

## **BOOK VIII - Fruit And Seed**

### **Chapter LVIII**

'Much ado there was, God wot; He wold love and she wold not.' -  
NICHOLAS BRETON.

Extension, we know, is a very imperfect measure of things; and the length of the sun's journeying can no more tell us how life has advanced than the acreage of a field can tell us what growths may be active within it. A man may go south, and, stumbling over a bone, may meditate upon it till he has found a new starting-point for anatomy; or eastward, and discover a new key to language telling a new story of races; or he may head an expedition that opens new continental pathways, get himself maimed in body, and go through a whole heroic poem of resolve and endurance; and at the end of a few months he may come back to find his neighbors grumbling at the same parish grievance as before, or to see the same elderly gentleman treading the pavement in discourse with himself, shaking his head after the same percussive butcher's boy, and pausing at the same shop-window to look at the same prints. If the swiftest thinking has about the pace of a greyhound, the slowest must be supposed to move, like the limpet, by an apparent sticking, which after a good while is discerned to be a slight progression. Such differences are manifest in the variable intensity which we call human experience, from the revolutionary rush of change which makes a new inner and outer life, to that quiet recurrence of the familiar, which has no other epochs than those of hunger and the heavens.

Something of this contrast was seen in the year's experience which had turned the brilliant, self-confident Gwendolen Harleth of the Archery Meeting into the crushed penitent impelled to confess her unworthiness where it would have been her happiness to be held worthy; while it had left her family in Pennicote without deeper change than that of some outward habits, and some adjustment of prospects and intentions to reduced income, fewer visits, and fainter compliments. The rectory was as pleasant a home as before: and the red and pink peonies on the lawn, the rows of hollyhocks by the hedges, had bloomed as well this year as last: the rector maintained his cheerful confidence in the good will of patrons and his resolution to deserve it by diligence in the fulfillment of his duties, whether patrons were likely to hear of it or not; doing nothing solely with an eye to promotion except, perhaps, the writing of two ecclesiastical articles, which having no signature, were attributed to some one else, except by the patrons who had a special copy sent them, and these certainly knew the author but did not read the articles. The rector, however, chewed no poisonous cud of suspicion on this point: he made marginal notes on his own copies to render them a more

interesting loan, and was gratified that the Archdeacon and other authorities had nothing to say against the general tenor of his argument. Peaceful authorship! - living in the air of the fields and downs, and not in the thrice-breathed breath of criticism - bringing no Dantesque leanness; rather, assisting nutrition by complacency, and perhaps giving a more suffusive sense of achievement than the production of a whole *Divina Commedia*. Then there was the father's recovered delight in his favorite son, which was a happiness outweighing the loss of eighteen hundred a year. Of whatever nature might be the hidden change wrought in Rex by the disappointment of his first love, it was apparently quite secondary to that evidence of more serious ambition which dated from the family misfortune; indeed, Mr Gascoigne was inclined to regard the little affair which had caused him so much anxiety the year before as an evaporation of superfluous moisture, a kind of finish to the baking process which the human dough demands. Rex had lately come down for a summer visit to the rectory, bringing Anna home, and while he showed nearly the old liveliness with his brothers and sisters, he continued in his holiday the habits of the eager student, rising early in the morning and shutting himself up early in the evenings to carry on a fixed course of study.

'You don't repent the choice of the law as a profession, Rex?' said his father.

'There is no profession I would choose before it,' said Rex. 'I should like to end my life as a first-rate judge, and help to draw up a code. I reverse the famous dictum. I should say, 'Give me something to do with making the laws, and let who will make the songs.'"

'You will have to stow in an immense amount of rubbish, I suppose - that's the worst of it,' said the rector.

'I don't see that law-rubbish is worse than any other sort. It is not so bad as the rubbishy literature that people choke their minds with. It doesn't make one so dull. Our wittiest men have often been lawyers. Any orderly way of looking at things as cases and evidence seems to me better than a perpetual wash of odds and ends bearing on nothing in particular. And then, from a higher point of view, the foundations and the growth of law make the most interesting aspects of philosophy and history. Of course there will be a good deal that is troublesome, drudging, perhaps exasperating. But the great prizes in life can't be won easily - I see that.'

