from childhood been familiar with the eccentric humour of the merchant; but this had been his first visit to the landed proprietor since, by a singular coincidence, each of the two men had come by inheritance into possession of a large estate. Characters are often so much influenced and altered by circumstances, that Meredith had felt some curiosity to see how the shrewd money-making, money-loving merchant of Threadneedle Street, would play the new part assigned him in the drama of life. Would Caleb Coffin exemplify the lesson taught to Parnell's hermit of the effect of sudden prosperity upon a selfish, niggardly nature?—

“ Thus artists melt the sullen ore of lead  
By heaping coals of fire upon its head :

In the kind warmth the metal learns to glow,  
And, free from dross, the silver runs below."

But Meredith had found nothing changed in Caleb except his surroundings: it was the old picture in a new frame, and one that did not harmonize with it. Mr. Coffin did not rise from his easy-chair to welcome his guest, but holding out to him two thin fingers, nodded to Meredith to take a seat. The following conversation then passed between them:—

*Caleb.*—An odd twirl of Fortune's wheel this, Meredith, that has landed me in a romantic old abbey—and you in a coal-pit! Matters would have been better had we exchanged places. I should have squeezed gold out of coal dust without minding blacking my fingers; and you would have played the grand signor to perfection, throwing away your money like a cavalier of old, entertaining ragged villagers by the hundred, and building scores of picturesque cottages for grateful tenants—he! he! he!" (Mr. Coffin's laugh was peculiar, being usually accompanied by a hiss uttered between his closed teeth.)

*Meredith.*—I shall have tenants enough in Northumberland. There are more than two thousand souls on the Pitsmouth property.

*Caleb.*—And you'll look upon all these black diamonds as your especial care to polish and pre-



Mr. Coffin did not rise from his easy-chair.



serve—he! he! he! I'll be bound you've wasted quires of foolscap already in planning houses and schools, lecture-rooms, libraries, and that sort of thing; that you mean to be a protector, pastor, parent, patron, and pattern to every one of your grimy friends, and spend at least twelve hours out of the twenty-four groping underground like a mole. Have you not some such mad schemes as these in your brain?

*Meredith.*—Of course I shall endeavour to look after the wants of my people.

*Caleb.*—Don't I know you as you've been from your boyhood—with your philanthropic Quixotism, your mania for night schools and ragged schools, your dashing at misery, vice, and dirt, as the Knight of the rueful countenance went full-tilt at the wind mills—I daresay with much the same result—he! he! he! I know how you'll go at them at Pitsmouth—reforming here, building there, trying to manufacture poets, philosophers, and saints out of grimy miners, till—till you get a wife, and she'll tether you down, and tame you down from a soaring eagle into a quiet domestic barn-door fowl.

*Meredith (smiling).*—Perhaps I shall find a wife who will rise higher far than myself as regards these same plans and projects for usefulness which seem to you so Quixotic.

*Caleb.*—Wheugh! don't believe it, Meredith. I don't mean to say that a fellow of your inches, with a good deal of the manner that takes with women, and plenty of the cash which constitutes "an eligible," will have any difficulty in finding a girl willing to go to Pitsmouth, or to Kamtschatka itself, as your wife. Ay, and ready to enter into every freak and fancy of yours—building all her air-castles of coal—willing to go down with you in a bucket to the deepest depths that ever were dug, declaring that she really prefers black to white, and that miners, to her mind, are the most interesting beings in creation. Of course your fair lady will say all this, and may believe that she feels it,—there's no more accounting for a girl's fancies than for those of a philanthropic mine-owner. But wait a bit, my dear fellow, and see how the coal-castle in the air goes off into smoke! When the good lady finds that she must be perpetually changing her curtains, and covering up her butter from coal-dust; when she sees that her geraniums will not flourish, and discovers that her own pretty face is always wanting washing; when friends think Northumberland much too far off for a visit; and even miners do not appear thankful for being taught, tutored, and trained;—why, then, you'll find matters changed. Your wife will not say, mark ye, "I wash my hands



of the whole concern ;” but she’ll find that Northumberland air don’t suit her health, or the health of her squalling baby, and she’ll rush up to London by train—pay a round of visits—do no end of shopping—see the exhibitions, and half a score of doctors, and get the opinions of the faculty that she, or baby, can’t possibly live so far north as Northumberland ; that Mentone, or Florence, or Algiers, or Patagonia, is the only place in the world for her—or the precious brat. And so—coaxing woman in one scale, Pitsmouth plans, projects, and philanthropy in the other—you will find, as plenty of husbands have found, that a man can’t do good unless his wife will let him ; and that had Quixote himself married Dulcinea, he would soon have settled down into a sober, sensible, family man.

*Meredith.*—I think that you do injustice to the fair sex, Mr. Coffin. In every work of beneficence, woman is found ready to lend effectual aid. In her labours she is usually more devoted and more disinterested than man.

*Caleb.*—My dear fellow, you know little of the world, least of all of the female half of it. There are two motives which sway the human race—interest and vanity, the love of gold and the love of praise. Now woman, I grant ye, has, as a rule, less of the money-making quality than we have ;

but of the vanity, the love of praise, woman has a thousand times more. It comes out in everything that she does; it is her very mainspring of action. Not "What will it be?" but "How will it look?" is woman's perpetual question. Depend on't, woman invented the vile Russian dinner, such as Lady Macaw gave yesterday to introduce me as lord of the manor to the society of Thwayte. There was everything to please the eye no doubt—plenty of plate, glass, and flowers (one can't eat plate, glass, and flowers)—but the dishes handed round were but so-so, and the cheap wines handed round but so-so; I'd have had a much better dinner at home, bating of course the company, the plate, the glass, and the flowers.

*Meredith.*—Lady Macaw has no great fortune.

*Caleb.*—But she must make a great display—that's the point. She must keep her carriage; she must entertain; she must be the leader in society; she must manage everything and everybody;—she tried to manage *me*—he! he! he! I guess she'll find that a tough job!

*Meredith.*—What course did she take?

*Caleb.*—Not a straight one. Her ladyship tacked towards every point in the compass, sounding carefully as she went. She could not well work upon my self-interest, so she'd get round me by means of my love of praise. I was soon well-informed as to

what a country gentleman of large property—one of an ancient honourable family—is expected to do when he comes to take possession. I believe that Lady Macaw would have him cut a hole in his pocket, and strut about dropping gold guineas at every step that he takes. Amongst other things, she tried to nail me down to patronizing her stall at the fancy-fair to be held at G—— for some nonsensical object. I suppose that when she and the pretty girls of her working party constrain old bachelors to buy their bibs and pink socks, pin-cushions, pinafores, and parrots, they fancy that they are doing a deed of charity—I would simply call it pocket-picking.

*Meredith.*—But we have wandered somewhat from the point from which we started, the disinterested beneficence of woman.

*Caleb.*—That it is disinterested is just what I deny. I tell you that every woman, plying her fingers to work, or her tongue to beg, looks for payment in pleasure or praise. There's my little niece Philomel Lamb, the parson's daughter, as good a creature as lives, and as deep as you yourself could desire in schools, and savings' banks, and cottage visiting—a philanthropist over head and ears! Why, where's the self-denial in this? She sets to her work because she likes it, and because the world says that

it becomes a parson's daughter to look after her father's flock. She likes all the curtsying and bobbing of the village children, and the name of being clever, active, and good. I don't say that there's harm in her liking it,—if she hadn't a bit of vanity she wouldn't be a woman—he ! he ! he !

*Meredith (to himself)*.—What a blind owl this is; and yet he fancies himself clearer sighted than the rest of the world !

*Caleb*.—Why, that merry black-eyed damsel, Lucy Langton, who sat next to me yesterday evening, can play at charity when she has nothing better to play at, hunt out “cases” when there's no other game to hunt, and I daresay cuts and snips and stitches for Lady Macaw's fancy-fair, as energetically as she would whirl round and round in a polka. And her pretty sister, Miss Delia, with her perpetual simper, will think herself doing a mighty good deed when showing off her taper fingers and jewelled rings selling frippery behind a counter. Folk must mount their hobbies ; and charity with most of your good people, especially the ladies, is an easy-going hack, that carries bells on its harness and trots all the better for the jingle—he ! he ! he ! With fiery philanthropists, like yourself, it may be like a hunter, that bears you right over hedge and ditch, but I suppose that you find pleasure in the excitement,

and on neither hack nor hunter is the rider likely to take the leap of Quintus Curtius.

*Meredith.*—But surely, Mr. Coffin, you cannot so close your eyes to facts as to deny that real sacrifices, great sacrifices, are made for the sake of charity by women.

*Caleb.*—No one denies it, my good friend, so you need not look so indignant as a champion of the sex. Woman sometimes will, and does sacrifice, money, time, strength, and a good deal besides, for the sake of being, or of seeming, charitable; don't shake your head so impatiently—the two things are closely connected. All that I argue for is, that there is one thing which woman does not, and will not sacrifice, and that is her vanity, her love of being admired. She'll go anywhere with that wind in her sails, but she can't beat up channel against it. Find me a girl who will do good in the dark, prove that she cares not a straw for what the world says of her doings, that she wants neither praises nor thanks, and I'll believe in the phoenix, or mermaids, or anything else that you will; I'll believe that you've chosen a wife who will help, not hinder you, in making a paradise of Pitsmouth; you shall have a rare gift for your nonpareil bride, and I'll dance myself at the wedding!

*Meredith (rising).*—Take care what you promise,

Mr. Coffin ; I may one day hold you to your word.

*Caleb.*—Mind you, I must have the choice of the test, and be satisfied that the metal has fairly stood it ; I must look through my own good spectacles, and not through your lover's eyes.

And so the companions parted, as we saw at the commencement of the chapter ; the eagle to make bitter reflections on the dull cynicism of the owl, and the owl to hoot ridicule at the romantic flights of the eagle. The remarks of Caleb Coffin had, however, disturbed the serenity of the young owner of Pitsmouth more than he chose to own. Meredith had seen in his own family the power of a domestic tether to keep down an ardent spirit ; he had seen a woman's influence divert into channels of ostentation what had once flowed in that of charity ; and the thought had often crossed his mind, that the philanthropist who would soar high must be content to soar alone.

## CHAPTER II.

### LADIES IN COUNCIL.



WHILE Mr. Coffin was criticising the ladies of Thwayte, the ladies, on their part, were passing judgment upon Mr. Coffin.

When the late easy-tempered, open-handed, good-natured proprietor of Burnesbey Abbey had paid the debt of nature, the character of his successor became a subject of curious conjecture, a matter of personal interest to all who dwelt in the neighbourhood. Sir John Coffin had held no very lofty place in men's esteem during his lifetime; but, like many more noble than himself, the fox-hunting squire was destined to be more highly appreciated after his departure from earth than during his residence in it.

At the dinner-party given in his honour by Lady Macaw, Mr. Coffin may be said to have made his first appearance in that circle in which his position as a large landed proprietor would henceforth give

him a prominent place. Caleb had indeed spent two or three days in the parsonage of Thwayte during the lifetime of his sister, Mrs. Lamb, the wife of the vicar—but years had elapsed since that visit. Lady Macaw, who had chanced then to meet him, had described Mr. Coffin to her husband as a satirical, talkative man, who looked as if he would be shrewd in business and sharp in driving a bargain. The lady had almost forgotten the merchant's existence when, by succeeding to the Burnesbey estate, Caleb suddenly became to her, as to the other residents near him, an object of curious interest, and a topic of gossiping talk. Lady Macaw had, as we have seen, asked the lord of the manor to dinner, giving him a formal entertainment, the preparation of which had cost her a good deal of consideration and arrangement, if it had cost her little besides. Lady Macaw, who regarded herself as the ruling spirit in Thwayte, had determined to secure, if possible, the master of Burnesbey Abbey, as one of the ministers of her will.

“First impressions are everything,” as Lady Macaw observed to Sir Patrick, her meek little husband, who passed a quiet life of obscurity under the shadow of his wife.

What impressions had been made on Mr. Coffin may have been gathered from the conversation re-



lated in the last chapter ; what impressions the new lord of the manor had himself made upon Thwayte society, shall be recorded in this.

Let me introduce my reader into the pretty country-residence to which Lady Macaw has given the name of the Villa of Roses. In her drawing-room is gathered together the little working-party of ladies who meet on each Tuesday to make pretty trifles for the fancy-bazaar, the proceeds of which are to place a bronze statue of a very distinguished statesman in the market-place of G——, the nearest county town. The room is furnished in modern style, and with some regard to taste. Chromolithographs, in elegant frames, adorn the gilt papered walls ; mirrors, on either side, reflect each other in endless perspective ; from the ceiling hangs the bright chandelier, lighted only on grand occasions ; every angle and “coign of vantage” holds the narrow shelf, laden with old porcelain, carved ivory, Italian cameos, or Chinese idols (Sir Patrick made his money, and won his title, in China). A large table, near the centre of the room, is heaped with muslin, silk, tape, bobbins, dolls, things made and in process of making, and at this table sits Lady Macaw, the presiding genius, a woman of portly dimensions, large nose, and prominent chin, dressed with strict regard to the fashion, and bearing herself

with an air of stately condescension which she mistakes for dignity. Lady Macaw is the self-constituted patroness of the village of Thwayte in general, and of its three unmarried ladies in particular; Philomel Lamb having lost her mother, and Mrs. Langton, the doctor's sickly wife, being little better than a cipher in the eyes of Lady Macaw.

The two Misses Langton form a striking contrast to each other. There, on a footstool, sits merry black-eyed Lucy, making her "love of a hedgehog" pincushion bristle all over with pins, as she laughs and chats with her nearest neighbour, achieving as much in the talking way as she does in the working. She is a girl ever ready for frolic and fun, a restless little creature, who can never be happy in one place for a fortnight together, and who is always paying visits or flying off on her travels. Lucy has climbed the mountains of Norway, dived into the catacombs of Rome, ascended the Great Pyramid itself, and put her initials on the top. Reclining amongst soft cushions, appears Delia, her sister, a fair pretty girl, with languid air and conscious simper, toying affectedly with the long strip of patchwork which is lying across her knee. The one maiden reminds us of the swallow, all energy and action; the other, of some pretty goldfinch, pruning its feathers in sunshine.

Near to Delia appears an elderly lady. In her turned and faded blue-green poplin, and long dingy olive-green veil, how familiar is the stunted form of Priscilla Eccles to every child in the village! No working-party would be complete without her; whenever a kind act is to be done, especially if it involve inconvenience and trouble, the aid of good Miss Eccles is always invoked, and is never refused. Save a weakness for gossip, a little disposition to be curious about her neighbour's concerns, natural to those who lead a secluded life in a village, Miss Eccles has few faults. Thwayte is a little world to the elderly maiden-lady, and though she occasionally visits G—— for shopping (rather to execute commissions than to improve her own slender wardrobe), such a journey is as great an undertaking to Miss Eccles as one across the Atlantic would be to Lucy Langton.

