Chapter XXVII - The First Blue-Stocking

Miss Keeldar and her uncle had characters that would not harmonise, - that never had harmonised. He was irritable, and she was spirited: he was despotic, and she liked freedom; he was worldly, and she, perhaps, romantic.

Not without purpose had he come down to Yorkshire: his mission was clear, and he intended to discharge it conscientiously: he anxiously desired to have his niece married; to make for her a suitable match: give her in charge to a proper husband, and wash his hands of her for ever.

The misfortune was, from infancy upwards, Shirley and he had disagreed on the meaning of the words 'suitable' and 'proper.' She never yet had accepted his definition; and it was doubtful whether, in the most important step of her life, she would consent to accept it.

The trial soon came.

Mr Wynne proposed in form for his son, Samuel Fawthrop Wynne.

'Decidedly suitable! Most proper!' pronounced Mr Sympson. 'A fine unencumbered estate: real substance; good connections. It must be done!'

He sent for his niece to the oak parlour; he shut himself up there with her alone; he communicated the offer; he gave his opinion; he claimed her consent.

It was withheld.

'No: I shall not marry Samuel Fawthrop Wynne.'

'I ask why? I must have a reason. In all respects he is more than worthy of you.'

She stood on the hearth; she was pale as the white marble slab and cornice behind her; her eyes flashed large, dilated, unsmiling.

'And I ask in what sense that young man is worthy of me?'

'He has twice your money, - twice your common sense; - equal connections, - equal respectability.'

'Had he my money counted five score times, I would take no vow to love him.'

'Please to state your objections.'

'He has run a course of despicable, commonplace profligacy. Accept that as the first reason why I spurn him.'

'Miss Keeldar, you shock me!'

'That conduct alone sinks him in a gulf of immeasurable inferiority. His intellect reaches no standard I can esteem: - there is a second stumbling-block. His views are narrow; his feelings are blunt; his tastes are coarse; his manners vulgar.'

'The man is a respectable, wealthy man. To refuse him is presumption on your part.'

'I refuse, point-blank! Cease to annoy me with the subject: I forbid it!'

'Is it your intention ever to marry, or do you prefer celibacy?'

'I deny your right to claim an answer to that question.

'May I ask if you expect some man of title - some peer of the realm - to demand your hand?'

'I doubt if the peer breathes on whom I would confer it.'

'Were there insanity in the family, I should believe you mad. Your eccentricity and conceit touch the verge of frenzy.'

'Perhaps, ere I have finished, you will see me overleap it.'

'I anticipate no less. Frantic and impracticable girl! Take warning! - I dare you to sully our name by a mésalliance!'

'Our name! Am I called Sympson?'

'God be thanked that you are not! But be on your guard! I will not be trifled with!'

'What, in the name of common law and common sense, would you, or could you do, if my pleasure led me to a choice you disapproved?'

'Take care! take care!' (warning her with voice and hand that trembled alike.)

'Why? What shadow of power have you over me? Why should I fear you?'

'Take care, madam!'

'Scrupulous care I will take, Mr Sympson. Before I marry, I am resolved to esteem - to admire - to love.'

'Preposterous stuff! - indecorous! - unwomanly!'

'To love with my whole heart. I know I speak in an unknown tongue; but I feel indifferent whether I am comprehended or not.'

'And if this love of yours should fall on a beggar?'

'On a beggar it will never fall. Mendicancy is not estimable.'

'On a low clerk, a play actor, a play-writer, or - or - - '

'Take courage, Mr Sympson! Or what?'

'Any literary scrub, or shabby, whining artist.'

'For the scrubby, shabby, whining, I have no taste: for literature and the arts, I have. And there I wonder how your Fawthrop Wynne would suit me? He cannot write a note without orthographical errors; he reads only a sporting paper: he was the booby of Stilbro' grammar school!'

'Unladylike language! Great God! - to what will she come?' He lifted hands and eyes.

'Never to the altar of Hymen with Sam Wynne.'

'To what will she come? Why are not the laws more stringent, that I might compel her to hear reason?'

'Console yourself, uncle. Were Britain a serfdom, and you the Czar, you could not compel me to this step. I will write to Mr Wynne. Give yourself no further trouble on the subject.'

. . . . . .

Fortune is proverbially called changeful, yet her caprice often takes the form of repeating again and again a similar stroke of luck in the same quarter. It appeared that Miss Keeldar - or her fortune - had by this time made a sensation in the district, and produced an impression in quarters by her unthought of. No less than three offers followed Mr Wynne's - all more or less eligible. All were in succession pressed on her by her uncle, and all in succession she refused. Yet amongst them was more than one gentleman of unexceptional

character, as well as ample wealth. Many besides her uncle asked what she meant, and whom she expected to entrap, that she was so insolently fastidious.

At last, the gossips thought they had found the key to her conduct, and her uncle was sure of it; and, what is more, the discovery showed his niece to him in quite a new light, and he changed his whole deportment to her accordingly.

