

Chapter XXII - Two Lives

Only half of Moore's activity and resolution had been seen in his defence of the mill: he showed the other half (and a terrible half it was) in the indefatigable, the relentless assiduity, with which he pursued the leaders of the riot. The mob, the mere followers, he let alone: perhaps an innate sense of justice told him that men misled by false counsel, goaded by privations, are not fit objects of vengeance, and that he who would visit an even violent act on the bent head of suffering, is a tyrant, not a judge. At all events, though he knew many of the number, having recognised them during the latter part of the attack when day began to dawn, he let them daily pass him on street and road without notice or threat.

The leaders he did not know. They were strangers: emissaries from the large towns. Most of these were not members of the operative class: they were chiefly 'downdraughts,' bankrupts, men always in debt and often in drink - men who had nothing to lose, and much - in the way of character, cash, and cleanliness - to gain. These persons Moore hunted like any sleuth-hound; and well he liked the occupation: its excitement was of a kind pleasant to his nature: he liked it better than making cloth.

His horse must have hated these times, for it was ridden both hard and often: he almost lived on the road, and the fresh air was as welcome to his lungs as the policeman's quest to his mood: he preferred it to the steam of dye-houses. The magistrates of the district must have dreaded him: they were slow, timid men; he liked both to frighten and to rouse them. He liked to force them to betray a certain fear, which made them alike falter in resolve and recoil in action - the fear, simply, of assassination. This, indeed, was the dread which had hitherto hampered every manufacturer - and almost every public man in the district. Helstone alone had ever repelled it. The old Cossack knew well he might be shot: he knew there was risk; but such a death had for his nerves no terrors: it would have been his chosen - might he have had a choice.

Moore likewise knew his danger: the result was an unquenchable scorn of the quarter whence such danger was to be apprehended. The consciousness that he hunted assassins was the spur in his high-mettled temper's flank. As for fear, he was too proud - too hard-natured - (if you will) - too phlegmatic a man to fear. Many a time he rode belated over moors, moonlit or moonless as the case might be, with feelings far more elate, faculties far better refreshed, than when safety and stagnation environed him in the counting-house. Four was the number of the leaders to be accounted for: two, in the course of a fortnight, were brought to bay near Stilbro'; the remaining two it was

necessary to seek further off: their haunts were supposed to lie near Birmingham.

Meantime the clothier did not neglect his battered mill: its reparation was esteemed a light task; carpenters' and glaziers' work alone being needed. The rioters not having succeeded in effecting an entrance, his grim, metal darlings - the machines - had escaped damage.

Whether, during this busy life - whether, while stern justice and exacting business claimed his energies and harassed his thoughts - he now and then gave one moment, dedicated one effort, to keep alive gentler fires than those which smoulder in the fane of Nemesis, it was not easy to discover. He seldom went near Fieldhead; if he did, his visits were brief: if he called at the Rectory, it was only to hold conferences with the Rector in his study. He maintained his rigid course very steadily. Meantime the history of the year continued troubled; there was no lull in the tempest of war; her long hurricane still swept the Continent. There was not the faintest sign of serene weather: no opening amid 'the clouds of battle-dust and smoke'; no fall of pure dews genial to the olive; no cessation of the red rain which nourishes the baleful and glorious laurel. Meantime, Ruin had her sappers and miners at work under Moore's feet, and whether he rode or walked - whether he only crossed his counting-house hearth, or galloped over sullen Rushedge - he was aware of a hollow echo, and felt the ground shake to his tread.

While the summer thus passed with Moore, how did it lapse with Shirley and Caroline? Let us first visit the heiress. How does she look? Like a love-lorn maiden, pale and pining for a neglectful swain? Does she sit the day long bent over some sedentary task? Has she for ever a book in her hand, or sewing on her knee, and eyes only for that, and words for nothing, and thoughts unspoken?

By no means. Shirley is all right. If her wistful cast of physiognomy is not gone, no more is her careless smile. She keeps her dark old manor-house light and bright with her cheery presence: the gallery, and the low-ceiled chambers that open into it, have learned lively echoes from her voice: the dim entrance-hall, with its one window, has grown pleasantly accustomed to the frequent rustle of a silk dress, as its wearer sweeps across from room to room, now carrying flowers to the barbarous peach-bloom salon, now entering the dining-room to open its casements and let in the scent of mignonette and sweet-briar, anon bringing plants from the staircase-window to place in the sun at the open porch-door.