The only member of the little working-party at the Villa of Roses who remains to be mentioned is Philomel Lamb, the vicar's daughter, a girl with a bright sweet face, simply attired, and wearing no ornament but a profusion of golden tresses, which shadow her temples and fall on her shoulders. It is from this fashion of wearing her hair as she did in the days of her childhood, that Philomel has acquired the playful cognomen of "the Lamb of the

golden fleece." Never has that luxuriant hair been imprisoned in plait, or twisted up into chignon. In vain had Lady Macaw given hints about attention to fashion, and the incongruity of a young lady "who has come out" wearing her hair in a way only suitable to a child, or a wax doll. Lady Macaw, who plumed herself on deep knowledge of human nature, thought that there was a little vanity and love of singularity in Philomel's choosing to keep her curls when every other lady brushed her hair from her brows, and wore a chignon at the back of her head. Miss Eccles, more good-natured in her judgment, had suggested that Philomel kept to her old way "because Mrs. Lamb, poor dear soul, was so fond of her child's yellow curls." Delia believed that the vicar's daughter studied the becoming, and liked to make the most of her only beauty; while Lucy always laughingly averred that Philomel chose the style of coiffure which cost her least trouble and thought. It is needless to decide which conjecture was most correct, perhaps each had some shadow of truth; be that as it may, Philomel retained her flowing locks, and her name of Lamb of the golden fleece.

"And what did you think of our new squire?" inquired Miss Eccles, in an audible whisper to Delia. The elder lady had not been at the dinner-party on

the preceding evening; she had not even had the usual invitation to drop in at tea. Lady Macaw, after due consideration, had decided that "the worthy old creature" would not improve Mr. Coffin's first impressions of Thwayte society.

"He's an owl," lisped Delia.

"He's an old horror," cried Lucy; both sisters replying in a breath.

"My dears, you forget that Mr. Coffin is Philomel's uncle," said Lady Macaw, glancing at the vicar's daughter, who was seated at the open window, busy with a child's little frock.

"Oh, there is no one more provoked with him than I am," cried Philomel, without raising her eyes from her work.

"Certainly Mr. Coffin has less idea of what society demands from one in his position than any land-owner whom I ever met with," observed Lady Macaw. "He carries the habits and ideas of the counting-house into the fine old country mansion. When I expressed, as in courtesy bound, a hope that I should see him at the fancy-fair to be held in June, 'You go there to *sell*, I suppose,' said he, 'but I should go there *to be sold*. You should have Butler's lines over the door as a motto,—

"Doubtless the pleasure is as great  
Of being cheated as to cheat;"

only I for one don't subscribe to the axiom.' Fancy any gentleman giving such a reply to a lady!"

"I daresay that he thought it witty," cried Lucy, "though every one else would think it simply rude; and that he ended with that horrid little hiss of a self-gratulatory laugh, which irritates more than his words. I sat next to Mr. Coffin at dinner, you know, so had an opportunity of testing his humour. I told him that we all looked to him to keep up good old customs in the place; that I delighted in riding, and hoped often to follow his pack as I had done that of Sir John, whose hospitality and public spirit were famous over the county."

"And what did Mr. Coffin reply?" asked Delia, pausing in her occupation of snipping pieces of many-coloured silks for her patch-work.

"That he would like to see me riding after hounds, but that they should not be hounds fed in his kennels; and that, as for hospitality, though he liked a good dinner well enough, he'd no notion of keeping open house for every one else who might do so."

There was a murmur of disapprobation amongst the fair workers; and Lucy stuck her pins into her hedgehog with savage rapidity, in a manner which suggested the idea that she would willingly have bestowed her quick pricks in another direction. Mr.

Coffin was sinking lower and lower in the estimation of the ladies of Thwayte.

“I had very little to say to the old owl,” lisped Delia. “I only asked him whether we should see him at the archery meeting on Wednesday, to which he assented. Then I ventured to observe that this time we had no prize worth shooting for, the ladies’ prize being but a poor brooch in form of a silver arrow. I showed him my own prize bracelet, which I won last year, and remarked, quite *en passant*, you know, that Sir John had always presented a twenty guinea prize for the ladies to shoot for. ‘Did he?’ said Mr. Coffin drily, peering through his goggles at my bracelet, as if he meant to bid for it. I observed that Sir John had been a popular man.”

“How did Mr. Coffin take so delicate a hint from a fair young lady?” inquired Lady Macaw, with a smile.

“Oh, he answered me in his own cynical way. ‘So Sir John gave twenty guineas, did he?’ I assented. ‘And Sir John bought popularity with a check for that sum?’ I did not know what to reply to so odd a question, but I suppose that Mr. Coffin took my silence for consent, for he went on, ‘I think that popularity was dear at the figure—he! he! he!—he might have made a much better bargain.’”

“Vulgar!” exclaimed Lady Macaw, with a slight toss of her stately head.

“Mean!” muttered the indignant Lucy.

“But I have something worse—much worse to tell,” said Philomel Lamb, laying down her work on her knee. So alarming an announcement excited the curiosity and attention of every member of the little conclave. Delia suspended her snipping, Lucy her vigorous pin-sticking, Lady Macaw left off counting her stitches, and the knitting-needles of Miss Eccles ceased their almost perpetual motion.

“You know that for years and years before I was born,” said Philomel, “the pretty cottage on the moor has been used as our village school.”

“From time immemorial it has been so,” observed Lady Macaw.

“It has been as natural to go to the class there on Sundays as to church!” cried Lucy Langton, who had taught by fits and starts, as she did everything else, plunging into philanthropy with the same energy that she did into pleasure.

“I never even knew until to-day,” continued the Lamb of the golden fleece, “that the cottage was part of the Burnesbey Abbey estate, though we all were aware that the schoolmaster’s salary was paid by the lord of the manor. The money had come so regularly, so much as a matter of course, that



what had gone on for so long seemed as if it must go on for ever."

"Certainly it did," said Lady Macaw.

"But Uncle Coffin does *not* think it a matter of course," pursued Philomel Lamb. "He means to stop the salary, turn out the good Arkwrights, break up the school, and make a village inn, as he calls it—I should say a public-house—of the cottage."

"Impossible!" cried both the Misses Langton.

"Impossible!" echoed Lady Macaw; while Miss Eccles, looking aghast, dropped half-a-dozen stitches in her dismay.

"Papa is so dreadfully vexed about it," continued Philomel Lamb; "all he could say he has said to prevent it; but there is no use arguing with Uncle Coffin, so the school will be given up."

"This can't be allowed," cried Lady Macaw, with decision.

"How can it be hindered?" faintly sighed poor Miss Eccles.

"Can't we get up a school in some other spot?" inquired Lucy.

"There's not another cottage available, I am afraid; and then there's the master and mistress's salary," began Philomel.

"Never mind salary!" exclaimed the energetic and

unpractical Lucy; "we'll have it an honorary affair; you'll take the girls—I'll go in for the boys."

"My dear, my dear, you forget that you are going to Paris next week," interrupted Lady Macaw; "there must be salaried teachers, and where is the money to come from?"

"Where, indeed?" said Miss Eccles, who could hardly be expected to contribute much out of her fifty pounds per annum.

"Would not the people of G—— help?" asked Lucy, with animation; "I should like us to show this skin-flint that we can do very well without him."

Lady Macaw shook her head with the grave dignity of a Burleigh. "The people of G—— will do nothing in the matter," she said; "no interest will be felt in the school of a village five miles away. G—— could not get up subscriptions sufficient for the statue in its own market-place without the assistance which I am giving it."

Miss Eccles whispered something to Delia, which no one else could hear. The young lady slightly shrugged her shoulders, and raised her pretty eyebrows as her only reply. Philomel guessed that the elderly lady in the faded green veil had been giving voice to the thought in her own mind, that a school in Thwayte was a good deal more needful than even a statue in G——.



He showed me a sovereign and a large gilt medal.



"I'll tell you what I will do," said Lady Macaw ; every one present was silent to hear the proposition of the ruling spirit in Thwayte. "I'll write to Mr. Coffin myself."

"Much he is likely to care for that," was the silent comment on the lady's words made by her hearers.

"Why should not Philomel try what she can make of her uncle?" cried Lucy Langton. "Most men have a weak point, if one only knows where to hit it. For aught that I know, the old screech-owl may be excessively fond of his niece."

Philomel shook her curly tresses. "I am afraid there is no strong affection between us," she said ; "though my uncle has been rather kind after his own peculiar fashion, and gave me the first sovereign that I ever possessed in my life."

"Ah, he can then give something better than sneers and bad jokes," observed Delia.

"It was a long time ago," said Philomel, "when my uncle came here on a visit. He showed me a sovereign and a large gilt medal, and asked me which I would have for my own. Child as I was, I fancied that the medal was but a larger piece of gold coin, and was about to choose it as that with which I could buy most (for my dear parents had already taught me something of what money can

do), when the hole in the medal attracted my notice. 'What is that hole for?' I asked. 'To put a ribbon in,' said my uncle, 'that you may hang the pretty thing round your neck. The big piece is for ornament, the little piece is for use.' I then took up the sovereign at once, saying, 'that I liked to have money to spend, and not to hang round my neck.' Uncle Coffin clapped me on the shoulder, and said, laughing, 'Well done, my little curly-poll, may you always have the sense to prefer use to show.' "

"Then there is a way of getting round the old owl!" cried Lucy.

"I daresay that he has a kind heart after all," observed Miss Eccles.

"I will certainly write to him," said Lady Macaw, folding by her piece of German work with an air of calm self-complacence and reliance on the power of her pen, which roused a little spirit of emulation in the Lamb of the golden fleece.

"I will do my best, my very best, to coax my uncle to let us have the cottage for our school-house still, and to continue the salary to the Arkwrights, so kindly paid by Sir John. I will go over to the Abbey at once," said Philomel, rising from her seat, for she felt impatient to try her powers of persuasion, and being young and of a buoyant spirit, she was now full of hope of success.

“You will not come with us, then, to practise archery in the field?” asked Lucy Langton. “Remember the bow-meeting is to be to-morrow; and if the silver arrow is scarcely worth contending for, we must shoot for the credit of the ladies of Thwayte.”

“The school is of more importance than the silver arrow,” replied Philomel; “and to save it from being broken up might do as much for the ladies of Thwayte as carrying off a prize from all the archers in England.”

“By-the-bye, is Mr. Latour to be at the meeting?” inquired Miss Eccles of Philomel Lamb.

The question was a simple one, but it was accompanied with a knowing, inquisitive look; and it certainly heightened the colour on the cheek of the village maiden. The blue eyes sank, perhaps because, for some reason or other, all the other eyes in the room were turned towards her.

“I don’t know—probably—I’m not sure,” replied the young lady.

“But *I* am sure,” replied Miss Delia Langton. “Mr. Latour told me that he would certainly be present, and shoot; no doubt he’ll carry off the gentlemen’s prize, for we’ve no other such archer in the county.”

Perhaps it was only fancy that made Philomel detect a slight emphasis on the first personal pro-

noun used by the prettiest girl in Thwayte, and only prejudice that made her feel provoked at what she thought a conscious simper upon the lips of Delia Langton.

“Well, Philomel, if you’re really bound for the Abbey on your philanthropic mission,” cried Lucy, “I heartily wish you success. May you bring down the owl with your first shot, pluck his plumage to your heart’s content, and wear as a trophy a feather in your cap, or your flowing hair, to the end of your days.”



## CHAPTER III.

### A SHOT AT THE OWL.



RIGHTLY fell the sunshine upon meadow and hedge-row, enamelled with the blossoms of May, as Philomel lightly trod the path through the fields which led to Burnesbey Abbey. Her spirit was in tone with the season, and with the warbling of linnet and thrush. The young maiden was as one of Nature's wild-flowers opening its petals to the light, or as the free bird that has never beaten its wings against the wires of a cage. Philomel was bound on what she felt to be a noble mission; a grander opportunity of benefitting her kind appeared to be now before her than had ever before occurred during her quiet, secluded life. Perhaps the young girl, as she tripped along in her straw hat and waving scarf, while the May breeze played with her golden tresses, did not scan very closely her own motives for undertaking

her mission. Philomel had a natural pleasure in conquering difficulties, in the hope of exercising power over a hard and sordid nature, of doing what the self-reliant Lady Macaw would never be able to do. It is not to be denied that a spirit of emulation, if it did not act as a spur, gave at least a zest to Philomel's expectations. She pictured to herself the pleasure of being the benefactress of her native village, and the tenfold increased delight which she would take in the school if it owed its preservation to her efforts.

And other thoughts would steal in—sweet and pleasant as the breeze of spring—so sweet that Philomel unconsciously slackened her steps to prolong the delicious reverie in which they now entranced her. The winner of the gentlemen-archers' prize had, according to the custom of the place, the privilege of presenting the ladies' prize to the fair victor, who, on her part, as Queen of the day, presented his trophy to him. Philomel had a presentiment that Delia would not be the one on the morrow to receive the silver arrow, and her own heart throbbed, and her blue eye sparkled, as fancy conjured up a bright scene. Philomel heard in imagination words softly spoken, congratulations uttered by lips that never flattered, to her who had won something better than trophy of silver or gold—the

power of being a blessing to many. And so the maiden's thoughts flowed on and on—ever in a deepening channel, with brighter sunshine glittering upon them, till the stream became lost in a wide-spreading sea of blissful hope, all the more dazzling because Philomel scarcely dared to own to herself what caused that intensity of light. As she heard the linnet calling to his mate, and the lark on buoyant wing sprang up from the meadow which she was crossing, almost unconsciously Philomel warbled to herself verses from Lytton's May-song:—

“ Wherefore, light bird, art thou bearing  
    Twig and moss to yonder tree?  
For the home that I am rearing,  
    High from earth, as Love's should be.

“ If thus rudely I begin it,  
    Love itself completes the nest,  
And the downy softness in it  
    Comes, O lover, from the breast.

“ All the while the buds are springing,  
    May is round thee and above,  
As the bird sings he is singing,  
    As the bird loves canst thou love?”

Philomel hushed the song on her lips, but not the music in her heart, as she approached the romantic old pile of Burnesbey Abbey, which from its antiquity and picturesque beauty had been the show-place of the county in the days of Sir John, who

had even winked at pic-nics held under the shadow of its walls by tourists who did not despise creature-comforts when in search of the picturesque. There was no danger now, however, that Philomel would come suddenly upon a pleasure party, or find the long grass strewn with fragments of sandwiches, or the corks of ginger-beer bottles. Save for the sounds of Nature, the place had been profoundly quiet since the gray owl had come to take possession of his nest.

Originally, as its name denoted, Burnesbey Abbey had been built for religious worship. The family into whose hands it had fallen in the reign of King Harry the Eighth, had, in successive generations, added to the pile, with little regard to symmetry of design. The student of architecture saw, with surprise, massive stone gateway, Gothic arch, and dim cloister—relics of the feudal age—in juxtaposition with half-ruined Grecian colonnade, and the gilded and carved ceilings of the reign of Louis Quatorze, the latest date which could be assigned to any part of the building. But Nature had done her utmost to harmonize all that otherwise would have seemed incongruous—she had draperied the Gothic arch with ivy, thrown round Italian columns a mantle of wild clematis, and set alike on old brick and more ancient stone the gray-green lichen and the dull

orange-stain ; she had planted the wall-flower in the niche, and half hidden the mullioned windows with leaves. Sir John had never suffered painter or builder to touch his romantic old home ; he had left stone to crumble and lichen to grow, the owl to form her nest in the ivy, and the jackdaw to wheel round the tower ; a hundred generations of swallows had made their homes under the eaves of Burnesbey Abbey, no one had ever disturbed them. To Philomel the wildness and solitude of the place gave it a singular charm. Though she had often, in company with others, partaken of Sir John's hospitality, this was the first time that she had visited Burnesbey Abbey on foot and alone. Never had she admired it half so much as when, in the stillness which brooded over it, fancy could people the ancient building with forms of the past. As Philomel crossed the rough bridge over the dried-up moat, she paused to gaze up on the time-worn abbey, and the exclamation, "How picturesque—how exquisite it is !" escaped from the maiden's lips.