Fieldhead had, of late, been fast growing too hot to hold them both; the suave aunt could not reconcile them; the daughters froze at the view of their quarrels: Gertrude and Isabella whispered by the hour together in their dressing-room, and became chilled with decorous dread if they chanced to be left alone with their audacious cousin. But, as I have said, a change supervened: Mr Sympson was appeased and his family tranquillised.

The village of Nunnely has been alluded to: its old church, its forest, its monastic ruins. It had also its Hall, called the Priory - an older, a larger, a more lordly abode than any Briarfield or Whinbury owned; and, what is more, it had its man of title - its baronet, which neither Briarfield nor Whinbury could boast. This possession - its proudest and most prized - had for years been nominal only: the present baronet, a young man hitherto resident in a distant province, was unknown on his Yorkshire estate.

During Miss Keeldar's stay at the fashionable watering-place of Cliffbridge, she and her friends had met with and been introduced to Sir Philip Nunnely. They encountered him again and again on the sands, the cliffs, in the various walks, sometimes at the public balls of the place. He seemed solitary; his manner was very unpretending - too simple to be termed affable; rather timid than proud: he did not condescend to their society - he seemed glad of it.

With any unaffected individual, Shirley could easily and quickly cement an acquaintance. She walked and talked with Sir Philip; she, her aunt, and cousins, sometimes took a sail in his yacht. She liked him because she found him kind and modest, and was charmed to feel she had the power to amuse him.

One slight drawback there was - where is the friendship without it? - Sir Philip had a literary turn: he wrote poetry, sonnets, stanzas, ballads. Perhaps Miss Keeldar thought him a little too fond of reading and reciting these compositions; perhaps she wished the rhyme had possessed more accuracy - the measure more music - the tropes more freshness - the inspiration more fire; at any rate, she always winced when he recurred to the subject of his poems, and usually did her best to divert the conversation into another channel.

He would beguile her to take moonlight walks with him on the bridge, for the sole purpose, as it seemed, of pouring into her ear the longest of his ballads: he would lead her away to sequestered rustic seats, whence the rush of the surf to the sands was heard soft and soothing; and when he had her all to himself, and the sea lay before them, and the scented shade of gardens spread round, and the tall shelter of cliffs rose behind them, he would pull out his last batch of sonnets, and read them in a voice tremulous with emotion. He did not seem to know, that though they might be rhyme, they were not poetry. It appeared by Shirley's downcast eye and disturbed face that she knew it, and felt heartily mortified by the single foible of this good and amiable gentleman.

Often she tried, as gently as might be, to wean him from this fanatic worship of the Muses: it was his monomania - on all ordinary subjects he was sensible enough; and fain was she to engage him in ordinary topics. He questioned her sometimes about his place at Nunnely; she was but too happy to answer his interrogatories at length: she never wearied of describing the antique Priory, the wild sylvan park, the hoary church and hamlet; nor did she fail to counsel him to come down and gather his tenantry about him in his ancestral halls.

Somewhat to her surprise Sir Philip followed her advice to the letter; and actually, towards the close of September, arrived at the Priory.

He soon made a call at Fieldhead, and his first visit was not his last: he said - when he had achieved the round of the neighbourhood - that under no roof had he found such pleasant shelter as beneath the massive oak beams of the grey manor house of Briarfield: a cramped, modest dwelling enough, compared with his own - but he liked it.

Presently, it did not suffice to sit with Shirley in her panelled parlour, where others came and went, and where he could rarely find a quiet moment to show her the latest production of his fertile muse; he must have her out amongst the pleasant pastures, and lead her by the still waters. Tête-à- tête ramblings she shunned; so he made parties for her to his own grounds, his glorious forest; to remoter scenes - woods severed by the Wharfe, vales watered by the Aire.

Such assiduity covered Miss Keeldar with distinction. Her uncle's prophetic soul anticipated a splendid future: he already scented the time afar off when, with nonchalant air, and left foot nursed on his right knee, he should be able to make dashingly-familiar allusions to his 'nephew the baronet.' Now, his niece dawned upon him no longer 'a mad girl,' but a 'most sensible woman.' He termed her, in confidential dialogues with Mrs Sympson, 'a truly superior person: peculiar, but very clever.' He treated her with exceeding deference; rose reverently to open and shut doors for her; reddened his face, and

gave himself headaches, with stooping to pick up gloves, handkerchiefs, and other loose property, whereof Shirley usually held but insecure tenure. He would cut mysterious jokes about the superiority of woman's wit over man's wisdom; commence obscure apologies for the blundering mistake he had committed respecting the generalship, the tactics, of 'a personage not a hundred miles from Fieldhead:' in short, he seemed elate as any 'midden-cock on pattens.'

His niece viewed his manoeuvres, and received his innuendoes, with phlegm: apparently, she did not above half comprehend to what aim they tended. When plainly charged with being the preferred of the baronet, she said, she believed he did like her, and for her part she liked him: she had never thought a man of rank - the only son of a proud, fond mother - the only brother of doting sisters - could have so much goodness, and, on the whole, so much sense.

Time proved, indeed, that Sir Philip liked her. Perhaps he had found in her that 'curious charm' noticed by Mr Hall. He sought her presence more and more; and, at last, with a frequency that attested it had become to him an indispensable stimulus. About this time, strange feelings hovered round Fieldhead; restless hopes and haggard anxieties haunted some of its rooms. There was an unquiet wandering of some of the inmates among the still fields round the mansion; there was a sense of expectancy that kept the nerves strained.