'Well, my boy, the best augury of a man's success in his profession is that he thinks it the finest in the world. But I fancy it so with most work when a man goes into it with a will. Brewitt, the blacksmith, said to me the other day that his 'prentice had no mind to his trade; 'and

yet, sir,' said Brewitt, 'what would a young fellow have if he doesn't like the blacksmithing?'

The rector cherished a fatherly delight, which he allowed to escape him only in moderation. Warham, who had gone to India, he had easily borne parting with, but Rex was that romance of later life which a man sometimes finds in a son whom he recognizes as superior to himself, picturing a future eminence for him according to a variety of famous examples. It was only to his wife that he said with decision: 'Rex will be a distinguished man, Nancy, I am sure of it - as sure as Paley's father was about his son.'

'Was Paley an old bachelor?' said Mrs. Gascoigne.

'That is hardly to the point, my dear,' said the rector, who did not remember that irrelevant detail. And Mrs. Gascoigne felt that she had spoken rather weakly.

This quiet trotting of time at the rectory was shared by the group who had exchanged the faded dignity of Offendene for the low white house not a mile off, well enclosed with evergreens, and known to the villagers, as 'Jodson's.' Mrs. Davilow's delicate face showed only a slight deepening of its mild melancholy, her hair only a few more silver lines, in consequence of the last year's trials; the four girls had bloomed out a little from being less in the shade; and the good Jocosa preserved her serviceable neutrality toward the pleasures and glories of the world as things made for those who were not 'in a situation.'

The low narrow drawing-room, enlarged by two quaint projecting windows, with lattices wide open on a July afternoon to the scent of monthly roses, the faint murmurs of the garden, and the occasional rare sound of hoofs and wheels seeming to clarify the succeeding silence, made rather a crowded, lively scene, Rex and Anna being added to the usual group of six. Anna, always a favorite with her younger cousins, had much to tell of her new experience, and the acquaintances she had made in London, and when on her first visit she came alone, many questions were asked her about Gwendolen's house in Grosvenor Square, what Gwendolen herself had said, and what any one else had said about Gwendolen. Had Anna been to see Gwendolen after she had known about the yacht? No: - an answer which left speculation free concerning everything connected with that interesting unknown vessel beyond the fact that Gwendolen had written just before she set out to say that Mr Grandcourt and she were going yachting on the Mediterranean, and again from Marseilles to say that she was sure to like the yachting, the cabins were very elegant, and she would probably not send another letter till she had written quite a long diary filled with *dittos*. Also, this movement of Mr and Mrs. Grandcourt had been mentioned in 'the newspaper;' so that

altogether this new phase of Gwendolen's exalted life made a striking part of the sisters' romance, the book-devouring Isabel throwing in a corsair or two to make an adventure that might end well.

But when Rex was present, the girls, according to instructions, never started this fascinating topic, and to-day there had only been animated descriptions of the Meyricks and their extraordinary Jewish friends, which caused some astonished questioning from minds to which the idea of live Jews, out of a book, suggested a difference deep enough to be almost zoological, as of a strange race in Pliny's Natural History that might sleep under the shade of its own ears. Bertha could not imagine what Jews believed now; and she had a dim idea that they rejected the Old Testament since it proved the New; Miss Merry thought that Mirah and her brother could 'never have been properly argued with,' and the amiable Alice did not mind what the Jews believed, she was sure she 'couldn't bear them.' Mrs. Davilow corrected her by saying that the great Jewish families who were in society were quite what they ought to be both in London and Paris, but admitted that the commoner unconverted Jews were objectionable; and Isabel asked whether Mirah talked just as they did, or whether you might be with her and not find out that she was a Jewess.