It was like the breaking of a fairy spell, when, as Philomel was gliding past the windows of what—ages before—had been the monks' refectory, she caught sight of her uncle, in brown coat, black velvet skull-cap, and goggle spectacles, seated within at a table, with a plate of biscuits and a decanter of

old port before him. Caleb Coffin saw his niece, rose, came to the window, and threw open the lattice.

“Why, Curly-poll, is that you, looking as bright and rosy as a May morning, come to cheer up a sulky old uncle in this strange rambling tumble-down old prison, into which his good or bad fortune has thrown him? Talk of country delights indeed! There’s something in London to tell one that the world is alive—a roll of wheels and a hum of voices—but here! I’d give something for a street cry; even a grinding organ would not come amiss to me now!”

“O uncle, you have the birds!” cried Philomel Lamb.

“Yes indeed; I’ve endless cawing of rooks; chattering, chirping, and twittering of swallows. I can’t light a fire in my bed-room, but the chimney must smoke; because the birds, forsooth, have chosen to fill it up with their nests. They build in the gutters, they stop up the pipes, they wake me every morning with the noise of their chirping. I’ll tell John to get the long ladder and pull down every nest in the place, and tear off the ivy that only serves as a harbour for earwigs, and give a decent respectable look to the building.”

“The birds and the ivy! Oh, without them half

the charm of the abbey would be gone!" exclaimed Philomel.

"That may be your opinion—that's not mine," said Caleb Coffin drily. "Maybe you've a taste for cobwebs also, and would think it desecration to let a carver and gilder set to work upon the old-fashioned ceilings. But I mean to have workmen down from London—I've just been drawing up estimates of what I think that it would cost to put this old place into thorough repair. I don't want gimcracks, or kickshaws, or show, but being neither an old baron nor an old monk, I like to have things decent about me. 'Twill cost a good round sum, I've no doubt; but I've made up my mind to spend it."

Philomel might at another time have burst into earnest expostulation against this scheme for transforming a beautiful old abbey into a prosaic "eligible residence" for a merchant from London. But Philomel had come with a definite object, and on an important mission, and was only too glad to find the old owl not only in a gracious humour and inclined to welcome a visitor, but also disposed to loosen his purse-strings. She therefore cheerfully accepted Caleb's invitation to come into the house and have a chat with him.

"You'll find the little door which opens on the

tumble-down colonnade on the latch," said Mr. Coffin; "don't bother yourself or John by ringing at the great front entrance; you can always get in without announcing yourself; and come at what hour you will, you will always be welcome."

Philomel passed along that graceful colonnade, which, though much less ancient than the Gothic portion of the building, bore traces quite as evident of the touch of the finger of Time. The latch-door opened into a passage dark, vaulted, and low, and through the nail-studded door at the end of it the young lady entered the low refectory, where she was kindly received by her uncle.

"Now, child, you must taste my old port—'tis prime, ninety-six a dozen, and cheap at the figure," said the owner of Burnesbey Abbey, laying his wrinkled hand upon the decanter before him, and nodding to his niece to occupy one of the large heavy chairs enriched with faded blue velvet, which had been bought in the reign of Queen Anne to supersede the old oaken benches.

"Thanks, uncle; but I have long ago taken my unfashionable early dinner, and I have the bad taste to prefer cowslip-wine to port a hundred years old," replied Philomel. "Let me sit on this footstool beside you, and tell you what brings me here to-day." Philomel drew out the footstool and seated herself at



the feet of her uncle, so that she could rest her clasped hand upon his knee, and look up into his face. She felt that in this child-like attitude of confidence and ease she could better prefer her request, and that the stately old velvet cushioned chair would have imparted to her its own stiffness. The merchant was looking down upon his niece through his tortoise-shell glasses with as much kindness as it was in the nature of the old owl to show. If there was a being on earth who had a nook in his selfish heart, it was this only child of the sister whom he had lost.

"I've come to ask a favour—a great favour," said Philomel, as she raised her bright face towards her uncle's, and her straw hat fell back upon her ringlets of gold. She won from him an answering smile, which had nothing cynical in it, as Caleb playfully observed, "Ah, I guess that you did not visit the old man for nothing. I'll be bound that to-morrow's archery-meeting was in that little head of yours as you came tripping along."

"I confess that it crossed my mind," owned the conscious maiden.

"You think you'll win the archery prize?"

"I hope so," said Philomel, smiling.

"And you came to ask me to give something handsome for the ladies to shoot for—eh, Curly-

poll? If I were sure that my little niece would be the one to get it—why, I shouldn't so much mind doing the handsome thing once in a way."

"No; my wishes fly higher than that, uncle; I am going to ask a much more important boon," said Philomel Lamb. "I am going to entreat my kind uncle to oblige not only me, but all who dwell near him, by continuing to do what Sir John did for our little school on the moor."

The manner of Caleb instantly changed; he uttered a low hiss, and roughly drew away the hand upon which Philomel had laid her own. "The child is crazy," he said. "Why, the rent of that cottage, the salary and all, can't come to less than seventy pounds per annum, the interest of two thousand pounds at three and a half per cent! You don't suppose that you have only to hold out your little hand and have two thousand sovereigns drop into it, like a ripe plum from a tree?"

"I know that I am asking a great favour," said Philomel timidly, for Caleb's roughness of manner discouraged her; "but you know that it is not for myself. Your own honour, your own satisfaction, and—"

"Fiddlety dee!" exclaimed Caleb Coffin, rising abruptly from his seat; "don't attempt to humbug

me with all those fine words, I'm not such a gudgeon as to snap at that bait; though," he added more good humouredly, "if I were, I should have plenty of idiots to keep me in company. What says the epigram?—

‘The world of fools has such a store,  
That he who would not see an ass,  
Must shut his shutters, bolt his door,  
And—*break his looking-glass!*’

Though *that's* the last thing that a woman would ever think of doing—he! he! he!" and, restored to complacence by his own joke, Caleb quietly resumed his seat, and stretched out his hand to the decanter.

"But, uncle," expostulated Philomel, "you would not really have Thwayte without a school, and we cannot support one unless you help us. The children have been so well taught."

"What have they been taught?" interrupted Caleb, with the bottle in his hand.

"Reading, writing—"

'Humbug!' cried Caleb Coffin; "what is their reading and writing to me? If a lad sweep away my dead leaves, I'll not ask him whether he has ever turned over the leaves of a book; if my housemaid rub up my furniture well, what care I how her brain may be furnished; let my cook mind her

pans, not her pens—'tis food for the body and not for the mind that I expect from my kitchen ;” and Caleb, having given out his sentiments, filled his glass with the costly wine.

Philomel felt shocked by the selfishness of the master who regarded his servants simply as instruments to minister to his own comfort. As he sat holding up his glass to the light, as if to examine the colour of its contents, and then slowly sipping, he looked to her eyes the picture of selfish indulgence.

“There is some knowledge,” Philomel observed, “that *all* should have—the knowledge that will make them better Christians as well as better servants. I am sure that if poor Sir John could speak now, he would tell us that there is no part of his fortune which he spent more wisely, more for his own happiness here and hereafter, than that with which he earned the blessings of the poor around him.”

Caleb Coffin set down his glass, and through his goggle glasses peered searchingly into the face of his niece. “I should like you to sift your own argument, for I take it there's more chaff than grain in your sack,” he observed; “though all that sounds very pretty, and I daresay that your father gets you to help him to write his sermons, do you mean to say that my poor cousin, Sir John—who

was no great saint, you'll allow—bought for himself a certain reversionary interest in the other world, by a certain expenditure in this?"

Philomel was embarrassed by the question, and the searching gaze oppressed her. Sir John had been notoriously careless of even the forms of religion, only going to church twice or thrice in the year, and then doing so merely as "a compliment to the parson." He had been suddenly cut off in the midst of a worldly career; and, liberal benefactor as he had been to the village, no one ever imagined that he had ever given a shilling from motives of piety. Sir John had kept up a school as he had kept a pack of hounds and a plentiful board, because to do so naturally belonged to his position as the wealthy lord of the manor.

"Do you suppose," continued Mr. Coffin, "that Sir John was able to keep a kind of debtor and creditor account with Heaven; that if a jovial careless sort of life, with an oath here and there, weighed down the balance against him, he had just to chuck a school and schoolmaster into the opposite scale, and have all even again? This abbey here was built, they say, by a robber baron of old, as a kind of compensation for cutting a score of throats. Neither consciences nor throats, I take it, can be mended with brick and mortar; yet some such idea

seems to lie at the bottom of a good deal of what is called charity now—a notion of purchasing by almsgiving here a reversion after death. But that's not *my* idea of religion."

"Nor mine neither," exclaimed Philomel with warmth; "it would be impiety to entertain it for a moment."

"Then what return did Sir John really get for what he laid out on that school? I'll tell you," said Caleb Coffin, beginning to count on his fingers. "First, he got Lady Macaw and her set to own that, with all his faults, he understood his position. Then, when he died, he got ditto ditto to say over their whist, 'Dear, what a pity; Sir John is dead!—spades are trumps. I wish he'd remembered the school in his will, but he was always so thoughtless, poor man! I'm afraid that we'll find his successor a sad stingy fellow—will you let me see the last trick?'"

Philomel could not forbear smiling at the mimicking tone and manner of the cynic.

"Thirdly," continued the owl, "Sir John will probably get the words, 'Liberal to the poor,' in black letters upon his monument; and now I think that I've summed up the full amount of the return for the interest of two thousand pounds expended by my cousin on the school, and I can't say that the

result tempts me to lay out my money on a like speculation."

"Oh, Uncle Caleb, do you not take into account the present pleasure of doing so much good?"

Perhaps that was a pleasure of which Mr. Coffin had no large experience, for he did not seem inclined to reckon it as an additional item in his calculation. "It's all very well for romantic young folk like yourself or Meredith," he observed, with a shrug of his shoulders, "to talk of such present pleasure, but I'll be bound that if you'd nothing else to set you going on works of charity, you'd precious soon come to a stop. Ay, Curly-poll, look indignant if you will, but I take it that it was not pure pleasure in doing good that brought you here begging to-day."

"I am sure that I neither asked nor wished for anything for myself," said Philomel Lamb, in the tone of one whose feelings are wounded.

"Nothing in the coin of the realm, I grant you; nothing in gold, silver, or copper; but maybe something that you like better in the crackling bank-notes of praise. Was there no pride in showing your power to squeeze money out of a millstone; no thought of what would be said of the pretty little maid who had coaxed her crabbed old uncle into being liberal and kind against his will and his nature?"

The fair young face of Philomel Lamb was suffused with crimson ; it seemed as if those keen gray eyes, peering through their tortoise-shell spectacles, were reading the secret which had made her walk to the abbey a time for such delightful musings. Covering her confusion with an air of childish petulance, Philomel Lamb hastily rose from her seat, and drew over her curly head the straw hat which had fallen back on her neck.

“I see, Uncle Caleb,” she said, “that whatever motive brought me here, at least I have come to no purpose. I only wish that our school had had a better and a more successful pleader than I am.”

And so, with something of coldness, the young lady bade good-bye to her uncle, and, mortified and disappointed, retraced her steps. With emotions of indignation against a selfish, stingy old man, were mingled a feeling of discontent with herself. There *had* been self-seeking in her attempt to influence her uncle, the secret desire to please *one* had been at least as strong as the wish to benefit many. It was certainly not love for the little scholars of Thwayte that had lent the most vivid tints to the picture which fancy had been drawing in Philomel’s mind, of woman, like some beneficent being, scattering blessings on the world at her feet.



## CHAPTER IV.

AIM HIGHER.



BEYOND the ancient gate, through which Philomel emerged from the grounds belonging to the abbey, spread to the left a tract of moorland. On the further side of this were seen the spire of the church, village roofs, and the shrubbery surrounding the vicarage, to which Philomel Lamb was now bound. To the right lay the pleasant meadow-path which she had pursued when coming from Lady Macaw's on the breaking-up of the little working-party at the Villa of Roses. Philomel paused before crossing the moor, as she saw the stunted figure of Miss Eccles, conspicuous from afar by the long green veil which she wore, coming from the direction of the villa. The elderly lady quickened her pace as much as a slight lameness would permit when she caught sight of the vicar's daughter, and Philomel, turning out of her way, went to meet her old friend.

"My dear, you've just come from the abbey?" cried Miss Eccles, as she limped towards Philomel, panting partly from eagerness to know the result of the visit, partly from breathlessness caused by walking unusually fast.

"Yes, I've seen my uncle," said Philomel.

"And what success have you had?" cried Miss Eccles.

Philomel sighed and shook her head as she answered, "None."

"If Mr. Coffin does not care for what you say, it is not likely that he will care for what Lady Macaw writes," said Miss Eccles with a look of disappointment, glancing down on a pink-tinted and musk-scented note which she held in her hand.

"Are you carrying a letter from Lady Macaw to my uncle?"

"I offered to do it; her servants are busy preparing for to-morrow's archery-meeting, you know. I am sure that I would do anything to help to keep up the school," continued the lady, raising her cotton handkerchief to her heated face, "but there's nothing that a poor old creature like me can do, except heartily wish and pray that those who have the means to do great good may have the heart also."

"Better to have the heart than the means, Miss Eccles," said Philomel kindly.

“It may be, my dear, it may be ; but I own that I did feel a little covetous to-day. I’ve everything I need for myself, but I should like to be able to give something more than good wishes. But I will not detain you, my dear ; I promised to take the letter at once.”

Philomel pressed her old friend’s hand, cased in its neatly-mended cotton glove, for, except upon very rare occasions, kid was a luxury unknown to Miss Eccles. The two then separated, and Philomel watched for a minute the little limping form as it hurried away on an errand of kindness.

“There,” thought she, “goes one who is ready to take a servant’s office, and to press on tired and heated on a mission which will bring her no credit and scarcely a word of thanks. I sometimes think,” reflected Philomel, as she turned to the path across the moor, “that Miss Eccles cares less about self than any one else in our village circle. She is ‘content to fill a little space,’ which is more than can be said of most of us. I wonder whether in her youth she ever got up little dramas in her own fancy of which she was the heroine, inventing speeches that would never be spoken, and imagining looks that would never be given.” Philomel sighed as she pursued her reflections. “What idle folly was mine ! How my charity was but a froth

covering the surface of vanity—a froth so light, that a breath of satire could blow it away! My uncle's society oppresses and chills me. He has no faith in what is lofty, noble, and generous; he cannot believe in any motive higher than that of covetousness or vanity. He would do with life what he is going to do with his beautiful old abbey—tear away the clinging associations, the blossoming hopes, silence the wild music, and reduce all, if he could, to one tame uniformity of selfish comfort! All charm of poetry destroyed, the beautiful sacrificed to the useful; as if the beautiful had not a use of its own, and as if the heart were not likely to be the happier and the purer for the poetry in it!"

As Philomel approached the cottage on the edge of the moor, she saw that the little scholars of Thwayte were dispersing to their various homes, as their afternoon lessons were just over. But there was no joyful sound from

“The playful children just let loose from school.”