One thing seemed clear. Sir Philip was not a man to be despised: he was amiable; if not highly intellectual, he was intelligent. Miss Keeldar could not affirm of him - what she had so bitterly affirmed of Sam Wynne - that his feelings were blunt, his tastes coarse and his manners vulgar There was sensibility in his nature: there was a very real, if not a very discriminating, love of the arts; there was the English gentleman in all his deportment: as to his lineage and wealth, both were, of course, far beyond her claims.

His appearance had at first elicited some laughing, though not ill-natured, remarks from the merry Shirley. It was boyish: his features were plain and slight; his hair sandy: his stature insignificant. But she soon checked her sarcasm on this point; she would even fire up if any one else made uncomplimentary allusion thereto. He had 'a pleasing countenance,' she affirmed; 'and there was that in his heart which was better than three Roman noses, than the locks of Absalom, or the proportions of Saul.' A spare and rare shaft she still reserved for his unfortunate poetic propensity: but, even here, she would tolerate no irony save her own.

In short, matters had reached a point which seemed fully to warrant an observation made about this time by Mr Yorke, to the tutor, Louis.

'Yond' brother Robert of yours seems to me to be either a fool or a madman. Two months ago, I could have sworn he had the game all in his own hands; and there he runs the country, and quarters himself up in London for weeks together, and by the time he comes back, he'll find himself checkmated. Louis, 'there is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; but, once let slip, never returns again.' I'd write to Robert, if I were you, and remind him of that.'

'Robert had views on Miss Keeldar?' inquired Louis, as if the idea were new to him.

'Views I suggested to him myself, and views he might have realised, for she liked him.'

'As a neighbour?'

'As more than that. I have seen her change countenance and colour at the mere mention of his name. Write to the lad, I say, and tell him to come home. He is a finer gentleman than this bit of a baronet, after all.'

'Does it not strike you, Mr Yorke, that for a mere penniless adventurer to aspire to a rich woman's hand is presumptuous - contemptible?'

'Oh! if you are for high notions, and double-refined sentiment, I've naught to say. I'm a plain, practical man myself; and if Robert is willing to give up that royal prize to a lad-rival - a puling slip of aristocracy - I am quite agreeable. At his age, in his place, with his inducements, I would have acted differently. Neither baronet, nor duke, nor prince, should have snatched my sweetheart from me without a struggle. But you tutors are such solemn chaps: it is almost like speaking to a parson to consult with you.'

. . . . . .

Flattered and fawned upon as Shirley was just now, it appeared she was not absolutely spoiled - that her better nature did not quite leave her. Universal report had indeed ceased to couple her name with that of Moore, and this silence seemed sanctioned by her own apparent oblivion of the absentee; but that she had not quite forgotten him - that she still regarded him, if not with love yet with interest - seemed proved by the increased attention which at this juncture of affairs a sudden attack of illness induced her to show that tutor-brother of Robert's, to whom she habitually bore herself with strange alternations of cool reserve and docile respect: now sweeping past him in all the dignity of the moneyed heiress and prospective Lady Nunnely, and anon accosting him as abashed schoolgirls are wont to

accost their stern professors: bridling her neck of ivory, and curling her lip of carmine, if he encountered her glance, one minute; and the next submitting to the grave rebuke of his eye, with as much contrition as if he had the power to inflict penalties in case of contumacy.

Louis Moore had perhaps caught the fever, which for a few days laid him low, in one of the poor cottages of the district, which he, his lame pupil, and Mr Hall, were in the habit of visiting together. At any rate he sickened, and after opposing to the malady a taciturn resistance for a day or two, was obliged to keep his chamber.

He lay tossing on his thorny bed one evening, Henry, who would not quit him, watching faithfully beside him, when a tap - too light to be that of Mrs Gill or the housemaid - summoned young Sympson to the door.

'How is Mr Moore to-night?' asked a low voice from the dark gallery.

'Come in and see him yourself.'

'Is he asleep?'

'I wish he could sleep. Come and speak to him, Shirley.'

'He would not like it.'

But the speaker stepped in, and Henry, seeing her hesitate on the threshold, took her hand and drew her to the couch.

The shaded light showed Miss Keeldar's form but imperfectly, yet it revealed her in elegant attire. There was a party assembled below, including Sir Philip Nunnely; the ladies were now in the drawing-room, and their hostess had stolen from them to visit Henry's tutor. Her pure white dress, her fair arms and neck, the trembling chainlet of gold circling her throat, and quivering on her breast, glistened strangely amid the obscurity of the sickroom. Her mien was chastened and pensive: she spoke gently.

'Mr Moore, how are you to-night?'

'I have not been very ill, and am now better.'

'I heard that you complained of thirst: I have brought you some grapes: can you taste one?'

'No: but I thank you for remembering me.'

'Just one.'

From the rich cluster that filled a small basket held in her hand, she severed a berry and offered it to his lips. He shook his head, and turned aside his flushed face.