Rex, who had no partisanship with the Israelites, having made a troublesome acquaintance with the minutiae of their ancient history in the form of 'cram,' was amusing himself by playfully exaggerating the notion of each speaker, while Anna begged them all to understand that he was only joking, when the laughter was interrupted by the bringing in of a letter for Mrs. Davilow. A messenger had run with it in great haste from the rectory. It enclosed a telegram, and as Mrs. Davilow read and re-read it in silence and agitation, all eyes were turned on her with anxiety, but no one dared to speak. Looking up at last and seeing the young faces 'painted with fear,' she remembered that they might be imagining something worse than the truth, something like her own first dread which made her unable to understand what was written, and she said, with a sob which was half relief -

'My dears, Mr Grandcourt - ' She paused an instant, and then began again, ' Mr Grandcourt is drowned.'

Rex started up as if a missile had been suddenly thrown into the room. He could not help himself, and Anna's first look was at him. But then, gathering some self-command while Mrs. Davilow was reading what the rector had written on the enclosing paper, he said -

'Can I do anything, aunt? Can I carry any word to my father from you?'

'Yes, dear. Tell him I will be ready - he is very good. He says he will go with me to Genoa - he will be here at half-past six. Jocosa and Alice, help me to get ready. She is safe - Gwendolen is safe - but she must be ill. I am sure she must be very ill. Rex, dear - Rex and Anna - go and tell your father I will be quite ready. I would not for the world lose another night. And bless him for being ready so soon. I can travel night and day till we get there.'

Rex and Anna hurried away through the sunshine which was suddenly solemn to them, without uttering a word to each other: she chiefly possessed by solicitude about any reopening of his wound, he struggling with a tumultuary crowd of thoughts that were an offence against his better will. The tumult being undiminished when they were at the rectory gate, he said -

'Nannie, I will leave you to say everything to my father. If he wants me immediately, let me know. I shall stay in the shrubbery for ten minutes - only ten minutes.'

Who has been quite free from egoistic escapes of the imagination, picturing desirable consequences on his own future in the presence of another's misfortune, sorrow, or death? The expected promotion or legacy is the common type of a temptation which makes speech and even prayer a severe avoidance of the most insistent thoughts, and sometimes raises an inward shame, a self-distaste that is worse than any other form of unpleasant companionship. In Rex's nature the shame was immediate, and overspread like an ugly light all the hurrying images of what might come, which thrust themselves in with the idea that Gwendolen was again free - overspread them, perhaps, the more persistently because every phantasm of a hope was quickly nullified by a more substantial obstacle. Before the vision of 'Gwendolen free' rose the impassable vision of 'Gwendolen rich, exalted, courted;' and if in the former time, when both their lives were fresh, she had turned from his love with repugnance, what ground was there for supposing that her heart would be more open to him in the future?

These thoughts, which he wanted to master and suspend, were like a tumultuary ringing of opposing chimes that he could not escape from by running. During the last year he had brought himself into a state of calm resolve, and now it seemed that three words had been enough to undo all that difficult work, and cast him back into the wretched fluctuations of a longing which he recognized as simply perturbing and hopeless. And at this moment the activity of such longing had an untimeliness that made it repulsive to his better self. Excuse poor Rex; it was not much more than eighteen months since he had been laid low by an archer who sometimes touches his arrow with a subtle, lingering poison. The disappointment of a youthful passion has effects

as incalculable as those of small-pox which may make one person plain and a genius, another less plain and more foolish, another plain without detriment to his folly, and leave perhaps the majority without obvious change. Everything depends - not on the mere fact of disappointment, but - on the nature affected and the force that stirs it. In Rex's well-endowed nature, brief as the hope had been, the passionate stirring had gone deep, and the effect of disappointment was revolutionary, though fraught with a beneficent new order which retained most of the old virtues; in certain respects he believed that it had finally determined the bias and color of his life. Now, however, it seemed that his inward peace was hardly more than that of republican Florence, and his heart no better than the alarm-bell that made work slack and tumult busy.