She takes her sewing occasionally: but, by some fatality, she is doomed never to sit steadily at it for above five minutes at a time: her thimble is scarcely fitted on, her needle scarce threaded, when a

sudden thought calls her upstairs: perhaps she goes to seek some just-then-remembered old ivory-backed needle-book, or older china-topped workbox, quite unneeded, but which seems at the moment indispensable; perhaps to arrange her hair, or a drawer which she recollects to have seen that morning in a state of curious confusion; perhaps only to take a peep from a particular window at a particular view, whence Briarfield Church and Rectory are visible, pleasantly bowered in trees. She has scarcely returned, and again taken up the slip of cambric, or square of half-wrought canvas, when Tartar's bold scrape and strangled whistle are heard at the porch-door, and she must run to open it for him; it is a hot day; he comes in panting; she must convoy him to the kitchen, and see with her own eyes that his water-bowl is replenished. Through the open kitchen-door the court is visible, all sunny and gay, and peopled with turkeys and their poults, peahens and their chicks, pearl-flecked Guinea fowls, and a bright variety of pure white, and purple-necked, and blue and cinnamon-plumed pigeons. Irresistible spectacle to Shirley! She runs to the pantry for a roll, and she stands on the door-step scattering crumbs: around her throng her eager, plump, happy, feathered vassals. John is about the stables, and John must be talked to, and her mare looked at. She is still petting and patting it, when the cows come in to be milked: this is important: Shirley must stay and take a review of them all. There are perhaps some little calves, some little new-yeaned lambs - it may be twins, whose mothers have rejected them: Miss Keeldar must be introduced to them by John - must permit herself the treat of feeding them with her own hand, under the direction of her careful foreman. Meantime, John moots doubtful questions about the farming of certain 'crofts,' and 'ings,' and 'holms,' and his mistress is necessitated to fetch her garden-hat - a gipsy-straw - and accompany him, over stile and along hedgerow, to hear the conclusion of the whole agricultural matter on the spot, and with the said 'crofts,' 'ings,' and 'holms' under her eye. Bright afternoon thus wears into soft evening, and she comes home to a late tea, and after tea she never sews.

After tea Shirley reads, and she is just about as tenacious of her book as she is lax of her needle. Her study is the rug, her seat a footstool, or perhaps only the carpet at Mrs Pryor's feet - there she always learned her lessons when a child, and old habits have a strong power over her. The tawny and lion-like bulk of Tartar is ever stretched beside her; his negro muzzle laid on his fore-paws, straight, strong, and shapely as the limbs of an Alpine wolf. One hand of the mistress generally reposes on the loving serf's rude head, because if she takes it away he groans and is discontented. Shirley's mind is given to her book; she lifts not her eyes; she neither stirs nor speaks; unless, indeed, it be to return a brief respectful answer to Mrs Pryor, who addresses deprecatory phrases to her now and then.

'My dear, you had better not have that great dog so near you: he is crushing the border of your dress.'

'Oh, it is only muslin: I can put a clean one on to-morrow.'

'My dear, I wish you could acquire the habit of sitting to a table when you read.'

'I will try, ma'am, some time; but it is so comfortable to do as one has always been accustomed to do.'

'My dear, let me beg of you to put that book down: you are trying your eyes by the doubtful firelight.'

'No, ma'am, not at all: my eyes are never tired.'

At last, however, a pale light falls on the page from the window: she looks, the moon is up; she closes the volume, rises, and walks through the room. Her book has perhaps been a good one; it has refreshed, refilled, rewarmed her heart; it has set her brain astir, furnished her mind with pictures. The still parlour, the clean hearth, the window opening on the twilight sky, and showing its 'sweet regent,' new throned and glorious, suffice to make earth an Eden, life a poem, for Shirley. A still, deep, inborn delight glows in her young veins; unmingled - untroubled, not to be reached or ravished by human agency, because by no human agency bestowed: the pure gift of God to His creature, the free dower of Nature to her child. This joy gives her experience of a genii- life. Buoyant, by green steps, by glad hills, all verdure and light, she reaches a station scarcely lower than that whence angels looked down on the dreamer of Bethel, and her eye seeks, and her soul possesses, the vision of life as she wishes it. No - not as she wishes it; she has not time to wish: the swift glory spreads out, sweeping and kindling, and multiplies its splendour faster than Thought can effect his combinations, faster than Aspiration can utter her longings. Shirley says nothing while the trance is upon her - she is quite mute; but if Mrs Pryor speaks to her now, she goes out quietly, and continues her walk upstairs in the dim gallery.

If Shirley were not an indolent, a reckless, an ignorant being, she would take a pen at such moments; or at least while the recollection of such moments was yet fresh on her spirit: she would seize, she would fix the apparition, tell the vision revealed. Had she a little more of the organ of acquisitiveness in her head - a little more of the love of property in her nature, she would take a good-sized sheet of paper and write plainly out, in her own queer but clear and legible hand, the story that has been narrated, the song that has been sung to her, and thus possess what she was enabled to create. But indolent she is,

reckless she is, and most ignorant, for she does not know her dreams are rare - her feelings peculiar: she does not know, has never known, and will die without knowing, the full value of that spring whose bright fresh bubbling in her heart keeps it green.