Tidings had already spread through the village that the place where the little ones and their parents before them had learned to fear God and read His Word was to be turned into a public-house, and the children were thronging together in groups, with looks of grave concern that were strange on their chubby faces. Philomel could scarcely bear to think

that the drunkard's song might soon be heard within those walls which had so often resounded with hymns. Without her usual merry smile, the vicar's daughter acknowledged the bows and curtseys from the various groups that she passed. As she went up to the cottage porch, a little child ran up to her, caught her by the dress, and looked up wistfully at Philomel, with her eyes brimming over with tears.

"What ails you, my little Mary?" said Philomel, tenderly, stooping down to the child.

"Oh, I hopes, I hopes it's not true as teacher is goin' away, and we won't never have no more school! You won't let it be true, will you?" pleaded the child.

It was bitter to Philomel to be able to speak no word of hope to the child, who seemed to have such confidence in the lady's power to help.

"Shall I find Mrs. Arkwright within?" asked Philomel, glancing towards the cottage.

Little Mary nodded her head. "She's a bin a-crying, and so has a lot on us—we be all so sorry as teacher is goin' away;" and the tears that had been glistening in the eyes overflowed and ran down the sunburnt cheeks.

With a sigh Philomel crossed the threshold of the little schoolhouse, and found the mistress not resting

after her teaching was over for the day, but busily engaged with her needle, while her foot rocked the cradle of her baby. Two elder children, but lately emerged from infancy, were quietly playing together in a corner of the room. Through the open back-door, Arkwright, with his eldest son, could be seen digging up potatoes in his garden. The cottage-scene would have presented a picture of domestic happiness, but for the shadow of approaching trouble darkening what had appeared to Philomel one of the most cheerful homes in the world.

Philomel had known Mrs. Arkwright so long, and had so often come to consult her in any difficulties that might arise in the parish, that the schoolmistress had become to the vicar's daughter almost like a personal friend. Mrs. Arkwright poured out no complaints — her manner as she greeted the young lady was quiet and placid as ever; but the sight of her pale cheek and reddened eyelids touched the heart of Philomel Lamb.

"I own, miss, that we were both taken aback when the notice to quit came yesterday," Mrs. Arkwright observed, in reply to something said by her guest; "it was so sudden, and we had not looked for it, seeing that all had been going on so well. But John and I have been reminding each other that nothing happens by chance, and that if the

school be a blessing to the place, God can find some way of keeping it going still."

"I see none," said Philomel, sadly; and then she told the quiet listener by whom she was seated of the vicar's futile endeavours, and then of her own unsuccessful attempt to move her uncle to change his intentions.

"But I might as well have wasted my breath in attempting to stir the monument by it," said Philomel, in conclusion. "I wish that I had not gone near him; I might have known that all would be useless."

"And yet, dear Miss Lamb," said Mrs. Arkwright, "surely it was better to fail than not to try. You have the comfort of knowing that you have done what you could to please our heavenly Master, and what is done unto Him can never be quite in vain."

"*Unto Him*," repeated Philomel, thoughtfully; "I am afraid," she added, looking down, "that not much of what we do, even in charity, can be said to be done *unto Him*."

The conversation then took another turn, and ere long the vicar's daughter rose and quitted the cottage, with her spirit calmed by contact with the meek piety and submission of the schoolmistress of Thwayte. Philomel's eyes had almost unconsciously

rested on a copy in round text-hand of a rhyme which had lain on the table,—

‘Our good works will be judged—and few will bear the trial—  
By our purity of motive and our strength of self-denial.’

And now the simple lines haunted her mind as she walked on. Was Caleb right, after all; was there no such thing to be found as pure disinterested charity; was the name but borrowed to cover vanity, ostentation, and pride? Philomel thought of Lady Macaw’s patronizing beneficence, Lucy Langton’s impulsive activity, Delia’s sentimental pity, Sir John’s free and careless liberality, her own dreamy delicious musings when going on an errand of mercy.

“*Unto Him,*” repeated Philomel to herself; “may not all true charity be concentrated in these two words, as the future oak in the acorn? What, then, is much to which we so readily, so self-complacently give the name? Is it not as the mistletoe, clinging to the tree and yet not of the tree, mingling its leaves with the oak’s leaves, yet neither drinking of its sap nor partaking of its nature? The cynic grasped the parasite plant and it yielded to his grasp, but he could not have thrown down the oak. He pulled down the false, because it was false—even he would have revered the true. What chords did I attempt to touch in the heart of my uncle?



I spoke of pleasing his neighbours, gratifying myself, satisfying his own mind, doing good to the village; the deeper notes never were struck; the key-note of all was not struck; I never alluded to the work of giving instruction to the Lord's lambs being a good work done *unto Him*."

Philomel looked on the sky, now crimson with the last glow of sunset, and then over the moor to the abbey. Why should she not go back to her uncle, impelled by a higher, holier, purer motive, to plead again the cause of the poor? Caleb Coffin was a worldly, a selfish man; but he was one who showed respect for at least the forms of religion, and who dared affirm that there was no spark of its real life within him? Philomel felt, indeed, a natural repugnance to entering on serious subjects with her uncle. On such subjects, above all she dreaded his sneer. But the vicar's daughter was thoroughly in earnest; she had promised to do her best, and she felt that she, as yet, had not done it. It was at least in no spirit of vanity or emulation, that Philomel Lamb, for the second time on that day, entered through the ancient gateway the grounds that environed the abbey.

## CHAPTER V.

### WILL IT STRIKE ?



PHILOMEL hailed as a good omen the sight of her uncle's form, with the evening glow upon it, standing in the colonnade, which, of that beautiful old building, had seemed to her the most beautiful part. She could better plead with him, the fair petitioner thought, with the fresh air of heaven around, and the rich sunset sky before them. Had not the master of Burnesbey Abbey come out to enjoy the deep calm of Nature at its holiest hour, and would he not, at such a time and in such a place, be more open to kindly and generous impressions ?

It was well that Philomel did not know that Caleb, as he glanced upward at the graceful capitals, the clematis-wreathed arches, the crumbling statue on its time-worn pedestal, was not gazing in admiration, but simply calculating "whether it would be worth while to improve and modernize the western

face of the mansion, by clearing away all this ruinous rubbish, which serves as a shelter to the bats."

When Caleb caught sight of the slight figure of his niece advancing towards him, he went to meet her, with that peculiar expression on his face which he intended for a smile, but which had something so cynical in it, that it was wont to excite rather an uneasy suspicion of ridicule in the person whom he might be addressing.

"So here you are again, Curly-poll, like a bad—*sovereign*, I suppose I must say; for it would be uncivil to compare a young lady to a bit of copper, be it bad or good."

"Nay, if either coin be false," replied Philomel Lamb, "the sovereign is the worst of the two, as having the higher pretensions, and causing the greater disappointment. You may wonder indeed to see me again to-day, but I have come—"

"I know why you've come," said Caleb, pulling from the pocket of his waistcoat a little tinted and scented note; "as your own arrow fell short, you've come to see whether this had hit the mark. He! he! he! I suppose that I shall have to stand as target for all the ladies of Thwayte—one off, another on; but there's not one of 'em as will strike the gold!—he! he! he!"

“I did not expect that Lady Macaw would succeed—”

“Where my pretty little niece had failed, eh, Philomel?” interrupted Mr. Coffin. “You are a genuine woman; you would have been rather provoked than pleased had her ladyship hit the bull’s eye. There was precious little chance of that, though she sent her arrow high enough—right over my head. Of all things I hate the using religion as a mask for worldliness; and a pretty specimen of that kind of hypocritical cant is enclosed in this dainty pink note.”

This was a discouraging commencement to the conversation, and Philomel felt at the moment as if it had placed a leaden padlock upon her own lips. But, conscious of the goodness of her cause, and resolved not to return home until she had made an appeal to her uncle’s better feelings, Philomel linked her arm closely in his, and, in that half-clinging position, began to speak in a tone which betrayed her nervous emotion.

“I am really afraid to tell you what I have come here to say, lest you should apply the same hard words to me. I have been reproaching myself for the selfish, worldly spirit in which I visited this place an hour ago; but now”—and warming with her theme, forgetting self in her subject, Philomel

pleaded earnestly and fervently, as to a Christian man, influenced by Christian motives; looking beyond the narrow sphere of this world, with its passing interests and empty praise, to the beneficent Being from whom he had received all freely, that he too might freely give—the Friend of the needy, who forgets not the smallest service done to His poor, if done *unto Him*. The voice of Philomel trembled with earnestness as she spoke; the profound silence observed by her hearer encouraged her to go on; her eyes were fixed not upon him, but the crimson drapery of the clouds, as if she drank in courage from the sight of their radiant beauty.

“You have accused me,” she said in conclusion, “of vanity and selfish desire to win credit while trying to do good, but I will show you that I am, *now*, at least, seeking nothing for myself, not even ‘the crackling bank-notes of praise.’ If you will write an answer to Lady Macaw, assuring her that you will keep up the village school, never will I hint to any mortal that *my* persuasions had the slightest influence; the credit shall be hers—yours—any one’s”—here Philomel looked her uncle full in the face with her honest blue eyes; “I will have no thanks and no praise, for

‘Our good works will be judged—and few will bear the trial—  
By our purity of motive, and our strength of self-denial.’ ”

“So that is your division of labour, is it?” said Caleb abruptly, smiling down into the eyes raised to his, but with his own cynical smile. “*You* have the ‘purity of motive’—granted—and you make over the ‘strength of self-denial’ to me! I protest against the division! ’Tis clear that you know, when two carry a burden on a pole, how to get hold of the lighter end. I am to expend two thousand pounds; you ladies any amount of words, which cost you nothing! But

‘ Words without deeds  
Are—husks without seeds!’

Would that fine Lady Macaw give up the gold cord on her footman’s shoulder for all the schools in the world, or Miss Lucy one gallop after the hounds, or her pretty simpering sister one dress *à la mode*, or you—but I’ll put you to the proof!” exclaimed Caleb Coffin, suddenly interrupting himself, and changing his animated manner to one of cold business-like decision; “listen to me, Philomel Lamb—Lamb of the golden fleece, as somebody called you. I will consent to do as you have proposed; return a favourable answer to that fine lady’s officious note—tell her that I am going, not only to keep up the school, but to endow it in perpetuity.”

“Oh, uncle, you darling!” exclaimed Philomel, with a burst of delight and gratitude, pressing the

arm on which she was leaning with both her little hands. She could hardly believe in her own success, it was so much beyond her hopes.

“Softly, softly—hear the conditions first; if I’m to set up in the self-denial line, I’ll take care to have you in partnership,” said Caleb Coffin, with his irritating laugh. “My conditions are three, Philomel Lamb, and must be observed to the very letter, or not one farthing of my money will I throw away on that school.”

“Oh, tell me them at once; don’t keep me in suspense!” cried Philomel gaily. “I shall not be easily frightened, I assure you. I would engage to walk up to London, and back, or to reap a field, or to leap over hedge and ditch with Lucy; anything that would tax my strength or my courage—and I have not a great share of either—to induce you to write such a letter to Lady Macaw.”

“I will neither tax your strength nor your courage,” said Caleb drily; “your task shall be quite proportioned to your powers. My three conditions are these: First, you shall clip off—pretty close to your head, mind you—every lock of your golden fleece”—

“Uncle Caleb!” exclaimed the astonished Philomel, quitting her hold of Coffin’s arm, and drawing backwards.

"Secondly," pursued the owl, pronouncing every sentence with deliberation, and keenly watching through his goggle-glasses the effect of his words, "you shall appear with your clipped poll—and no wig, no false tresses, mind you—at the archery-meeting to-morrow, and shoot for the prize as if nothing had happened."

"Every one present would think me crazy!" cried Philomel Lamb.

"Perhaps they might," said her uncle drily, "but not more crazy than I should think myself were I to fling away two thousand pounds on a school. Now for my last condition. You shall never convey a hint, by word or by look, to any one living why you have cut off your curls."

"Uncle Caleb, I know that you are jesting; I am sure that you are!" exclaimed Philomel, attempting to laugh off the annoyance and disappointment which she felt.

"I never was more serious in my life," said Caleb Coffin. "I have made you a fair offer, Philomel—a handsome offer, I should call it—golden coin for golden tresses; you keep these, I keep that: but I'll never listen to another word, I promise you, about maintaining and endowing that wretched school for the brats of the village."

"You never could wish me to make myself the



laughing-stock of the county !” cried Philomel, with an expression of indignation, which painted itself upon her expressive face.

“Wish it—no, certainly I neither wish nor expect you to play the fool !” cried the wily old man. “I only want you not to wish or expect another to make sacrifices which you do not choose to make yourself. But see—all the colour has gone from the clouds; it has transferred itself, I think, to your cheeks—I never saw them before with such a fine crimson tint; it’s mighty becoming, set off by the tresses of gold! You had better return home, Philomel, before it grows dark, namesake though you be to the warbler of night. The nightingale herself, I take it, only chooses to sing in darkness that she may have the field, or rather the bush, all to herself. Go home, Philomel Lamb, go home; the nightingale was never intended to soar to the lofty height which you were attempting just now, she had better keep to her quiet bush and her pleasant song. Be as charitable as you like in a sober, easy, comfortable way, but leave fools and fanatics to follow the example of the eider duck, that to warm others is ready to strip off the very down from her breast !”

## CHAPTER VI.

### A SLACKENED BOW.



WITH wounded feelings and an embittered spirit, Philomel Lamb trod her homeward path in the twilight, averting her eyes as she passed the picturesque village school-house on the edge of the moor. Caleb Coffin, she saw clearly, had been trifling with her. He had craftily found a method of silencing her earnest pleadings for what he was resolved not to grant. The cynic was hugging himself in the comfortable conviction that selfishness is a necessary constituent of solid sense, and that enthusiasm in any cause is but the bubbling up of weaker fluid, easily stirred, easily heated, without form or consistency of its own.

As she hurried on her way the sweet sounds and sights of nature seemed for the time to have lost all attraction for Philomel Lamb. A thought came flitting ever and anon across the mind of the maiden,

always thrust impatiently aside, yet ever returning. Again and again the words, "Could I—ought I—no—absurd! impossible!" unconsciously escaped from Philomel's lips, as she approached the green gate which opened on the vicarage lawn, and its half circle of narrow gravel-drive.

Fresh hoof-marks were on that gravel; none had been there when, after her early dinner with her father, Philomel had left her home on her visit to the Villa of Roses. Visitors must have surely been rare, or why should the heart of Philomel have fluttered at sight of those hoof-prints; and why should she have looked so eagerly towards the porch to see if a saddle-horse were standing before it? All thoughts of Caleb Coffin, the Arkwrights, the abbey and the school, at once passed away from her mind. With rapid step Philomel passed along the drive, unconsciously smoothing back from her brow with her hand the light hair that the breezes had ruffled. There was no steed fastened by the rein to the rose-covered porch, yet it was not without a sensation of disappointment that the young lady, on entering the sitting-room, found her father alone.

"Why, Philomel, what has become of you?" was the greeting of the vicar to his daughter, as she hurried in, a little flushed and panting. "The

water is getting cold in the tea-pot. I told Sarah not to bring the tray up till you made your appearance, but Sarah is a bit of clock-work herself, and makes no allowance for the vagaries of young ladies."