'But what then can I bring you instead? You have no wish for fruit; yet I see that your lips are parched. What beverage do you prefer?'

'Mrs Gill supplies me with toast and water: I like it best.'

Silence fell for some minutes.

'Do you suffer? Have you pain?'

'Very little.'

'What made you ill?'

Silence.

'I wonder what caused this fever? To what do you attribute it?'

'Miasma, perhaps - malaria. This is autumn, a season fertile in fevers.'

'I hear you often visit the sick in Briarfield, and Nunnely too, with Mr Hall: you should be on your guard: temerity is not wise.'

'That reminds me, Miss Keeldar, that perhaps you had better not enter this chamber, or come near this couch. I do not believe my illness is infectious: I scarcely fear' (with a sort of smile) 'you will take it; but why should you run even the shadow of a risk? Leave me.'

'Patience: I will go soon; but I should like to do something for you before I depart - any little service - - '

'They will miss you below.'

'No, the gentlemen are still at table.'

'They will not linger long: Sir Philip Nunnely is no wine-bibber, and I hear him just now pass from the dining-room to the drawing-room.'

'It is a servant.'

'It is Sir Philip, I know his step.'

'Your hearing is acute.'

'It is never dull, and the sense seems sharpened at present. Sir Philip was here to tea last night. I heard you sing to him some song which he had brought you. I heard him, when he took his departure at eleven o'clock, call you out on to the pavement, to look at the evening star.'

'You must be nervously sensitive.'

'I heard him kiss your hand.'

'Impossible!'

'No; my chamber is over the hall, the window just above the front door, the sash was a little raised, for I felt feverish: you stood ten minutes with him on the steps: I heard your discourse, every word, and I heard the salute. Henry, give me some water.'

'Let me give it him.'

But he half rose to take the glass from young Sympson, and declined her attendance.

'And can I do nothing?'

'Nothing: for you cannot guarantee me a night's peaceful rest, and it is all I at present want.'

'You do not sleep well?'

'Sleep has left me.'

'Yet you said you were not very ill?'

'I am often sleepless when in high health.'

'If I had power, I would lap you in the most placid slumber; quite deep and hushed, without a dream.'

'Blank annihilation! I do not ask that.'

'With dreams of all you most desire.'

'Monstrous delusions! The sleep would be delirium, the waking death.'

'Your wishes are not so chimerical: you are no visionary?'

'Miss Keeldar, I suppose you think so: but my character is not, perhaps, quite as legible to you as a page of the last new novel might be.'

'That is possible. . . But this sleep: I should like to woo it to your pillow - to win for you its favour. If I took a book and sat down, and read some pages - - ? I can well spare half an hour.'

'Thank you, but I will not detain you.'

'I would read softly.'

'It would not do. I am too feverish and excitable to bear a soft, cooing, vibrating voice close at my ear. You had better leave me.'

'Well, I will go.'

'And no good-night?'

'Yes, sir, yes. Mr Moore, good-night.' (Exit Shirley.)

'Henry, my boy, go to bed now: it is time you had some repose.'

'Sir, it would please me to watch at your bedside all night.'

'Nothing less called for: I am getting better: there, go.'

'Give me your blessing, sir.'

'God bless you, my best pupil!'

'You never call me your dearest pupil!'

'No, nor ever shall.'

. . . . . .

Possibly Miss Keeldar resented her former teacher's rejection of her courtesy: it is certain she did not repeat the offer of it. Often as her light step traversed the gallery in the course of a day, it did not again pause at his door; nor did her 'cooing, vibrating voice' disturb a second time the hush of the sickroom. A sick-room, indeed, it soon ceased to be; Mr Moore's good constitution quickly triumphed over his indisposition: in a few days he shook it off, and resumed his duties as tutor.

That 'Auld Lang Syne' had still its authority both with preceptor and scholar, was proved by the manner in which he sometimes promptly passed the distance she usually maintained between them, and put down her high reserve with a firm, quiet hand.

One afternoon the Sympson family were gone out to take a carriage airing. Shirley, never sorry to snatch a reprieve from their society, had remained behind, detained by business, as she said. The business - a little letter- writing - was soon despatched after the yard-gates had closed on the carriage: Miss Keeldar betook herself to the garden

It was a peaceful autumn day. The gilding of the Indian summer mellowed the pastures far and wide. The russet woods stood ripe to be stript, but were yet full of leaf. The purple of heath-bloom, faded but not withered, tinged the hills. The beck wandered down to the Hollow, through a silent district; no wind followed its course, or haunted its woody borders. Fieldhead gardens bore the seal of gentle decay. On the walks, swept that morning, yellow leaves had fluttered down again. Its time of flowers, and even of fruits, was over; but a scantling of apples enriched the trees; only a blossom here and there expanded pale and delicate amidst a knot of faded leaves.

These single flowers - the last of their race - Shirley culled as she wandered thoughtfully amongst the beds. She was fastening into her girdle a hueless and scentless nosegay, when Henry Sympson called to her as he came limping from the house.

'Shirley, Mr Moore would be glad to see you in the schoolroom and to hear you read a little French, if you have no more urgent occupation.'

