

Chapter XII - Mr And Mrs Glegg At Home

In order to see Mr and Mrs Glegg at home, we must enter the town of St. Ogg's, - that venerable town with the red fluted roofs and the broad warehouse gables, where the black ships unlade themselves of their burthens from the far north, and carry away, in exchange, the precious inland products, the well-crushed cheese and the soft fleeces which my refined readers have doubtless become acquainted with through the medium of the best classic pastorals.

It is one of those old, old towns which impress one as a continuation and outgrowth of nature, as much as the nests of the bower-birds or the winding galleries of the white ants; a town which carries the traces of its long growth and history like a millennial tree, and has sprung up and developed in the same spot between the river and the low hill from the time when the Roman legions turned their backs on it from the camp on the hillside, and the long-haired sea-kings came up the river and looked with fierce, eager eyes at the fatness of the land. It is a town 'familiar with forgotten years.' The shadow of the Saxon hero-king still walks there fitfully, reviewing the scenes of his youth and love-time, and is met by the gloomier shadow of the dreadful heathen Dane, who was stabbed in the midst of his warriors by the sword of an invisible avenger, and who rises on autumn evenings like a white mist from his tumulus on the hill, and hovers in the court of the old hall by the river-side, the spot where he was thus miraculously slain in the days before the old hall was built. It was the Normans who began to build that fine old hall, which is, like the town, telling of the thoughts and hands of widely sundered generations; but it is all so old that we look with loving pardon at its inconsistencies, and are well content that they who built the stone oriel, and they who built the Gothic facade and towers of finest small brickwork with the trefoil ornament, and the windows and battlements defined with stone, did not sacreligiously pull down the ancient half-timbered body with its oak-roofed banqueting-hall.

But older even than this old hall is perhaps the bit of wall now built into the belfry of the parish church, and said to be a remnant of the original chapel dedicated to St. Ogg, the patron saint of this ancient town, of whose history I possess several manuscript versions. I incline to the briefest, since, if it should not be wholly true, it is at least likely to contain the least falsehood. 'Ogg the son of Beorl,' says my private hagiographer, 'was a boatman who gained a scanty living by ferrying passengers across the river Floss. And it came to pass, one evening when the winds were high, that there sat moaning by the brink of the river a woman with a child in her arms; and she was clad in rags, and had a worn and withered look, and she craved to be rowed across the river. And the men thereabout questioned her, and said, 'Wherefore dost thou desire to cross the river? Tarry till the morning, and take

shelter here for the night; so shalt thou be wise and not foolish.' Still she went on to mourn and crave. But Ogg the son of Beorl came up and said, 'I will ferry thee across; it is enough that thy heart needs it.' And he ferried her across. And it came to pass, when she stepped ashore, that her rags were turned into robes of flowing white, and her face became bright with exceeding beauty, and there was a glory around it, so that she shed a light on the water like the moon in its brightness. And she said, 'Ogg, the son of Beorl, thou art blessed in that thou didst not question and wrangle with the heart's need, but wast smitten with pity, and didst straightway relieve the same. And from henceforth whoso steps into thy boat shall be in no peril from the storm; and whenever it puts forth to the rescue, it shall save the lives both of men and beasts.' And when the floods came, many were saved by reason of that blessing on the boat. But when Ogg the son of Beorl died, behold, in the parting of his soul, the boat loosed itself from its moorings, and was floated with the ebbing tide in great swiftness to the ocean, and was seen no more. Yet it was witnessed in the floods of aftertime, that at the coming on of eventide, Ogg the son of Beorl was always seen with his boat upon the wide-spreading waters, and the Blessed Virgin sat in the prow, shedding a light around as of the moon in its brightness, so that the rowers in the gathering darkness took heart and pulled anew.'

This legend, one sees, reflects from a far-off time the visitation of the floods, which, even when they left human life untouched, were widely fatal to the helpless cattle, and swept as sudden death over all smaller living things. But the town knew worse troubles even than the floods, - troubles of the civil wars, when it was a continual fighting-place, where first Puritans thanked God for the blood of the Loyalists, and then Loyalists thanked God for the blood of the Puritans. Many honest citizens lost all their possessions for conscience' sake in those times, and went forth beggared from their native town. Doubtless there are many houses standing now on which those honest citizens turned their backs in sorrow, - quaint-gabled houses looking on the river, jammed between newer warehouses, and penetrated by surprising passages, which turn and turn at sharp angles till they lead you out on a muddy strand overflowed continually by the rushing tide. Everywhere the brick houses have a mellow look, and in Mrs Glegg's day there was no incongruous new-fashioned smartness, no plate-glass in shop-windows, no fresh stucco-facing or other fallacious attempt to make fine old red St. Ogg's wear the air of a town that sprang up yesterday. The shop-windows were small and unpretending; for the farmers' wives and daughters who came to do their shopping on market-days were not to be withdrawn from their regular well-known shops; and the tradesmen had no wares intended for customers who would go on their way and be seen no more. Ah! even Mrs Glegg's day seems far back in the past now, separated from us by changes that widen the years. War and the rumor of war had