"I'm sorry to be late, papa," said Philomel, as she hastily proceeded to perform the duties of the tea-table, after unloosing her straw-hat and throwing her scarf across the back of a chair. Mr. Lamb was a punctual man, and the hands of the little brass clock on the mantelpiece—the most steady-going of clocks—pointed to quarter of an hour beyond the usual time at which the vicar partook of his simple repast.

"Any news, papa?" asked Philomel, as she unlocked the rosewood caddy.

"That wretched business about the school can hardly be called news now," said the vicar; "nothing has ever happened in this parish that has given me more annoyance."

"Has any one been here?" inquired Philomel, with her eyes fixed upon the water which she was pouring into the cups to heat them.

"Yes, poor old Barnes was here; he wants me to get him a weekly allowance from the Board. I think that the honest old fellow should have it; I told him I'd do what I could."

Philomel was persuaded old Barnes had not come upon horseback, and felt no strong interest at that moment in the worn-out ploughman.

“And Mrs. Bullen called for a letter to the G—— Dispensary for her child. I’ll go and see poor little Martha to-morrow; I’m afraid that she’ll never get the better of that attack in her chest.” And the vicar, as he took his seat at the table, looked almost as grave as if the washerwoman’s child had been one of his own.

“Any other visitors, papa?” asked Philomel, after a pause. Had she seen the mark of wheels as well as of hoofs on the gravel, she would have asked the question more boldly.

“Visitors—yes,” said the vicar, rousing himself from an apparently painful train of thought to speak on a subject of indifference. “Young Latour was here; he came just when I was up to my ears in the parish accounts, and sat for nearly an hour. These young fellows seem to think that time is of no more value to others than it is to themselves.”

“I suppose that he’ll be at the bow-meeting to-morrow,” said Philomel Lamb.

“I don’t know—yes—I remember he said that he was going,” replied the vicar; “but really my mind was so much taken up, what with the accounts

and what with the conduct of Coffin regarding my school, that I could scarcely give attention to what my visitor was saying."

Philomel felt provoked with herself for having gone a second time to Burnesbey Abbey upon her unsuccessful mission.

"Stop—that's enough—you've put in three lumps already; I don't want the sugar-basin emptied into my cup," said the vicar good-humouredly. "If the tea prove colourless and cold, you seem resolved at least to have it sweet. I might as well have asked Latour to stay and share our bread and butter," continued the vicar, drawing his cup towards him; "I wish that he had called a little later, when I should have been more at leisure. I like the young man; he is not one of your drawing-room puppies, dangling after ladies, and retailing mere gossip. I believe that Latour has both heart and brains; and he is none the worse for shooting better than any other man in the county."

The vicar himself had been no contemptible archer, and during the earlier period of his residence in Thwayte might have been cited as a specimen of muscular Christianity. Lady Macaw had been somewhat scandalized by the pastor's energetic cricketing on the green with his parishioners, and had often observed that a vicar who would pull off

his coat and rush about madly with butcher-boys and plough-boys, could not have a becoming sense of the dignity of his position, nor inspire respect in his flock. It was certain, however, that Thomas Lamb succeeded in winning their affections, for he threw himself heart and soul into their interests, and would walk twenty miles and miss his dinner any day to serve the poorest of his people. The vicar had for years given up cricketing and archery; Miss Eccles said that he had had no heart for such sports since the death of his poor dear wife; while Lady Macaw averred that Mr. Lamb was growing stout, and that it was not heart but breath that he wanted. In confirmation of the latter opinion, the rosy, cheerful face of the parson was still always seen wherever his people gathered together for harmless amusement; and his hearty "Well done!" would resound over the green when there was a high leap over a hurdle, or a skilful hit at a wicket.

In the pulpit Thomas Lamb was a simple, earnest, straightforward preacher, who forgot himself in his work. He spoke plainly and always to the point, and grappled with sin in his parish, as, in his youth, he would have grappled and wrestled with an opponent in one of the athletic contests in which he then delighted. Thomas Lamb was, however, no

eloquent preacher in the pulpit, no ready writer at the desk. It was no easy matter to the worthy vicar to compose a single sermon in the week, especially since the loss of his wife, who had helped him to write it; and he always on Sundays preached two. Thomas Lamb drew from his library what he could not draw from his brain; and, to the great disgust of Lady Macaw, made no secret of doing so.

“I really, much as I dislike using my carriage on a Sunday, have often to drive to G—— to attend service there,” the lady would say, in a tone of pathetic complaint. “Of course it is right to set an example of regular attendance at a parish-church; and I know, in a village like Thwayte, the people naturally look up for direction to those in a position like mine; but really, to see a clergyman taking a book, a bound book, into the pulpit, shocks all one’s ideas of propriety. I actually presented Mr. Lamb with a black silk manuscript cover, and suggested that if he must preach the sermons of others, he should at any rate copy them out, so that he might at least appear to his congregation to be giving them the fruits of his own toil and study; but he has never had the grace to take the hint, or make use of the cover.”

“If it is right for me to give my flock better sermons than I can make myself, why should I be



ashamed to let them know that I do so?" had been the observation of honest Thomas Lamb. "If a man lend me his good cloak to cover my threadbare suit, it seems to me only fair to let him have credit for the loan."

The vicar of Thwayte was a kind-hearted, cheerful-tempered, hard-working parson, more popular perhaps in the cottage than the hall, but everywhere welcome, and everywhere at home. He enjoyed a good story, he relished a good jest, but never when mirth had the slightest tinge of profanity, or the joke could cause the smallest degree of pain. Thomas Lamb was one of the fondest of fathers; he had been Philomel's playmate in her childhood—quite as fond of a game of romps as herself; and often had the vicar raced up and down the slip of garden at the back of his house with his little one perched on his shoulder, her golden locks streaming behind her, while the mingled laughter of father and daughter sounded merrily on the breeze. Though the gaiety of the Lambs had now a more sober cast, Philomel still found in her surviving parent not only a guide and instructor, but the most genial and cheerful of companions, fondly partial, tenderly indulgent; whose rebuke seldom went beyond a smile and shake of the head, or a playful admonition conveyed in a jest. But Thomas Lamb's own

standard of duty was high ; and he had so impressed his views and principles on his daughter, that the bridle of roses by which he held her was in his hands a very powerful curb. Philomel would have shrunk more from bringing a cloud over that frank loving face, whose smile made brightness in her home, than many a girl would from bringing upon herself the sternest displeasure of a parent less tenderly beloved.

There was no smile on the face of the vicar, however, as he sat with his daughter at their humble repast in the twilight of that spring evening. There was an unwonted stamp of care on the brow of the pastor, and not a single story or joke escaped him as he slowly stirred his tea and emptied his plate. Philomel also felt little inclined to converse. Her thoughts, however, were of a more chequered character than those of her father, sunshine or shadow prevailing as they reverted to the disappointments of the day, or the expected pleasures of the morrow. To judge by the softened yet bright expression of her blue eyes, the sunshine predominated ; for at the silent tea-table, as in the flowery fields, Philomel was indulging in day-dreams. From these she was roused by an exclamation from her father, whose meditations had been of a more sombre and practical cast.

“It will do incalculable mischief!” and a sigh followed which came from the depth of the vicar’s soul.

“Ah, papa, you were thinking of the school.”

“I was thinking of the public-house,” said Mr. Lamb, pushing back his chair and rising from the table. “Here have I been for twenty years battling against drunkenness in my village, giving up my own glass of ale for the sake of example; and when I hoped that I was showing a good front to the foe, there comes my own brother-in-law and attacks me, as it were, from the rear. Look at poor Wakefield, father of six children (every one of them attending the school); he is just struggling out of the mire, making resolutions not to drink, and keeping them sometimes for three weeks at a time; what chance will he have to become a sober fellow at last, when a new public-house is planted almost opposite to his own door; and where will these wretched children of a drunkard be taught anything but mischief, when the only school-house within four miles of them is turned into a pest-house instead!” The vicar used a good deal of gesture in speaking, and his manner, usually animated, had now the warmth of just indignation.

“I wish that Sir John had lived till he was a hundred years old,” cried Philomel.

“I wonder whether you could do anything with your uncle?” said the vicar, as the idea suddenly presented itself to his mind. “He cared not a straw for my words; I’ve not much of the knack of persuasion, but a woman can sometimes coax when a man cannot convince; and you, Philomel”—the father’s hand was on the shoulder of his daughter, playing with her soft golden tresses—“you have been rather a pet with your uncle; suppose that you take him in hand.”

“I have been twice at the abbey to-day,” said Philomel Lamb.

“Ah, I might have been sure that you would leave no stone unturned. You are the willing horse, my darling, that never needs the spurring. But, of course, your request, like my own, met with flat refusal. Had the least hope been held out by Caleb, you would have shared it with me at once.”

Had honest Thomas Lamb been fronting his daughter instead of standing behind her; looking at her countenance suffused with crimson, instead of toying with her curls, notwithstanding the deepening shades of approaching night, he must have seen the confusion caused by his observation. That confusion became more painful as the vicar went on. “I know that you have the matter just as much at heart as I have, and I would willingly part

with my right hand to preserve that school to my village."

A sharp pang shot through the heart of Philomel. She rose hastily and busied herself with putting by sugar, locking the caddy, and ringing the bell for Sarah to clear away the tea-things and bring the lighted candle. Philomel then brought her work-basket from its corner. This was the hour when the vicar delighted to listen to her music—to hear, as he said, his nightingale sing in the gloaming—but Philomel felt this evening that she had not the heart to sing. After Sarah had brought in the single light, Philomel proposed that her father should read aloud to her as she worked; Mr. Lamb made an attempt to do so, but neither he nor his daughter could fix their thoughts on the page. The volume was soon closed, and the vicar's conversation again recurred to the school. Philomel, bending over her needle, was a very silent listener.

Thus the evening wore on heavily till the time had arrived for Bible-reading and prayer. In his simply-expressed supplications, the vicar especially remembered the subject then uppermost in his mind. He earnestly prayed that He who has all hearts in his hand would preserve the village-school, and make it a blessing to many; and give to those who had power to help it a ready will, a self-sacrificing spirit.

As Philomel knelt by her father's side, two bright drops fell from her closed eyes upon her clasped fingers, but so faint was her whispered "Amen" at the close, that it reached no human ear.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A GOLDEN STRING.



THE brightest day may close in wind and rain —the joyous hopes which spring from the young heart, like free birds on the wing, be driven back chilled and drooping, like the same birds cowering for shelter from the rattling hail and roughening blast. How different was Philomel when she sought her quiet chamber that night from what she had seemed when, with elastic step, she had crossed the fields on her way to Burnesbey Abbey ! Schemes of philanthropy had then blended in her fancy with dreams of earthly delight, so closely intertwined, that she had deluded herself into the idea that she was devoting herself to her duty. Caleb Coffin's hand had rudely drawn aside a silvery veil, had disenchanting fairy-land, and awakened a dreamer who would willingly have dreamed on her pleasant dream still.

Philomel Lamb sat at her toilette-table, before

an old-fashioned oval mirror; the light of a single candle fell upon her fair face and luxuriant hair, and their reflection in the glass looked like some antique picture of a Saxon beauty, with a dark background to throw out the figure. Almost as motionless as if they were indeed a work of the painter's art, the thoughtful sad eyes from the mirror, seemed to gaze into the living eyes which they reflected. Philomel was lost in thought, and scarcely conscious that she was looking upon her own image, as she sat with her cheek resting on the hand which was half hidden beneath tresses of falling gold.

“He said that he would give his right hand,” murmured Philomel, “and with him it was no idle boast; what my father says, he would do. For the good of his flock, for the honour of his Master, I believe, I know that my father would cheerfully bear the loss, the suffering, the dependence which such a sacrifice must bring. And I,—no anguish of frame, no daily, hourly deprivation of comfort is required of me; a temporary disfigurement, a sacrifice of petty vanity is all that is now asked, and from that sacrifice I draw back! Yet, in my enthusiasm, I have oft envied the missionary's labours, almost coveted the martyr's crown. It has seemed nothing strange to me that tenderly nurtured women





Philomel Lamb sat at her toilet table.



should give themselves up to a living death, hardship, separation from all that they loved, if but the sacrifice could be sweetened by thought that it was accepted. I have longed for more ample means, that I might employ my wealth in works of charity. Now every one of these locks is worth a hundred times its weight in gold ! In a few seconds, I could do more for the good of others than I am likely to accomplish in all the course of my future life. My uncle would keep his word, he has never yet broken his promise ; he believes, indeed, that he will never be called upon to fulfil it, that a woman's vanity must be stronger within her than mercy, gratitude, devotion ! Can he be right—can he be right, at least, in his judgment of *mine* !”

Philomel raised her head, and stretched out the hand upon which it had been resting towards a small work-box, which lay so near that she could reach it without rising. Slowly she drew the box towards her, slowly she opened it, and took out a little pair of scissors, fashioned in the shape of a stork, the two points uniting to form the bill. Philomel's large cutting-out scissors were in her work-basket below, in the sitting-room, where the vicar, whose hours were later than his daughter's, usually read or wrote for some time before he retired to rest. Mr. Lamb was neither reading nor writing

at this moment; Philomel heard the sound of his steps as he paced up and down the room below, as he never did but when his mind was troubled.

“Oh, that I could but go to him now!” thought Philomel, with her hand on the scissors, “lay my head upon his shoulder, ask his advice, tell him what is disturbing my conscience. If I had but papa’s smile and word of encouragement, I believe—yes—I do believe, that I could let his dear fingers clip off every one of these locks. He would be more proud of his school than ever, if he owed its preservation to his child. But I must not consult even my father, he must not know my secret; if he did, it would soon be a secret to no one.” Philomel smiled to herself, as she thought how impossible it would be to her parent to keep silence upon such a subject. “Why, I might make papa angry at the very time when I was doing my utmost to please him. Lady Macaw would have the credit of being the one to influence my uncle, and confer a benefit upon all the village.” And, in the mirror of her fancy, Philomel saw the lady patroness of Thwayte in her sweeping robe of rustling silk, with a smile even more self-complacent than usual, receiving congratulations and thanks from the little circle of which she was the self-constituted queen. Impatiently Philomel pushed the scissors aside, she would never sacrifice her hair to

swell the pride of that stately dame. Let the school be given up, rather than be retained as a memorial of what one pushing, managing, ostentatious woman could accomplish.

“There comes the spirit of emulation and pride again,” exclaimed the vicar’s daughter, half aloud; “the very spirit which impelled me onwards a few hours ago, is now drawing me back. Why should I care, if another be thanked and lauded for a work which is not her own? I must prize, indeed, those crackling bank-notes of praise, when I am thus jealous of their being appropriated by another. Where is my purity of motive? Where my simple desire to do my duty, seeking for no earthly reward?”

Philomel took up the scissors; again she fixedly gazed into the glass of the old-fashioned mirror. “Cutting off the hair—why, to that every nun submits before she takes the black veil! But then, all the world knows why the nun is clipped, and she has not to go the next day to an archery-meeting.” The point of the scissors drooped, the hold on the rings relaxed;—fair reader, had you been in Philomel’s place, would you have grasped them more firmly?