Rex's love had been of that sudden, penetrating, clinging sort which the ancients knew and sung, and in singing made a fashion of talk for many moderns whose experience has by no means a fiery, demonic character. To have the consciousness suddenly steeped with another's personality, to have the strongest inclinations possessed by an image which retains its dominance in spite of change and apart from worthiness - nay, to feel a passion which clings faster for the tragic pangs inflicted by a cruel, reorganized unworthiness - is a phase of love which in the feeble and common-minded has a repulsive likeness to his blind animalism insensible to the higher sway of moral affinity or heaven-lit admiration. But when this attaching force is present in a nature not of brutish unmodifiableness, but of a human dignity that can risk itself safely, it may even result in a devotedness not unfit to be called divine in a higher sense than the ancient. Phlegmatic rationality stares and shakes its head at these unaccountable prepossessions, but they exist as undeniably as the winds and waves, determining here a wreck and there a triumphant voyage.

This sort of passion had nested in the sweet-natured, strong Rex, and he had made up his mind to its companionship, as if it had been an object supremely dear, stricken dumb and helpless, and turning all the future of tenderness into a shadow of the past. But he had also made up his mind that his life was not to be pauperized because he had had to renounce one sort of joy; rather, he had begun life again with a new counting-up of the treasures that remained to him, and he had even felt a release of power such as may come from ceasing to be afraid of your own neck.

And now, here he was pacing the shrubbery, angry with himself that the sense of irrevocableness in his lot, which ought in reason to have been as strong as ever, had been shaken by a change of circumstances that could make no change in relation to him. He told himself the truth quite roughly -

'She would never love me; and that is not the question - I could never approach her as a lover in her present position. I am exactly of no consequence at all, and am not likely to be of much consequence till my head is turning gray. But what has that to do with it? She would not have me on any terms, and I would not ask her. It is a meanness to be thinking about it now - no better than lurking about the battle-field to strip the dead; but there never was more gratuitous sinning. I have nothing to gain there - absolutely nothing. \* \* \* Then why can't I face the facts, and behave as they demand, instead of leaving my father to suppose that there are matters he can't speak to me about, though I might be useful in them?'

The last thought made one wave with the impulse that sent Rex walking firmly into the house and through the open door of the study, where he saw his father packing a traveling-desk.

'Can I be of any use, sir?' said Rex, with rallied courage, as his father looked up at him.

'Yes, my boy; when I'm gone, just see to my letters, and answer where necessary, and send me word of everything. Dymock will manage the parish very well, and you will stay with your mother, or, at least, go up and down again, till I come back, whenever that may be.'

'You will hardly be very long, sir, I suppose,' said Rex, beginning to strap a railway rug. 'You will perhaps bring my cousin back to England?' He forced himself to speak of Gwendolen for the first time, and the rector noticed the epoch with satisfaction.

'That depends,' he answered, taking the subject as a matter-of-course between them. 'Perhaps her mother may stay there with her, and I may come back very soon. This telegram leaves us in ignorance which is rather anxious. But no doubt the arrangements of the will lately made are satisfactory, and there may possibly be an heir yet to be born. In any case, I feel confident that Gwendolen will be liberally - I should expect, splendidly - provided for.'

'It must have been a great shock for her,' said Rex, getting more resolute after the first twinge had been borne. 'I suppose he was a devoted husband.'

'No doubt of it,' said the rector, in his most decided manner. 'Few men of his position would have come forward as he did under the circumstances.'

Rex had never seen Grandcourt, had never been spoken to about him by any one of the family, and knew nothing of Gwendolen's flight from her suitor to Leubronn. He only knew that Grandcourt, being very

much in love with her, had made her an offer in the first weeks of her sudden poverty, and had behaved very handsomely in providing for her mother and sisters. That was all very natural and what Rex himself would have liked to do. Grandcourt had been a lucky fellow, and had had some happiness before he got drowned. Yet Rex wondered much whether Gwendolen had been in love with the successful suitor, or had only forborne to tell him that she hated being made love to.