Shirley takes life easily: is not that fact written in her eye? In her good-tempered moments, is it not as full of lazy softness as in her brief fits of anger it is fulgent with quick-flashing fire? Her nature is in her eye: so long as she is calm, indolence, indulgence, humour, and tenderness possess that large grey sphere: incense her, - a red ray pierces the dew, - it quickens instantly to flame.

Ere the month of July was passed, Miss Keeldar would probably have started with Caroline on that northern tour they had planned; but just as that epoch an invasion befell Fieldhead: a genteel foraging party besieged Shirley in her castle and compelled her to surrender at discretion. An uncle, an aunt, and two cousins from the south, a Mr, Mrs, and two Misses Sympson, of Sympson Grove, - -shire, came down upon her in state. The laws of hospitality obliged her to give in, which she did with a facility which somewhat surprised Caroline, who knew her to be prompt in action and fertile in expedient, where a victory was to be gained for her will. Miss Helstone even asked her how it was she submitted so readily? - she answered, old feelings had their power - she had passed two years of her early youth at Sympson Grove.

'How did she like her relatives?'

She had nothing in common with them, she replied: little Harry Sympson, indeed, the sole son of the family, was very unlike his sisters, and of him she had formerly been fond; but he was not coming to Yorkshire: at least, not yet.

The next Sunday the Fieldhead pew in Briarfield Church appeared peopled with a prim, trim, fidgety, elderly gentleman, who shifted his spectacles and changed his position every three minutes; a patient, placid-looking elderly lady, in brown satin, and two pattern young ladies, in pattern attire, with pattern deportment. Shirley had the air of a black swan, or a white crow, in the midst of this party; and very forlorn was her aspect. Having brought her into respectable society, we will leave her there a while, and look after Miss Helstone.

Separated from Miss Keeldar for the present, as she could not seek her in the midst of her fine relatives; scared away from Fieldhead by the visiting commotion which the new arrivals occasioned in the neighbourhood, Caroline was limited once more to the grey Rectory; the solitary morning walk in remote by-paths; the long, lonely afternoon sitting in a quiet parlour which the sun forsook at noon, or

in the garden alcove where it shone bright, yet sad, on the ripening red currants trained over the trellis, and on the fair monthly roses entwined between, and through them fell chequered on Caroline sitting in her white summer dress, still as a garden statue. There she read. old books, taken from her uncle's library; the Greek and Latin were of no use to her; and its collection of light literature was chiefly contained on a shelf which had belonged to her aunt Mary: some venerable Lady's Magazines, that had once performed a sea voyage with their owner, and undergone a storm, and whose pages were stained with salt water; some mad Methodist Magazines, full of miracles and apparitions, of preternatural warnings, ominous dreams, and frenzied fanaticism; the equally mad Letters of Mrs Elizabeth Rowe from the Dead to the Living; a few old English Classics: - from these faded flowers Caroline had in her childhood extracted the honey, - they were tasteless to her now. By way of change, and also of doing good, she would sew; make garments for the poor, according to good Miss Ainley's direction. Sometimes, as she felt and saw her tears fall slowly on her work, she would wonder how the excellent woman who had cut it out and arranged it for her, managed to be so equably serene in her solitude.

'I never find Miss Ainley oppressed with despondency, or lost in grief,' she thought; 'yet her cottage is a still, dim little place, and she is without a bright hope or near friend in the world. I remember, though, she told me once, she had tutored her thoughts to tend upwards to Heaven. She allowed there was, and ever had been, little enjoyment in this world for her, and she looks, I suppose, to the bliss of the world to come. So do nuns - with their close cell, their iron lamp, their robe straight as a shroud, their bed narrow as a coffin. She says, often, she has no fear of death - no dread of the grave: no more, doubtless, had St. Simeon Stylites, lifted up terrible on his wild column in the wilderness: no more has the Hindoo votary stretched on his couch of iron spikes. Both these having violated nature, their natural likings and antipathies are reversed: they grow altogether morbid. I do fear death as yet, but I believe it is because I am young: poor Miss Ainley would cling closer to life, if life had more charms for her. God surely did not create us, and cause us to live, with the sole end of wishing always to die. I believe, in my heart, we were intended to prize life and enjoy it, so long as we retain it. Existence never was originally meant to be that useless, blank, pale, slow-trailing thing it often becomes to many, and is becoming to me, among the rest.'