For several minutes Philomel sat buried in thought, or listening to the restless footsteps heard

from below, or the mellow note of a nightingale warbling from a neighbouring tree. Then again the maiden raised the scissors, opened them, and enclosed one fair little lock within the gaping bill of the stork—but she had not the courage to press the two steel rings together. Pride and jealousy might be overcome indeed, but there was a more powerful obstacle than either in the heart of the poor little maiden. A very different form from that of Lady Macaw was flitting before her fancy. Once more the stork, and the little hand which held it, rested upon the table—the released tress fell again to its accustomed place on Philomel's temple. The maiden shook her head, as if in reply to some question which she put to herself, and leaving the scissors before the mirror, rose and went to the window.

Philomel drew back the little white muslin curtain, opened the lattice, and looked forth into the night. The balmy spring-air came softly through the leaves of the clustering creepers, cooled the maiden's flushed cheek, and stirred her golden hair. In the deep blue vault a few stars were glimmering with pale pure light. There are few things that so raise and solemnize the mind as silent contemplation of these orbs of beauty. Philomel thought for how many ages these "sentinel

stars had kept watch in the sky," while generations of men came and passed, like successive waves on the beach, rising, rolling onward with their freight of hopes, fears, sorrows, and joys, breaking and passing away. Thousands of years before, the same feelings which moved her spirit had influenced hearts which were now undistinguishable dust!

" They suffered—but their pangs are o'er;  
Enjoyed—but their delights are fled;  
Had friends—their friends are now no more;  
And foes—their foes are dead!"

Was there then nothing enduring amidst that ever-flowing tide and ebb of human existence and decay, nothing firm and solid, nothing abiding, more lasting even than those stars upon which Eve gazed from Eden? Yes; the memory, the joy, the blessing of God on the smallest act done *unto Him!*

The mind of Philomel reverted to her father, his simple earnestness, his fervent prayer; and linked with that thought came one, if sadder yet sweeter, of the deathbed by which she had once stood in childish awe, which almost overpowered sorrow, when she had felt the last pressure of a thin wasted hand on her head, and heard a mother's faintly-whispered blessing. But Philomel now thought not of her mother as dead. Might not the spirit's home be amongst those glittering stars; might she not be

hovering near, her eyes looking down on her child ; could her voice be heard on the night-breeze, would it not be an echo of what conscience was even now whispering so clearly ?

Philomel turned suddenly from the casement, her eyes brimming over with tears. She took up the little scissors and again enclosed a golden fore-lock. This time she did her work in earnest. But it seemed as if the delicate instrument refused to obey her will ; Philomel found a mechanical difficulty in severing the hair by the bill of the stork—the screw of the scissors loosened with the strain on the lever, and some seconds elapsed ere the forelock dropped on the toilette-table—the first real sacrifice, perhaps, that the vicar's daughter ever had made.

A gasping sigh escaped from the maiden as she gazed on the soft severed tress which lay before her ; she was startled at her own act. It was cutting the bridge behind her, for it would be almost as difficult to account for the loss of one lock as for that of all ; the sacrifice of the first made that of the rest more easy—more indispensable—for if it remained alone it would be a sacrifice made in vain. But Philomel laid down the little fancy scissors.

“ I should be half the night cutting off my hair with these,” she said to herself ; “ I will go for the



large pair in my basket down-stairs as soon as papa has left the parlour; just now I could not bear to meet him."

A strange feeling of impatience came over Philomel Lamb. Either she mistrusted her own resolution, or the delay in its execution was to her a prolonged mental torture from which she longed to escape. The sound of her father's tramping excited in the girl painful nervous irritation. To soothe it Philomel employed the waiting-time in devotion, making the school for which she was sacrificing so much, a subject for special prayer. Philomel remained on her knees till she heard the parlour door open, and then her father's well-known tread up the stair. She rose and intuitively counted each step, and listened to hear the closing of Mr. Lamb's door, before, with a nervous touch, she noiselessly opened her own.

The staircase was quite dark, save for the feeble glimmer of starlight through the unshuttered window which looked on the staircase; but Philomel could find her way about the familiar dwelling without need of using her eyes. She knew well the little table in the angle of the sitting-room where her basket was regularly placed at night, for order as well as punctuality was the rule in the vicarage of Thwayte. Philomel in the darkness easily found

what she sought, but the cold feel of the scissors made her shiver as she carried it away.

Mr. Lamb heard the rustle of her dress as she re-ascended the stairs. He opened his door a little, surprised at his daughter's moving about the house at so late an hour.

"My darling, is anything wrong? Why are you not at rest?" he inquired.

"I only went for my scissors, papa," replied Philomel Lamb.

There was a "Good night," and a "Bless you, my child!" The blessing went warm to poor Philomel's heart, and when she had regained her own apartment, she set to her stern work with more courage.

There was certainly nothing of the stoic about the vicar's daughter. Philomel dared scarcely trust herself to think of what she was doing; but as each tress was shorn from her head, she tried to fix her thoughts upon some individual child in her little school-class who would benefit by the sacrifice which she was painfully making.

"There is for my little Mary. She did not plead to-day in vain, but she little guessed what the pleading would cost me. There is for my dark-eyed Katie; how her eyes will sparkle to-morrow when she hears the good news that my uncle will keep up

the school! There is for Annie Wakefield, poor child, who prays night and morning that father may keep sober." This blending of personal interest in individuals did not detract from Philomel's "purity of motive," while it softened the pain of sacrifice, and increased her "strength of self-denial."

It was over—all over—at last; the golden fleece lay a mass of rich beauty on Philomel's knee; she had done what could not be undone. Did the maiden repent of the act? She could hardly have answered that question, but she dared not look in her mirror. Philomel gathered the fair hair in a little heap and placed it upon her toilette-table; she then rose and went to a drawer, from which she took out a white card-board box. From this she emptied out the contents—a few ribbons, laces, and trinkets, which had once belonged to her mother. Philomel returned to her seat with the box, and then, one by one, placed in it the golden tresses which since her childhood had been her richest adornment. The girl handled each lock with a kind of tender regret, as though it had been a living thing—and if she left a few diamond drops on the gold, few young ladies will blame her for the weakness. Philomel closed the lid over the box which held her offering, went to her little desk, and wrote a few hurried lines:—


“The other conditions will be kept as faithfully as the first. Remember your part of the bond.”

Philomel put the note on the top of the box, enclosed the whole in paper; and after carefully sealing up the parcel, addressed it to Caleb Coffin. A little flash of triumph came over the maiden's spirit as she directed that packet. She fancied the look of surprise on the crafty merchant's face when he should raise the lid of the box, and see the golden contents. Would not the cynic be convinced at last that woman is capable of making a silent sacrifice, not only of her selfishness but of her vanity!

And so the weary girl at last retired to rest, with a sweet consciousness that she had indeed kept her promise, and done her best—she would not now reflect at what a price. If her sleep was not altogether refreshing—if her dreams were troubled—it was because there was one special hope—undefined, unconfessed, yet perhaps the most precious of all—that was driven shivering back upon her heart, as the bird cowering in its nest from the force of the pitiless storm.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### SOMETHING TO BEAR.



HE day broke in sunny beauty. At "the breezy call of incense-breathing morn," the merry birds filled the air with their twittering, and the bleat of the lamb was heard from the meadow. Man roused himself to his various labours. The sound of the woodcutter's axe came from the forest, the clink of iron from the village forge, and the slow creak of the waggon from the lane. Under the eaves the swallows were chattering, and the "cock's shrill clarion" rose from the yard. Pleasant was the blending of rural sounds which roused Philomel to consciousness that another day had begun.

But the vicar's daughter awoke with a sense of oppression at her heart which excluded all pleasure, a feeling that some strange thing had occurred, that something painful was before her, though when she first opened her blue eyes to the light, full con-

sciousness had not returned, and she knew not what caused the oppressive sensation. Then she felt a chilliness at her head, and intuitively Philomel put up her hand to that which some hours before had been so warmly, as well as so richly, clothed; the first touch recalled to her in a moment all that had happened upon the preceding evening.

How different often are our sensations in the morning from those experienced in the night—in what an altered light events and objects appear! If Philomel had been earnest, resolute, devoted, when the quiet stars were shining over her—if the curtain of night had seemed to shut out the world—all her courage and spirit of self-sacrifice now appeared to have faded away with the stars. She sprang from her pillow with a feeling akin to desperation, and for the first half-hour, while her fingers intuitively went on with her toilette preparations, her mind was wildly revolving schemes of escape from the consequences of what appeared to her now a senseless, almost suicidal, act. Where should she hide herself—what could she do? should she feign sickness, keep her apartment, shroud herself in darkness from the gaze of inquisitive eyes, the reach of impertinent gossip? Philomel was half wild with vexation when she looked at herself in her mirror; there was a choking sensation in her throat; but

she was too much excited to cry, she was rather disposed in a fit of passionate distress to fling herself down on the floor. This was all very childish indeed, but poor Philomel was no heroine. She had done what could not be undone, and was not able at first to remember that "things without remedy should be without regard," and that the loss of her golden fleece was not the heaviest of misfortunes.

The first thing to soften the distress of the shorn lamb was the distant sound of children's voices singing a hymn which Philomel had herself taught them in the little school-house on the moor. She threw open her lattice to let in the music, and with it came in the sweet morning air, laden with perfume from the garden. Tears came into Philomel's eyes as she listened, and then she turned them towards the parcel which she had directed to Caleb Coffin on the preceding night, and something of thankful pleasure mingled now with her pain.

"It has not been for naught; there is comfort at least in that thought. If I am a loser, others are gainers. Those dear little voices—how sweet they sound! I think that they were sent to cheer me, and give me courage to go on; for go on I must! I am like one climbing a cliff, who has reached a point whence he cannot go back. I must not stop

on my way, or the fruit of my effort is lost. I must go on—I must go on!” Philomel repeated these last words again and again. If, according to her own simile, she had been as one clambering up the steep face of a cliff, till there was no way of turning or descending, a jutting crag seemed to be overshadowing her now; her nerve was failing her, her courage was sinking, and yet she must rise above that obstacle, or all the hard upward struggle already experienced would avail her nothing.

Philomel's window looked out on a fair lawn girdled with shrubbery, dotted with parterres. The village lay beyond it, backed by the wood, and above the trees rose the tower of the church, its gilt weathercock gleaming bright in the morning beam. Job, the labourer employed at the vicarage, was standing on the dew-sprinkled lawn, by the lines of newly-mown grass, whetting his scythe, and merrily whistling. There were sounds of movement within the dwelling. Philomel heard Sarah the maid setting down the jug of hot water and the cleaned boots outside the door of the vicar's apartment. It was time that another step should be taken on Philomel's difficult path, another point by an effort be gained. She called the maid to her room, strangely dreading to meet even the eye of the simple Scottish general-servant.



Sarah obeyed the young lady's call. Philomel did not look at her as she entered; fancy painted vividly enough the expression of blank amazement on the face of the maid as she saw her mistress for the first time divested of all her long flowing hair. Philomel pointed to the parcel which lay on the table, and in as steady a voice as she could command bade Sarah ask Job to take it directly to Burnesbey Abbey. Philomel had to repeat the order in a more peremptory tone before it was obeyed, for the servant was so much astonished by what she saw, that she could scarcely take in the sense of what she heard. It was a relief to the vicar's daughter when Sarah had quitted the room with that precious packet, though Philomel was persuaded that the first words which would escape the maid's lips would be, "Sure my young leddy has gone clean daft!"

Philomel watched Job from her window as he stopped in his mowing to receive the message and parcel from Sarah. Few words seemed to pass between the two. Job wiped his scythe, hung it up in a blossoming lilac, took up his fustian jacket which had lain on the gravel drive, put it on, and then set off on his errand, little guessing what were the contents of the small white parcel which he carried under his arm.

“I have now compromised myself fully,” murmured Philomel Lamb to herself, as Job passed through the green gate, and she heard its clink as it swung back behind him. “He carries my plighted promise as well as my hair. Oh, may my uncle faithfully fulfil his part of a bond as strange as that made by Shylock, I had almost said—as cruel!”

Philomel, though heavy-hearted, was no longer excited. The Rubicon had been crossed, there was no more painful struggling with indecision and doubt. The vicar’s daughter quietly read her chapter, and knelt at her morning devotions; she had never engaged in them with a more simple, confiding faith. There is to a loving heart a sweetness in sacrifice; notwithstanding all her fears and regrets, when Philomel rose from her knees she felt no longer unhappy.

“Oh, that I could but tell my father why I have done this,” murmured Philomel half aloud, as she heard the vicar descending the stairs. “For the first time in my life I fear to face him. Papa will be so much surprised, so much annoyed; my conduct will seem so inexplicable to him. His vexation will be the worst—or almost the worst—part of my trial.” Philomel went to her drawer, took out her small store of ribbons, carried them to her

toilette table, and forced herself to look calmly into the mirror. She must wear no false hair—even had any been at hand, that was a part of her bond—but she might soften the effect of the disfigurement which the loss of her ringlets occasioned. Philomel used the scissors here and there where the golden fleece had been hastily and unevenly clipped; and she bound a blue ribbon round her temples, letting the ends fall behind on her shoulders. The maiden felt little satisfied with the effect of her simple coiffure, and yet not all the charm of her face had been lost with her curls. The contour of the head was classical, the hair on it smooth and shining as gold, the countenance beneath looked more youthful than ever, with its rosy blush, and expression of mingled shyness and sweetness.

Thrice Philomel went to the top of the staircase, thrice she returned to her own apartment, before she could summon up courage sufficient to meet her father at the breakfast-table before family prayers. Delay, however, could not make the inevitable trial more easy to be borne, and when Philomel did enter the parlour at last, it was with a rapid, hurried step. The vicar had his back to the door when it was opened by his daughter, he was looking out the chapter for the day; but when he turned round and suddenly confronted Philomel, his surprise at her

altered appearance was expressed in an ejaculation which was rarely known to escape from his lips.

“Bless me,” cried the vicar three times, and each time with stronger emphasis, “what has the child done with her hair!”

Philomel went up to her father for her usual morning salute, but instead of giving it the vicar held her back by her shoulders, that he might gaze with a long, puzzled, scrutinizing look at the head shorn of its locks. Embarrassed and distressed by his gaze, poor Philomel dared not raise her eyes, and felt her whole countenance suffused with a burning glow.

“What mad freak is this?” said the vicar at last in a tone of displeasure. “You are the last person whom I should have expected to play the fool in a silly attempt to follow the fashion.”

“It is not the fashion at all,” replied Philomel, scarcely knowing whether to cry or to laugh.

“Fashion or not—it is frightful; you look like a charity-child,” bluntly observed the vicar. “I hate the masses of false hair with which girls now-a-days disfigure their heads, and I thought that the pendulum of fashion might be swinging back to no hair at all, but the latter fancy would be the most absurd of the two.”

“I hope, papa, that you don’t mind much,” said

Philomel, timidly approaching and giving the kiss which her parent, for once, did not return.

“Well, I suppose that a girl has a right to do what she pleases with her own hair; dress it like a Chinese or an Ojibeway Indian, if it takes her fancy to do so,” said the vicar, still looking a good deal disturbed; “but I am sorry that a daughter of mine should make herself the talk of the village. Of course you do not intend to show your cropped poll at the archery-meeting to-day.”

“Indeed, papa, I believe—I think—I know that I mustn’t break my engagement.”

The vicar merely shrugged his shoulders, and to Philomel’s relief at that moment Sarah came in for family prayers.

At breakfast the vicar was unusually silent. When Sarah brought in the steaming kettle, she observed to herself that master looked put out, and no wonder, he had taken such pleasure in Miss Philomel’s hair. Mr. Lamb was, however, a good-tempered man, and had a kindly heart. He saw that his daughter was pained, and he would not distress her by questions. Only, during breakfast-time, Philomel several times found her father looking at her short hair with a perplexed and troubled expression.