The messenger delivered his commission very simply, as if it were a mere matter of course.

'Did Mr Moore tell you to say that?'

'Certainly: why not? And now, do come, and let us once more be as we were at Sympson Grove. We used to have pleasant school-hours in those days.'

Miss Keeldar, perhaps, thought that circumstances were changed since then; however, she made no remark, but after a little reflection quietly followed Henry.

Entering the schoolroom, she inclined her head with a decent obeisance, as had been her wont in former times; she removed her bonnet, and hung it up beside Henry's cap. Louis Moore sat at his desk, turning the leaves of a book, open before him, and marking passages with his pencil; he just moved, in acknowledgment of her curtsey, but did not rise.

'You proposed to read to me a few nights ago,' said he. 'I could not hear you then; my attention is now at your service. A little renewed

practice in French may not be unprofitable: your accent, I have observed, begins to rust.'

'What book shall I take?'

'Here are the posthumous works of St. Pierre. Read a few pages of the Fragments de l'Amazone.'

She accepted the chair which he had placed in readiness near his own - the volume lay on his desk - there was but one between them; her sweeping curls drooped so low as to hide the page from him.

'Put back your hair,' he said.

For one moment, Shirley looked not quite certain whether she would obey the request or disregard it: a flicker of her eye beamed furtive on the professor's face; perhaps if he had been looking at her harshly or timidly, or if one undecided line had marked his countenance, she would have rebelled, and the lesson had ended there and then; but he was only awaiting her compliance - as calm as marble, and as cool. She threw the veil of tresses behind her ear. It was well her face owned an agreeable outline, and that her cheek possessed the polish and the roundness of early youth, or, thus robbed of a softening shade, the contours might have lost their grace. But what mattered that in the present society? Neither Calypso nor Eucharis cared to fascinate Mentor.

She began to read. The language had become strange to her tongue; it faltered; the lecture flowed unevenly, impeded by hurried breath, broken by Anglicised tones. She stopped.

'I can't do it. Read me a paragraph, if you please, Mr Moore.'

What he read, she repeated: she caught his accent in three minutes.

'Très bien,' was the approving comment at the close of the piece.

'C'est presque le Français rattrapé, n'est-ce pas?'

'You could not write French as you once could, I dare say?'

'Oh! no. I should make strange work of my concords now.'

'You could not compose the devoir of La Première Femme Savante?'

'Do you still remember that rubbish?'

'Every line.'

'I doubt you.'

'I will engage to repeat it word for word.'

'You would stop short at the first line,'

'Challenge me to the experiment.'

'I challenge you.'

He proceeded to recite the following: he gave it in French, but we must translate, on pain of being unintelligible to some readers.

. . . . . .

'And it came to pass when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.'

This was in the dawn of time, before the morning stars were set, and while they yet sang together.

The epoch is so remote, the mists and dewy grey of matin twilight veil it with so vague an obscurity, that all distinct feature of custom, all clear line of locality, evade perception and baffle research. It must suffice to know that the world then existed; that men peopled it; that man's nature, with its passions, sympathies, pains, and pleasures, informed the planet and gave it soul.

A certain tribe colonised a certain spot on the globe; of what race this tribe - unknown: in what region that spot - untold. We usually think of the East when we refer to transactions of that date; but who shall declare that there was no life in the West, the South, the North? What is to disprove that this tribe, instead of camping under palm-groves in Asia, wandered beneath island oak-woods rooted in our own seas of Europe?

It is no sandy plain, nor any circumscribed and scant oasis I seem to realise. A forest valley, with rocky sides and brown profundity of shade, formed by tree crowding on tree, descends deep before me. Here, indeed, dwell human beings, but so few, and in alleys so thick branched and over-arched, they are neither heard nor seen. Are they savage? - doubtless. They live by the crook and the bow: half shepherds, half hunters, their flocks wander wild as their prey. Are they happy? - no: not more happy than we are at this day. Are they good? - no: not better than ourselves: their nature is our nature - human both. There is one in this tribe too often miserable - a child

bereaved of both parents. None cares for this child: she is fed sometimes, but oftener forgotten: a hut rarely receives her: the hollow tree and chill cavern are her home. Forsaken, lost, and wandering, she lives more with the wild beast and bird than with her own kind. Hunger and cold are her comrades: sadness hovers over, and solitude besets her round. Unheeded and unvalued, she should die: but she both lives and grows: the green wilderness nurses her, and becomes to her a mother: feeds her on juicy berry, on saccharine root and nut.

There is something in the air of this clime which fosters life kindly: there must be something, too, in its dews, which heals with sovereign balm. Its gentle seasons exaggerate no passion, no sense; its temperature tends to harmony; its breezes, you would say, bring down from heaven the germ of pure thought, and purer feeling. Not grotesquely fantastic are the forms of cliff and foliage; not violently vivid the colouring of flower and bird: in all the grandeur of these forests there is repose; in all their freshness there is tenderness.