'Nobody,' she went on - 'nobody in particular is to blame, that I can see, for the state in which things are: and I cannot tell, however much I puzzle over it, how they are to be altered for the better; but I feel there is something wrong somewhere. I believe single women should have more to do - better chances of interesting and profitable occupation than they possess now. And when I speak thus, I have no

impression that I displease God by my words; that I am either impious or impatient, irreligious or sacrilegious. My consolation is, indeed, that God hears many a groan, and compassionates much grief which man stops his ears against, or frowns on with impotent contempt. I say impotent, for I observe that to such grievances as society cannot readily cure, it usually forbids utterance, on pain of its scorn: this scorn being only a sort of tinselled cloak to its deformed weakness. People hate to be reminded of ills they are unable or unwilling to remedy: such reminder, in forcing on them a sense of their own incapacity, or a more painful sense of an obligation to make some unpleasant effort, troubles their ease and shakes their self-complacency. Old maids, like the houseless and unemployed poor, should not ask for a place and an occupation in the world: the demand disturbs the happy and rich: it disturbs parents. Look at the numerous families of girls in this neighbourhood: the Armitages, the Birtwistles, the Sykes. The brothers of these girls are every one in business or in professions; they have something to do: their sisters have no earthly employment, but household work and sewing; no earthly pleasure, but an unprofitable visiting; and no hope, in all their life to come, of anything better. This stagnant state of things makes them decline in health: they are never well; and their minds and views shrink to wondrous narrowness. The great wish - the sole aim of every one of them is to be married, but the majority will never marry: they will die as they now live. They scheme, they plot, they dress to ensnare husbands. The gentlemen turn them into ridicule: they don't want them; they hold them very cheap: they say - I have heard them say it with sneering laughs many a time - the matrimonial market is overstocked. Fathers say so likewise, and are angry with their daughters when they observe their manoeuvres: they order them to stay at home. What do they expect them to do at home? If you ask, - they would answer, sew and cook. They expect them to do this, and this only, contentedly, regularly, uncomplainingly all their lives long, as if they had no germs of faculties for anything else: a doctrine as reasonable to hold, as it would be that the fathers have no faculties but for eating what their daughters cook, or for wearing what they sew. Could men live so themselves? Would they not be very weary? And, when there came no relief to their weariness, but only reproaches at its slightest manifestation, would not their weariness ferment in time to frenzy? Lucretia, spinning at midnight in the midst of her maidens, and Solomon's virtuous woman, are often quoted as patterns of what 'the sex' (as they say) ought to be. I don't know: Lucretia, I dare say, was a most worthy sort of person, much like my cousin Hortense Moore; but she kept her servants up very late. I should not have liked to be amongst the number of the maidens. Hortense would just work me and Sarah in that fashion, if she could, and neither of us would bear it. The 'virtuous woman,' again, had her household up in the very middle of the night; she 'got breakfast over' (as Mrs Sykes says) before one o'clock A.M.; but she had something

more to do than spin and give out portions: she was a manufacturer - she made fine linen and sold it: she was an agriculturist - she bought estates and planted vineyards. That woman was a manager: she was what the matrons hereabouts call 'a clever woman.' On the whole, I like her a good deal better than Lucretia; but I don't believe either Mr Armitage or Mr Sykes could have got the advantage of her in a bargain: yet, I like her. 'Strength and honour were her clothing: the heart of her husband safely trusted in her. She opened her mouth with wisdom; in her tongue was the law of kindness: her children rose up and called her blessed; her husband also praised her.' King of Israel! your model of a woman is a worthy model! But are we, in these days, brought up to be like her? Men of Yorkshire! do your daughters reach this royal standard? Can they reach it? Can you help them to reach it? Can you give them a field in which their faculties may be exercised and grow? Men of England! look at your poor girls, many of them fading round you, dropping off in consumption or decline; or, what is worse, degenerating to sour old maids, - envious, backbiting, wretched, because life is a desert to them: or, what is worst of all, reduced to strive, by scarce modest coquetry and debasing artifice, to gain that position and consideration by marriage which to celibacy is denied. Fathers! cannot you alter these things? Perhaps not all at once; but consider the matter well when it is brought before you, receive it as a theme worthy of thought: do not dismiss it with an idle jest or an unmanly insult. You would wish to be proud of your daughters and not to blush for them - then seek for them an interest and an occupation which shall raise them above the flirt, the manoeuvrer, the mischief-making tale-bearer. Keep your girls' minds narrow and fettered - they will still be a plague and a care, sometimes a disgrace to you: cultivate them - give them scope and work - they will be your gayest companions in health; your tenderest nurses in sickness; your most faithful prop in age.'