“I shall not dine at home to-day,” said Mr. Lamb, as he concluded his meal; “I shall go to see Bullen’s

sick child, and then on to G——. I shall look in there on the rector, and probably take early dinner with him."

"Then will you not accompany me to the archery-meeting, papa?" asked Philomel, who dreaded facing the company without the support of her father's presence.

"Not accompany you, but join you there. I shall be in time, no doubt, to see you receive the silver arrow, if you win the prize," said the vicar smiling. "But, in truth," he added, more gravely, "I am scarcely in a mood for all these gay doings to-day. This niggardly conduct of Coffin's weighs on my spirits; my own village will look as strange to me without my school, as—as you do, child, without your ringlets."

"Oh, papa, I don't despair of our keeping on the school!" exclaimed Philomel, with a brighter glance than had beamed on her face since she had met her father that morning.

The vicar sighed, and shook his head. "Caleb Coffin," he observed, "is not a man to be changed by a word or led by a hair."

"We shall see," said Philomel, smiling; and as she went up the stairs to her room her heart felt much lighter than it had done when she had descended them before breakfast.

## CHAPTER IX.

### R A N D O M   S H O T S.



"HAT will be my uncle's reply to my note? Will he write? will he come? He will be a little sorry, I think, for the loss of my poor hair; but a great deal more sorry for the loss of his money." Such were

the thoughts perpetually recurring to the mind of Philomel Lamb, as she pursued her little household avocations, or, seated in her own apartment, completed her simple preparations for the afternoon's fête by fastening collar and cuffs on the white muslin dress with blue forget-me-nots printed upon it, which she was to wear at the archery-meeting. Philomel's fancy moved more rapidly than her needle, and several times she laid down her work, and went to her little flower-mantled casement to see if no messenger were in sight coming from the direction of Burnesbey Abbey. Was it possible that her uncle would deceive her; would the close-fisted,

cold-hearted cynic actually discover some method of keeping his promise to the ear, and breaking it to the sense? Philomel felt indignant with herself at letting such a suspicion cross her mind for a moment.

The clock on the stairs had just struck the mid-day hour, as if echoing the chime from the church, when Philomel once more went to her casement, and looked down on the shrubbery and lawn. Her father was quitting the vicarage to go on his errands of kindness, umbrella in hand, according to his invariable habit, though there was not a cloud in the sky.

“ An honest man, tight buttoned to the chin,  
Broadcloth without, and a warm heart within.”

Mr. Lamb had just issued from under the porch of the vicarage, when Philomel heard the familiar click of the shrubbery gate, and saw Miss Eccles, in her faded green poplin, with her long veil hanging limp behind her, hurrying into the grounds as fast as lameness would let her. The face of the elderly lady was all aglow with delight, her mouth expanded in the broadest of smiles; it might be merely from pleasure at meeting her pastor, but a child could have read fair weather in the barometer of that kindly old face. Miss Eccles held an open note in her hand, and Philomel guessed from her eager gesture that the note must contain good news.



The vicar's daughter watched with curious interest the meeting between her father and her friend, though she could not at the distance distinguish a word that was uttered. Miss Eccles met her pastor half-way on the gravel drive, with both her hands extended towards him; she said something as she held out the note to Mr. Lamb, which made him give a little start of pleasure or surprise. Of course, his back was towards the vicarage; Philomel as she bent forward from the casement would have given anything for a glimpse of her father's face, for she guessed what were the tidings which the joyful messenger had brought. Her wish was quickly gratified; as Mr. Lamb returned the note to Miss Eccles he turned suddenly round, looked up at the window at which his daughter was standing, every feature of his countenance radiant with honest pleasure, took off his hat and waved it aloft, then joyously went on his way.

Philomel ran down-stairs to welcome Miss Eccles and hear the glad tidings of which she was evidently the bearer; in the excitement of joy and hope, the lamb quite forgot the loss of her fleece.

She met Miss Eccles in the porch. The elderly lady was smiling and panting, but the expression of her face changed by a sudden transition to that of wonder, when her glance fell on the vicar's daughter.

"Why, Philomel," she exclaimed, drawing back, "who on earth has been clipping off your hair?"

"Never mind my hair, tell me your news!" cried Philomel eagerly, catching from the hand of her old friend the open note, in which she recognized the formal, peculiar handwriting of Caleb Coffin.

"Lady Macaw sent it for you and your father to see; she received it not half an hour since. I chanced to be calling. But, dear heart! dear heart! what has become of your beautiful golden curls?"

Philomel scarcely heard the question, she was eagerly reading the note, which was brief, as the epistles of Caleb Coffin were wont to be.

"DEAR MADAM,—There are some arguments which cannot be refuted, some requests which cannot be denied. It is possible that woman's persuasion may after all prep up the school, and turn an old cynic into a philanthropist in spite of himself. You shall know my final decision at the archery-meeting to-day.—Faithfully yours,

"CALEB COFFIN."

"To think of his granting to Lady Macaw what he refused to you and your dear excellent father! 'Tis a strange world," exclaimed Miss Eccles. "I little knew that the tiny pink note which I carried myself to the abbey would have worked such a wonderful charm. It must have been a very clever, coaxing letter indeed. She is a remarkable woman, is Lady Macaw. You should see her pride and de-

light; she is really looking ten years younger to-day. She told me that she had never yet set her heart upon any object which she did not accomplish; that she had felt persuaded from the first that she could twist the old man round her finger."

"She had better not let the old man know that she says so," observed Philomel with a smile, as she accompanied her visitor into the parlour.

Philomel's pleasure at her own success was not to be without much alloy. She needed all its sustaining power to enable her to endure with tolerable patience the cross-questioning which followed from the elderly lady regarding the loss of her tresses. The weakness of Miss Eccles was curiosity, and, with all her kindliness of nature, she was utterly deficient in tact. She was very inquisitive, very desirous to know why Philomel had so disfigured herself, what she intended to make of her hair, whether it were to be turned into a wig, or whether—here Miss Eccles lowered her tone to a mysterious whisper—she meant to sell it for some charitable purpose; she had heard before of such strange things being done. Philomel, half amused, half angry, and a good deal perplexed, felt inclined to make some excuse for escaping to her own room, and so abruptly ending a conversation which teased her almost beyond her powers of endurance.

“Why, here come the Langtons!” exclaimed Miss Eccles, suddenly interrupting herself in the midst of an earnest recommendation of Macassar oil, to stimulate the growth of short hair.

“Oh, I can’t stand all this!” thought poor Philomel, starting to her feet, and feeling like a hunted creature in her own father’s home.

Lucy Langton, eager and impetuous as usual, came in first, brimful of news; she had heard by this time—all the village had heard—of the note to Lady Macaw, and the story, passing from mouth to mouth, had of course received additions by the way. The Langtons—after calling to congratulate the Arkwrights—had hastened on to the vicarage to tell Philomel, should she not have heard of it already, that Mr. Coffin, in the handsomest manner, had made a gift of schoolhouse and endowment to the lady of the Villa of Roses! But the rapid current of Lucy’s thoughts was quickly turned into a new channel by her first glance at Philomel Lamb. Bursting into an uncontrollable fit of merriment, the young lady threw herself into an arm chair, and rocked herself backwards and forwards, almost convulsed with laughter. Lucy could hardly articulate between her bursts of mirth, “Shorn lamb! shorn lamb! what has become of your fleece?”

Lucy’s exuberant merriment was infectious, and

though Miss Eccles bit her own lip and pinched her own arm to suppress by pain her inclination to join in it, and Delia, pressing her handkerchief to her mouth, turned away towards the window, Philomel found herself the unwilling cause of great amusement to the three ladies, a position which caused her considerable embarrassment and annoyance.

“I seem to afford you a good deal of diversion,” said the poor young girl, struggling to speak in a tone of good humour.

“Oh, dear child, I beg your pardon!” cried Lucy, with tears of laughter in her merry black eyes; “but really you do look so funny, as if you had just come out of an hospital or a prison—or—or a lunatic asylum!” A little explosive sound of mirth escaped from under Delia’s handkerchief, and Miss Eccles desperately walked to the piano, and pretended to examine the pieces of music on the top. “But I don’t know when wonders will cease. If the owl suddenly is transformed into a bird of paradise—the last thing I should ever have expected—it is no wonder if the nightingale herself appears in the new character of an unfledged yellow—”

“Come, come, you’re too hard on her,” tittered Delia; “there’s no accounting for tastes; perhaps Philomel has been studying the becomings, or has anticipated a new style of coiffure not yet intro-

duced from Paris, and we shall all be roundheads before winter!" This weak attempt at a jest elicited another burst of laughter, though Miss Eccles, who had returned to her seat, cried again and again, "'Tis too bad!" more in the way of self-reproach than of rebuke to the others.

"Perhaps, when your mirth has exhausted itself, you will tell me what you meant by the owl becoming a bird of paradise," said poor Philomel, who was anxious to effect a diversion.

"Oh! have you not heard?—surely you must know," cried Lucy, eagerly; "Miss Eccles must have told you what has made all Thwayte beside itself with joy. We were at the schoolhouse just now, and you should have seen the rejoicings, heard the clamour. Mrs. Arkwright was almost in tears."

The countenance of Philomel brightened.

"But to think of Mr. Coffin's granting the boon to Lady Macaw," cried Delia; "it really detracts from one's pleasure at having the school retained. Her ladyship stood on a high enough pedestal already."

"I expect to have a proposition to have Lady Macaw's statue in the market-place of G—— instead of Lord ——'s," laughed Lucy. "I'm certain there will be a paragraph in the *Times*, all about the school, and probably a picture of it in the

*Illustrated.* It will be the Macaw School from this time forward, for one could not call it the 'Coffin,' you know."

"Certainly Lady Macaw will take good care that the world is informed of her share in the matter," lisped Delia.

"I wonder," observed Lucy, "whether the benefactress and patroness of Thwayte ever heard of the lines,—

' Who builds a church to God, and not to fame,  
Will ne'er inscribo the marble with his name.'

They come into my mind so often when I am at the Villa of Roses."

"Come come, my dear, Lady Macaw is a very charitable kind creature," said Miss Eccles, grateful for an invitation to the archery-meeting.

"She beats out her gold very thin, and makes it cover a marvellous wide space," said Lucy. "I should like to know the exact point at which gold takes the title of gilding."

"She has done a good deed now," expostulated the elderly lady; "have you seen Mr. Coffin's note to Lady Macaw?"

"I should like to see it of all things!" cried Lucy; "it would be a most amusing specimen of the correspondence of a cynic metamorphosed into a courtier."

Miss Eccles had already drawn from her bag the note which she had brought to the vicarage. It was eagerly seized upon by Lucy, who read it aloud, mimicking the tone of Caleb Coffin as she did so. As she concluded the little epistle, she dropped her hands on her knee with the exclamation, "Depend on't, 'tis all a take in! The old miser is laughing in his sleeve at the lady who lets herself be humbugged so readily!"

"What do you mean?" cried poor Miss Eccles, looking aghast at the doubt suggested.

"Don't you see," exclaimed Lucy, striking the paper, "he does not compromise himself; he promises nothing; that word 'may' is a loophole through which he can always back out."

"Certainly," observed Delia, "from what I heard I had imagined that Mr. Coffin had given a much more decided assurance of his intentions to Lady Macaw."

"She'll find her pedestal crumbling beneath her," said Lucy, laughing as she returned the note to Miss Eccles, who looked crest-fallen and anxious. "I wish that I were as sure of the silver arrow to-day as I am that the owl is not a bird to be caught by any spring prepared for him at the Villa of Roses."

The visitors soon after took their departure, and



Philomel seemed to breathe more freely when they had gone; but the ridicule to which she had been subjected had left a sore pang behind. "Will *he* regard me as they regarded, though chivalrous courtesy will prevent him from showing outwardly what he thinks?" was the question which she asked herself with a sinking heart. "I have had trial enough for one day—I cannot, dare not meet *him* at the archery-fête. And yet, what Lucy observed is true. My wary uncle has not compromised himself yet—he is doubtless in hopes that though I have fulfilled his first condition, I will shrink back from the last. He *has* kept a loop-hole open, and I—I only—can close it! Heigh-ho! 'tis a painful ordeal! I would that the day were over!"

The idea of entering a nunnery or a prison would scarcely at that moment have appeared so formidable to Philomel, as that of joining a gay throng of neighbours and acquaintances at that fête to which she had once looked forward with keenest delight.

## CHAPTER X.

### WHO WINS THE PRIZE?



**M**OST auspiciously shone the sun on the fête at the Villa of Roses; no weather could be more favourable for an archery-meeting; there was not even a puff of southerly breeze to blow an arrow aside. Soft white clouds lay like snowy mountains on the horizon; all above was blue as the sky of Italy.

Lady Macaw, brilliant in a dress that might have suited a duchess, and with a gracious condescension of manner that might have befitted a queen, received her numerous guests at the top of the steps which led down into her pretty pleasure-grounds, beyond which lay the field with the targets. The terrace, where an hour before nothing had been heard but the song of a bird, was now crowded with gaily-dressed ladies, and the hum of their voices filled the air. The school of Thwayte afforded a topic which superseded even that of the weather. Lady Macaw im-

parted information and received congratulations on all hands, with serene self-consciousness of having well earned the laurels on which she reposed. The unfavourable opinion which she had formed of the master of Burnesbey Abbey had been much modified by his note ; though even that, as she owned, betrayed an ignorance of the forms of society such as might hardly have been expected in a man of his station. " Mr. Coffin," Lady Macaw blandly observed, " is one whose character is misunderstood by many, and therefore severely judged. He has a great knowledge of the world, but has unfortunately not seen the best side of it. But there is a great deal of warmth of heart and generosity of nature under a cynical manner ; and no doubt, with a little judicious advice from those whom he trusts and esteems, our good friend will soon understand and fulfil all the duties attending his position."

Carriage after carriage set down its fair freight, and dresses and parasols of every hue gave to the lawn the appearance of an animated flower-bed. The gentlemen-archers and some of the ladies appeared in uniforms of Lincoln green appropriate to the occasion : but such a costume was not *de rigueur*, and Delia Langton and Philomel Lamb, two of the best lady-archers in the county, had both resolved not to wear it ; the latter from economy, the former because

“cloth is so dreadfully heavy, and green so shockingly trying to the complexion!” Delia adopted instead a more becoming dress of white muslin, with a cerise-coloured scarf, and a long feather of the same brilliant hue drooping from a hat of the smallest dimensions. A graceful quiver hung from her shoulder, filled with many-tinted darts; and as she stood leaning on her bow, which was adorned with ribbon of cerise, Delia Langton might certainly have been pointed out as the prettiest girl in the gay assembly had she not looked so conscious of being so.

Poor little Miss Eccles moved uneasily amongst the gay throng. She was far more in her element in the cottage or at the sewing-class, than in a scene so brilliant as this. She was conscious that even her dress looked peculiar amongst the fashionable robes around her, though she had donned her best—her only silk gown, that which her brother had presented her with on his marriage, and which had since appeared, “just as good as new,” at the christenings of most of his nine children. After perambulating the walks in a vain search for Philomel, by whose side she would feel more at ease, the shy little woman took refuge under the wing of Delia, whom she had known from her cradle, and who was standing in an attitude which some might call graceful and others affected, under a laburnum’s gold-dropping boughs.