The gentle charm vouchsafed to flower and tree, - bestowed on deer and dove, - has not been denied to the human nursling. All solitary, she has sprung up straight and graceful. Nature cast her features in a fine mould; they have matured in their pure, accurate first lines, unaltered by the shocks of disease. No fierce dry blast has dealt rudely with the surface of her frame; no burning sun has crisped or withered her tresses: her form gleams ivory-white through the trees; her hair flows plenteous, long, and glossy; her eyes, not dazzled by vertical fires, beam in the shade large and open, and full and dewy: above those eyes, when the breeze bares her forehead, shines an expanse fair and ample, - a clear, candid page, whereon knowledge, should knowledge ever come, might write a golden record. You see in the desolate young savage nothing vicious or vacant; she haunts the wood harmless and thoughtful: though of what one so untaught can think, it is not easy to divine.

On the evening of one summer day, before the Flood, being utterly alone - for she had lost all trace of her tribe, who had wandered leagues away, she knew not where, - she went up from the vale, to watch Day take leave and Night arrive. A crag, overspread by a tree, was her station: the oak-roots, turfed and mossed, gave a seat: the oak-boughs, thick-leaved, wove a canopy.

Slow and grand the Day withdrew, passing in purple fire, and parting to the farewell of a wild, low chorus from the woodlands. Then Night entered, quiet as death: the wind fell, the birds ceased singing. Now every nest held happy mates, and hart and hind slumbered blissfully safe in their lair.

The girl sat, her body still, her soul astir; occupied, however, rather in feeling than in thinking, - in wishing, than hoping, - in imagining, than projecting. She felt the world, the sky, the night, boundlessly mighty. Of all things, herself seemed to herself the centre, - a small, forgotten atom of life, a spark of soul, emitted inadvertent from the great creative source, and now burning unmarked to waste in the heart of a black hollow. She asked, was she thus to burn out and perish, her living light doing no good, never seen, never needed, - a star in an else starless firmament, - which nor shepherd, nor wanderer, nor sage, nor priest, tracked as a guide, or read as a prophecy? Could this be, she demanded, when the flame of her intelligence burned so vivid; when her life beat so true, and real, and potent; when something within her stirred disquieted, and restlessly asserted a God-given strength, for which it insisted she should find exercise?

She gazed abroad on Heaven and Evening: Heaven and Evening gazed back on her. She bent down, searching bank, hill, river, spread dim below. All she questioned responded by oracles she heard, - she was impressed; but she could not understand. Above her head she raised her hands joined together.

'Guidance - help - comfort - come!' was her cry.

There was no voice, nor any that answered.

She waited, kneeling, steadfastly looking up. Yonder sky was sealed: the solemn stars shone alien and remote.

At last, one over-stretched chord of her agony slacked: she thought Something above relented: she felt as if Something far round drew nigher: she heard as if Silence spoke. There was no language, no word, only a tone.

Again - a fine, full, lofty tone, a deep, soft sound, like a storm whispering, made twilight undulate.

Once more, profounder, nearer, clearer, it rolled harmonious.

Yet, again - a distinct voice passed between Heaven and Earth.

'Eva!'

If Eva were not this woman's name, she had none. She rose.

'Here am I.'

'Eva!'

'Oh, Night! (it can be but Night that speaks) I am here!'

The voice, descending, reached Earth.

'Eva!'

'Lord!' she cried, 'behold thine handmaid!'

She had her religion: all tribes held some creed.

'I come: a Comforter! Lord, come quickly!'

The Evening flushed full of hope: the Air panted; the Moon - rising before - ascended large, but her light showed no shape.

'Lean towards me, Eva. Enter my arms; repose thus.'

'Thus I lean, O Invisible, but felt! And what art thou?'

'Eva, I have brought a living draught from heaven. Daughter of Man, drink of my cup!'

'I drink - it is as if sweetest dew visited my lips in a full current. My arid heart revives: my affliction is lightened: my strait and struggle are gone. And the night changes! the wood, the hill, the moon, the wide sky - all change!'

'All change, and for ever. I take from thy vision, darkness: I loosen from thy faculties, fetters! I level in thy path, obstacles: I, with my presence, fill vacancy: I claim as mine the lost atom of life: I take to myself the spark of soul - burning, heretofore, forgotten!'

'Oh, take me! Oh, claim me! This is a god.'

'This is a son of God: one who feels himself in the portion of life that stirs you: he is suffered to reclaim his own, and so to foster and aid that it shall not perish hopeless.'

'A son of God! Am I indeed chosen?'

'Thou only in this land. I saw thee that thou wert fair: I knew thee that thou wert mine. To me it is given to rescue, to sustain, to cherish, mine own. Acknowledge in me that Seraph on earth, named Genius.'

'My glorious Bridegroom! True Dayspring from on high! All I would have, at last I possess. I receive a revelation. The dark hint, the obscure whisper, which have haunted me from childhood, are interpreted. Thou art He I sought. God-born, take me, thy bride!'

'Unhumbled, I can take what is mine. Did I not give from the altar the very flame which lit Eva's being? Come again into the heaven whence thou wert sent.'

That Presence, invisible, but mighty, gathered her in like a lamb to the fold; that voice, soft, but all-pervading, vibrated through her heart like music. Her eye received no image: and yet a sense visited her vision and her brain as of the serenity of stainless air, the power of sovereign seas, the majesty of marching stars, the energy of colliding elements, the rooted endurance of hills wide based, and, above all, as of the lustre of heroic beauty rushing victorious on the Night, vanquishing its shadows like a diviner sun.

Such was the bridal-hour of Genius and Humanity. Who shall rehearse the tale of their after-union? Who shall depict its bliss and bale? Who shall tell how He, between whom and the Woman God put enmity, forged deadly plots to break the bond or defile its purity? Who shall record the long strife between Serpent and Seraph? How still the Father of Lies insinuated evil into good - pride into wisdom - grossness into glory - pain into bliss - poison into passion? How the 'dreadless Angel' defied, resisted, and repelled? How, again and again, he refined the polluted cup, exalted the debased emotion, rectified the perverted impulse, detected the lurking venom, baffled the frontless temptation - purified, justified, watched, and withstood? How, by his patience, by his strength, by that unutterable excellence he held from God - his Origin - this faithful Seraph fought for Humanity a good fight through time; and, when Time's course closed, and Death was encountered at the end, barring with fleshless arms the portals of Eternity, how Genius still held close his dying bride, sustained her through the agony of the passage, bore her triumphant into his own home - Heaven; restored her, redeemed, to Jehovah - her Maker; and at last, before Angel and Archangel, crowned her with the crown of Immortality.

Who shall, of these things, write the chronicle?

. . . . . .

'I never could correct that composition,' observed Shirley, as Moore concluded. 'Your censor-pencil scored it with condemnatory lines, whose signification I strove vainly to fathom.'

She had taken a crayon from the tutor's desk, and was drawing little leaves, fragments of pillars, broken crosses, on the margin of the book.

'French may be half-forgotten, but the habits of the French lesson are retained, I see,' said Louis: 'my books would now, as erst, be unsafe

with you. My newly bound St. Pierre would soon be like my Racine: Miss Keeldar, her mark - traced on every page.'

Shirley dropped her crayon as if it burned her fingers.

'Tell me what were the faults of that devoir?' she asked. 'Were they grammatical errors, or did you object to the substance?'

'I never said that the lines I drew were indications of faults at all. You would have it that such was the case, and I refrained from contradiction.'

'What else did they denote?'

'No matter now.'

'Mr Moore,' cried Henry, 'make Shirley repeat some of the pieces she used to say so well by heart.'

'If I ask for any, it will be Le Cheval Dompté,' said Moore, trimming with his pen-knife the pencil Miss Keeldar had worn to a stump.

She turned aside her head; the neck, the clear cheek, forsaken by their natural veil, were seen to flush warm.

'Ah! she has not forgotten, you see, sir,' said Henry, exultant. 'She knows how naughty she was.'

A smile, which Shirley would not permit to expand, made her lip tremble; she bent her face, and hid it half with her arms, half in her curls, which, as she stooped, fell loose again.

'Certainly, I was a rebel!' she answered.

'A rebel!' repeated Henry. 'Yes: you and papa had quarrelled terribly, and you set both him and mamma, and Mrs Pryor, and everybody, at defiance: you said he had insulted you - - '

'He had insulted me,' interposed Shirley.

'And you wanted to leave Sympson Grove directly. You packed your things up, and papa threw them out of your trunk; mamma cried - Mrs Pryor cried; they both stood wringing their hands begging you to be patient, and you knelt on the floor with your things and your upturned box before you, looking, Shirley - looking - why, in one of your passions. Your features, in such passions, are not distorted; they are fixed, but quite beautiful: you scarcely look angry, only resolute, and in a certain haste; yet one feels that, at such times, an obstacle

cast across your path would be split as with lightning. Papa lost heart, and called Mr Moore.'

'Enough, Henry.'

'No: it is not enough. I hardly know how Mr Moore managed, except that I recollect he suggested to papa that agitation would bring on his gout; and then he spoke quietly to the ladies, and got them away; and afterwards he said to you, Miss Shirley, that it was of no use talking or lecturing now, but that the tea-things were just brought into the schoolroom, and he was very thirsty, and he would be glad if you would leave your packing for the present and come and make a cup of tea for him and me. You came: you would not talk at first; but soon you softened and grew cheerful. Mr Moore began to tell us about the Continent, the war, and Bonaparte; subjects we were both fond of listening to. After tea he said we should neither of us leave him that evening: he would not let us stray out of his sight, lest we should again get into mischief. We sat one on each side of him: we were so happy. I never passed so pleasant an evening. The next day he gave you, missy, a lecture of an hour, and wound it up by marking you a piece to learn in Bossuet as a punishment-lesson - Le Cheval Dompté. You learned it instead of packing up, Shirley. We heard no more of your running away. Mr Moore used to tease you on the subject for a year afterwards.'

'She never said a lesson with greater spirit,' subjoined Moore. 'She then, for the first time, gave me the treat of hearing my native tongue spoken without accent by an English girl.'

'She was as sweet as summer-cherries for a month afterwards,' struck in Henry: 'a good hearty quarrel always left Shirley's temper better than it found it.'