"My dear, I'm so glad to see you; it's so nice to be near somebody one knows," cried Miss Eccles, limping up to the belle of Thwayte, who happened at the moment to be speaking to no one. "I feel bewildered in such a gay crowd. I've been hunting for Philomel Lamb—old Mrs. Brown was to bring her from the vicarage. I wonder what can make her so late! The shooting will begin in a few minutes, I suppose; people are moving already towards the meadow."

"There is Philomel," observed Delia coldly, glancing in the direction of a walk through the shrubbery, from which two figures were emerging.

"Ah, yes, with her father—but that's not Mr. Lamb; no, no, how dull my old eyes are growing! It's Mr. Latour in his archery dress, bow, quiver, and all! The two seem engaged in a very interesting conversation. How happy our Philomel is looking—her cheeks are as bright as your ribbon! Dearie me! I should never have believed that she could have looked so well with all her pretty ringlets cut off!"

"She has made a fright of herself," observed Delia, and the cerise feather quivered as she spoke.

"Some one does not think so, I'll be bound," said Miss Eccles, with a knowing smile. Like most unmarried ladies, she took special interest in any-

thing that might end in a wedding. "I've thought for a long time," she added, dropping her voice to a confidential whisper, "that there was a fancy in that direction."

"The fancy is all in your own brain," replied Delia, with the slightest approach towards asperity. The expression of her face, however, instantly changed, and her pretty teeth were shown in a gracious smile, as she caught the eye of Mr. Latour, who raised his cap, and came forward to greet her. Miss Eccles limped off at once to Philomel, near to whom, faithful as a shadow, she remained during the rest of the fête.

After a few commonplace observations had been exchanged between Mr. Latour and Miss Langton, relative to the weather, the company, the shooting, the archer, bending his tall form so that his accents might be heard by his companion, without reaching any ear but her own, said, with a little hesitation in his tone, "I believe that you and your sister are very intimate with Miss Lamb. Can you inform me—have you any idea why she has adopted that new mode of wearing her hair?"

"Wearing it!—rather of *not* wearing it," said Delia, with a little affected simper. "She has certainly confided nothing to us, though Miss Eccles and we were putting her to the question about it

this morning. I suppose that Philomel Lamb has her whims and fancies, like other people."

"I should not think that Miss Lamb is one likely to act upon mere whim," observed Mr. Latour. "She has perhaps some reason which she does not choose to make known."

"Oh, surely young ladies are not bound to have reasons for all that they do!" replied Delia, gently stroking down the feather of an arrow which she had drawn from her quiver. "Some people like to be odd, and different from others. Philomel belongs to rather an eccentric family."

"I never heard that before," said the archer, coldly.

"Her aunt was eccentric—very eccentric. I know that she was once under restraint, poor thing!" observed the benevolent Delia.

"Mr. Coffin never had a sister except Mrs. Lamb. I suppose that this poor lady was a sister of the vicar?" The observation took the interrogatory form.

"Yes; that is, sister-in-law," replied Delia, biting her lip; for she intuitively perceived that she was not raising herself in the estimation of Mr. Latour. To change the conversation, the young lady abruptly remarked: "Of course, you have heard that Mr. Coffin has held out hopes of his

keeping up our dear little school. Do you believe that he will actually do so ?”

“I have no doubt upon the subject,” the archer replied. “I had a very interesting conversation with Mr. Coffin at Burnesbey Abbey this morning. Ah ! here he comes to answer for himself. I believe that we were only waiting for his arrival to commence the shooting. Will you permit me to string your bow, Miss Langton ?”

Caleb Coffin was just entering the gate leading to the Villa of Roses when he was overtaken by his brother-in-law, Thomas Lamb. The vicar came, umbrella in hand, heated after his long walk to and from G——.

“I’ve just dropped in to see my little girl shoot,” he observed, after shaking hands with Mr. Coffin.

“What’s this that I hear about Philomel ?” asked Caleb, abruptly. “People say that she has clipped off all her gold curls. What could induce a young girl to do anything so absurd ?”

The old merchant fixed his keen eyes, as he spoke, on the vicar, with a penetrating glance of inquiry.

“I cannot conceive why she did it. It passes my comprehension,” replied the honest pastor, shrugging his shoulders.

“What ! you have not asked her ?” inquired Caleb Coffin.



"She keeps her own counsel," replied the vicar, looking rather annoyed. "I never before knew my little girl have anything like a secret with me."

Caleb indulged for a moment in his little hissing laugh ; and then, in his stiff, ungainly manner, advanced towards Lady Macaw, who came down the steps with both hands extended to welcome her guest. She was too much absorbed in doing the honours to the liberal master of Burnesbey Abbey, to have much attention to bestow on the simple honest-hearted vicar who stood at his side.

Caleb received all the courteous and flattering things that were said to him by Lady Macaw with a little shake of the head and twinkle of the eye, which puzzled and somewhat disconcerted her. She noticed (nothing ever escaped the notice of Lady Macaw) that Mr. Coffin was followed by his servant, bearing two narrow boxes under his arm. She inquired the meaning of this with her eyes ; but as Caleb Coffin either did not understand that kind of language, or did not choose to appear to do so, she left him to make his explanation when he pleased. Lady Macaw had her own ideas, her own hopes, regarding the contents of those mysterious boxes, but had sufficient tact not to trouble her eccentric guest with questions. "After a salmon has taken the bait, it must be given line, and

humoured and played with, or it may break away after all," thought the sagacious lady of the Villa of Roses.

All the company now adjourned to the field where the archery contest was to take place. A double set of targets had been put up; one at long range for the gentlemen, the other at shorter range for the ladies. While the archers, bow in hand, betook themselves to their own appointed place, by far the larger portion of the company ranged themselves in a semicircle behind one of the ladies' targets, as the point of greatest interest. In the centre of this semicircle stood Lady Macaw, her long train sweeping the grass. Caleb Coffin was at her side. A little to the left, ever keeping as close as possible to Philomel when her turn for shooting arrived, appeared the vicar, leaning with both hands on his umbrella, firmly planted in the sod; while Miss Eccles kept rather in the background, save when the flight of an arrow shot by a friend was succeeded by the plop which told that the target was struck, when her eagerness made her press forward a little.

Philomel Lamb looked bright and hopeful, as she slowly drew the lengthening cord. A spring of pleasure was rising in the young maiden's heart, not altogether springing from a sense of duty performed, though owing much of its sweetness to that

source. The vicar's daughter had felt that in the eyes of one at least she was not disfigured ; and such being the case, she could cheerfully part with the admiration of all the world beside.

Several ladies from G—— and its neighbourhood contended for the silver arrow ; but it was soon evident that one of the fair archers of Thwayte was likely to carry off the prize. The arrows of Lucy Langton, indeed, seemed as erratic as herself : over or under the mark, to the right or the left—now ringing against the iron stand of the target, now disappearing no one knew where—it was clear that the silver prize was not likely to be won by her bow. But Delia had practised diligently, had a good eye and a steady hand, and had set her heart upon being the queen of the day. In shooting, no lady approached her except Philomel Lamb, who kept for some time but a little behind her. The vicar's daughter was encouraged and animated by the hearty sympathy of her father, who was standing near her, eagerly watching the flight of each of her arrows. The vicar's love of archery, and partiality for his child, made him take a keen interest in the sport ; and he could not refrain from calling out directions as Philomel pointed her arrow, or exclaiming with hearty pleasure when that arrow quivered in the target.

The last arrows were at length to be shot off. Delia and Philomel were the last to shoot ; and before they did so, both were in advance of all their rivals. The prize must therefore, of necessity, be gained by one or other of these fair maidens of Thwayte. Delia had marked a point higher than Philomel before this last decisive trial, and therefore the chances of success were in her favour. Very slowly and cautiously Delia took her aim and drew the tightening cord. The arrow flew through the air.

“A hit!—’tis in the outer circle,” exclaimed Caleb Coffin, who, peering through his goggle spectacles, showed more interest in the game than was consistent with his character of cynic.

“Now, success to you, my child!” cried the vicar, as he handed the last arrow to Philomel ; then drew back, eagerly awaiting the result.

A shout from the spot where the gentlemen were shooting was heard at this moment.

“Latour has it!” was the cry.

Philomel paused, turned her head for an instant to listen, and then, with a bright smile on her lips, drew her bow, and her last arrow went quivering right into the centre of the gold! The vicar could not refrain from a shout, and Miss Eccles clapped her hands with delight.

“ Well done, lamb of the shorn fleece !—well done !” exclaimed Caleb Coffin. “ I thought you would win the day. You’ve hit the right point in more than one sense.”

There were smiles and congratulations on all sides, in which the gentlemen archers, who now joined the circle around the ladies’ target, united. There was but one face on which a cloud rested. Delia unstrung her bow with a feeling of deeper mortification at her heart than could have been caused by mere failure in winning the silver brooch.

“ And now let us adjourn to the Villa of Roses,” said Lady Macaw, “ that our Robin Hood and the sylvan queen may receive the prizes which are awaiting them there. Mr. Latour, you have won the privilege of escorting Miss Lamb, and of presenting to her—our fair victor—the silver arrow, trophy of success.”

“ A moment—excuse me. Let me have a part in this matter,” said Caleb Coffin, who, as soon as the contest had been decided, had beckoned to his servant, who had been waiting at a little distance while the shooting went on. “ Let Mr. Latour and my niece Philomel respectively have the honour, or pleasure, or privilege, or whatever you may call it, of presenting each other with prizes ; but I have on this occasion followed your suggestion, Miss

Delia Langton." Caleb seemed to take a little malicious pleasure in teasing the discomfited lady archer. "You showed me your golden prize bracelet, and gave me a pretty strong hint that if I wished to be a popular man in Thwayte, I should follow Sir John's example by giving something worth shooting for. I am not above taking a lady's advice. I am going to appear in my new character of a popular man. I have provided prizes not only for the lady, but for the gentleman winner also; and I hope that I may have succeeded in pleasing the taste of each."

There was a murmur of applause through the circle, and the proceedings of Caleb Coffin were watched with no little interest as he took the first box from his servant and said, as he placed it in the hands of Mr. Latour, "Meredith, present that to the lady whose arrow struck the centre of the gold."

Smiling and blushing and sharing in no small degree the curiosity of those around her, Philomel received and opened the box which contained the gift of her uncle, and drew out a piece of parchment written over, signed, and sealed.

"What is it? what can it be?" passed from mouth to mouth, as inquiring glances were exchanged amongst the spectators.

“Allow me to explain,” said Meredith Latour, who was assuredly not the least pleased or interested member of the throng. “This parchment is a deed, which I had the gratification of signing as witness this morning, by which my late guardian, Mr. Coffin, makes over the cottage now used as a schoolhouse in Thwayte, with a liberal endowment in perpetuity, to any trustees whom Miss Lamb, his niece, may be pleased to appoint.”

There was a general murmur of satisfaction, amidst which Lady Macaw’s faint “Oh!” was unheeded and unheard.

“In the name of all my parishioners, as well as in that of my daughter, I thank you most heartily, Caleb Coffin, for your generous gift!” cried the delighted Vicar of Thwayte.

“There is no generosity in the matter, nor is that deed a gift,” replied Caleb, with a significant nod at Philomel, whose eyes spoke the joy and gratitude which she could not put into words. “The affair is a mercantile transaction between my niece Philomel and me. I have had a *quid pro quo* for my money, goods delivered beforehand, an honest bargain has been made and kept by both parties concerned,—he! he! he!”

“What on earth can he mean!” exclaimed Lady Macaw. Curiosity became intense, and the circle

of listeners drew closer, while Philomel, embarrassed notwithstanding her happiness, would gladly have made her escape.

“But let us finish our business before we tell our stories,” said Caleb. “Philomel, queen of the bow, it is your duty now to present the prize to the victor.”

Philomel gave over her own box with its precious contents to her father, and receiving the other from Mr. Coffin, shyly and with downcast eyes placed it in the hands of Meredith Latour. Every one, except Caleb and the winner of the prize, gave an exclamation of amazement when the lid was raised, and disclosed the contents of the box to be rich tresses of golden hair !

“There ! talk of generosity now, if you will !” said the cynic gaily, turning towards the astonished vicar. “That little heap of lady’s locks has cost me two thousand guineas this morning. I challenged you yesterday,” continued Caleb Coffin, addressing himself to Meredith—“I challenged you to find in the world a woman who would sacrifice vanity to duty, who would be content to do good in the dark, and I promised a golden forfeit should such a phoenix be found. Philomel has twice purchased the deed which she has received—first, by the sacrifice of her hair, and secondly, by her silence ; and now



I redeem my pledge—the Golden Fleece is your own.”

Philomel caught the exclamation of “My noble girl!” and felt the pressure of her father’s hand on her shoulder. The words and the pressure filled her with keener joy than the volley of applause and congratulation which resounded on all sides.

“I was certain that she had her reasons—that she must have her reasons!” exclaimed Miss Eccles, almost crying with pleasure.

“I never saw anything so shocking—so—so improper,” whispered the indignant Delia to her sister. “Only fancy the bad taste—that word is a thousand times too mild—shown by the horrid old owl in presenting his niece’s hair as an archery prize to a gentleman! What on earth will he do with it?”

“Oh, he will know well enough what to do with it,” laughed Lucy, greatly amused. “Meredith Latour has the golden chain—the gold ring is sure to follow. Caleb Coffin would never have given the fleece, had he not had the best reasons for knowing that the lamb was sure to follow it.”

“Mr. Latour will be carrying her off to Northumberland,” said Miss Eccles, confidentially. “I always guessed, you know, that something was going on in that quarter.”

“I pity her—from my soul I pity her!” observed Delia, shrugging her shoulders. “I would prefer Newgate to Northumberland with its horrid colliers and coal-dust! To crop her hair close before sending her to prison was really a sensible thing!”

Philomel neither felt nor looked an object for pity at that moment, though she who had “done good by stealth” might and did “blush to find it fame.” She longed, indeed, to be out of the throng, and freed from its embarrassing gaze—alone, if but for an hour, with her father or somebody else; but the intensity of her happiness overpowered even the pain of her shyness.

Lady Macaw had at first experienced a sense of disappointment, as one who finds that she has been unconsciously appropriating and wearing the laurel-wreath due to another. She had the tact, however, not to betray her mortification. Approaching the shy young maiden before her, she took her graciously by the hand, and said, addressing herself to the master of Burnesbey Abbey:—

“We have all to thank you, Mr. Coffin, not only for your munificent gift to our village, but for making known to us the full value of the treasure which we have long cherished amongst us. Philanthropy will be named from henceforth in Thwayte, ‘the Order of the Golden Fleece;’ and I hope that

it will be found that we have many 'companions' in that illustrious order."

"With Lady Macaw for grand-master," whispered Lucy Langton to her sister.

"Nay, nay," observed old Caleb, in his own cynical manner; "to give money may be common, to beg money more common; there's many a man will do the first—many a woman the second; but I've been told that

'Our good deeds must be judged—and few will bear the trial—  
By our *purity of motive* and *strength of self-denial.*'"

If Philomel's proof of sincerity were made the touchstone for all, I suspect that many whose names figure on subscription-lists, and whose fair persons at charity-meetings, would hardly come forward to claim the honours of this new order of

The Golden Fleece.









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