'You talk of me as if I were not present,' observed Miss Keeldar, who had not yet lifted her face.

'Are you sure you are present?' asked Moore: 'there have been moments since my arrival here, when I have been tempted to inquire of the lady of Fieldhead if she knew what had become of my former pupil?'

'She is here now.'

'I see her, and humble enough; but I would neither advise Harry, nor others, to believe too implicitly in the humility which one moment can hide its blushing face like a modest little child, and the next lift it pale and lofty as a marble Juno.'

'One man in times of old, it is said, imparted vitality to the statue he had chiselled. Others may have the contrary gift of turning life to stone.'

Moore paused on this observation before he replied to it. His look, at once struck and meditative, said, 'A strange phrase: what may it mean?' He turned it over in his mind, with thought deep and slow, as some German pondering metaphysics.

'You mean,' he said at last, 'that some men inspire repugnance, and so chill the kind heart.'

'Ingenious!' responded Shirley. 'If the interpretation pleases you, you are welcome to hold it valid. I don't care.'

And with that she raised her head, lofty in look, and statue-like in hue, as Louis had described it.

'Behold the metamorphosis!' he said: 'scarce imagined ere it is realised: a lowly nymph develops to an inaccessible goddess. But Henry must not be disappointed of his recitation, and Olympia will deign to oblige him. Let us begin.'

'I have forgotten the very first line.'

'Which I have not. My memory, if a slow, is a retentive one. I acquire deliberately both knowledge and liking: the acquisition grows into my brain, and the sentiment into my breast; and it is not as the rapid springing produce which, having no root in itself, flourishes verdurous enough for a time, but too soon falls withered away. Attention, Henry! Miss Keeldar consents to favour you. 'Voyez ce Cheval ardent et impétuetux,' so it commences.'

Miss Keeldar did consent to make the effort; but she soon stopped.

'Unless I heard the whole repeated, I cannot continue it,' she said.

'Yet it was quickly learned, ‘soon gained, soon gone,” moralised the tutor. He recited the passage deliberately, accurately, with slow, impressive emphasis.

Shirley, by degrees, inclined her ear as he went on. Her face, before turned from him, returned towards him. When he ceased, she took the word up as if from his lips: she took his very tone; she seized his very accent; she delivered the periods as he had delivered them: she reproduced his manner, his pronunciation, his expression.

It was now her turn to petition.

'Recall Le Songe d'Athalie,' she entreated, 'and say it.'

He said it for her; she took it from him; she found lively excitement in the pleasure of making his language her own: she asked for further indulgence; all the old school-pieces were revived, and with them Shirley's old school-days.

He had gone through some of the best passages of Racine and Corneille, and then had heard the echo of his own deep tones in the girl's voice, that modulated itself faithfully on his: - Le Chène et le Roseau, that most beautiful of La Fontaine's fables, had been recited, well recited by the tutor, and the pupil had animatedly availed herself of the lesson. Perhaps a simultaneous feeling seized them now, that their enthusiasm had kindled to a glow, which the slight fuel of French poetry no longer sufficed to feed; perhaps they longed for a trunk of English oak to be thrown as a Yule log to the devouring flame. Moore observed - 'And these are our best pieces! And we have nothing more dramatic, nervous, natural!'

And then he smiled and was silent. His whole nature seemed serenely alight: he stood on the hearth, leaning his elbow on the mantelpiece, musing not unblissfully. Twilight was closing on the diminished autumn day: the schoolroom windows - darkened with creeping plants, from which no high October winds had as yet swept the sere foliage - admitted scarce a gleam of sky; but the fire gave light enough to talk by.

And now Louis Moore addressed his pupil in French; and she answered, at first, with laughing hesitation and in broken phrase: Moore encouraged while he corrected her; Henry joined in the lesson; the two scholars stood opposite the master, their arms round each other's waists: Tartar, who long since had craved and obtained admission, sat sagely in the centre of the rug, staring at the blaze which burst fitful from morsels of coal among the red cinders: the group were happy enough, but -

'Pleasures are like poppies spread; You seize the flower - its bloom is shed.'

The dull, rumbling sound of wheels was heard on the pavement in the yard.

'It is the carriage returned,' said Shirley; 'and dinner must he just ready, and I am not dressed.'

A servant came in with Mr Moore's candle and tea: for the tutor and his pupil usually dined at luncheon time.

'Mr Sympson and the ladies are returned,' she said, 'and Sir Philip Nunnely is with them.'

'How you did start, and how your hand trembled, Shirley!' said Henry, when the maid had closed the shutter and was gone. 'But I know why - don't you, Mr Moore? I know what papa intends. He is a little ugly man, that Sir Philip I wish he had not come: I wish sisters and all of them had stayed at De Walden Hall to dine. Shirley should once more have made tea for you and me, Mr Moore, and we would have had a happy evening of it.'

Moore was locking up his desk, and putting away his St. Pierre - 'That was your plan - was it, my boy?'

'Don't you approve it, sir?'

'I approve nothing Utopian. Look Life in its iron face: stare Reality out of its brassy countenance. Make the tea, Henry; I shall be back in a minute.'

He left the room: so did Shirley, by another door.