then died out from the minds of men, and if they were ever thought of by the farmers in drab greatcoats, who shook the grain out of their sample-bags and buzzed over it in the full market-place, it was as a state of things that belonged to a past golden age when prices were high. Surely the time was gone forever when the broad river could bring up unwelcome ships; Russia was only the place where the linseed came from, - the more the better, - making grist for the great vertical millstones with their scythe-like arms, roaring and grinding and carefully sweeping as if an informing soul were in them. The Catholics, bad harvests, and the mysterious fluctuations of trade were the three evils mankind had to fear; even the floods had not been great of late years. The mind of St. Ogg's did not look extensively before or after. It inherited a long past without thinking of it, and had no eyes for the spirits that walk the streets. Since the centuries when St. Ogg with his boat and the Virgin Mother at the prow had been seen on the wide water, so many memories had been left behind, and had gradually vanished like the receding hilltops! And the present time was like the level plain where men lose their belief in volcanoes and earthquakes, thinking to-morrow will be as yesterday, and the giant forces that used to shake the earth are forever laid to sleep. The days were gone when people could be greatly wrought upon by their faith, still less change it; the Catholics were formidable because they would lay hold of government and property, and burn men alive; not because any sane and honest parishioner of St. Ogg's could be brought to believe in the Pope. One aged person remembered how a rude multitude had been swayed when John Wesley preached in the cattle-market; but for a long while it had not been expected of preachers that they should shake the souls of men. An occasional burst of fervor in Dissenting pulpits on the subject of infant baptism was the only symptom of a zeal unsuited to sober times when men had done with change. Protestantism sat at ease, unmindful of schisms, careless of proselytism: Dissent was an inheritance along with a superior pew and a business connection; and Churchmanship only wondered contemptuously at Dissent as a foolish habit that clung greatly to families in the grocery and chandlery lines, though not incompatible with prosperous wholesale dealing. But with the Catholic Question had come a slight wind of controversy to break the calm: the elderly rector had become occasionally historical and argumentative; and Mr Spray, the Independent minister, had begun to preach political sermons, in which he distinguished with much subtlety between his fervent belief in the right of the Catholics to the franchise and his fervent belief in their eternal perdition. Most of Mr Spray's hearers, however, were incapable of following his subtleties, and many old-fashioned Dissenters were much pained by his 'siding with the Catholics'; while others thought he had better let politics alone. Public spirit was not held in high esteem at St. Ogg's, and men who busied themselves with political questions were regarded with some suspicion, as dangerous characters; they were usually persons

who had little or no business of their own to manage, or, if they had, were likely enough to become insolvent.

This was the general aspect of things at St. Ogg's in Mrs Glegg's day, and at that particular period in her family history when she had had her quarrel with Mr Tulliver. It was a time when ignorance was much more comfortable than at present, and was received with all the honors in very good society, without being obliged to dress itself in an elaborate costume of knowledge; a time when cheap periodicals were not, and when country surgeons never thought of asking their female patients if they were fond of reading, but simply took it for granted that they preferred gossip; a time when ladies in rich silk gowns wore large pockets, in which they carried a mutton-bone to secure them against cramp. Mrs Glegg carried such a bone, which she had inherited from her grandmother with a brocaded gown that would stand up empty, like a suit of armor, and a silver-headed walking-stick; for the Dodson family had been respectable for many generations.

Mrs Glegg had both a front and a back parlor in her excellent house at St. Ogg's, so that she had two points of view from which she could observe the weakness of her fellow-beings, and reinforce her thankfulness for her own exceptional strength of mind. From her front window she could look down the Tofton Road, leading out of St. Ogg's, and note the growing tendency to 'gadding about' in the wives of men not retired from business, together with a practice of wearing woven cotton stockings, which opened a dreary prospect for the coming generation; and from her back windows she could look down the pleasant garden and orchard which stretched to the river, and observe the folly of Mr Glegg in spending his time among 'them flowers and vegetables.' For Mr Glegg, having retired from active business as a wool-stapler for the purpose of enjoying himself through the rest of his life, had found this last occupation so much more severe than his business, that he had been driven into amateur hard labor as a dissipation, and habitually relaxed by doing the work of two ordinary gardeners. The economizing of a gardener's wages might perhaps have induced Mrs Glegg to wink at this folly, if it were possible for a healthy female mind even to simulate respect for a husband's hobby. But it is well known that this conjugal complacency belongs only to the weaker portion of the sex, who are scarcely alive to the responsibilities of a wife as a constituted check on her husband's pleasures, which are hardly ever of a rational or commendable kind.

Mr Glegg on his side, too, had a double source of mental occupation, which gave every promise of being inexhaustible. On the one hand, he surprised himself by his discoveries in natural history, finding that his piece of garden-ground contained wonderful caterpillars, slugs, and insects, which, so far as he had heard, had never before attracted

human observation; and he noticed remarkable coincidences between these zoological phenomena and the great events of that time, - as, for example, that before the burning of York Minster there had been mysterious serpentine marks on the leaves of the rose-trees, together with an unusual prevalence of slugs, which he had been puzzled to know the meaning of, until it flashed upon him with this melancholy conflagration. (Mr Glegg had an unusual amount of mental activity, which, when disengaged from the wool business, naturally made itself a pathway in other directions.) And his second subject of meditation was the 'contrairiness' of the female mind, as typically exhibited in Mrs Glegg. That a creature made - in a genealogical sense - out of a man's rib, and in this particular case maintained in the highest respectability without any trouble of her own, should be normally in a state of contradiction to the blindest propositions and even to the most accommodating concessions, was a mystery in the scheme of things to which he had often in vain sought a clew in the early chapters of Genesis. Mr Glegg had chosen the eldest Miss Dodson as a handsome embodiment of female prudence and thrift, and being himself of a money-getting, money-keeping turn, had calculated on much conjugal harmony. But in that curious compound, the feminine character, it may easily happen that the flavor is unpleasant in spite of excellent ingredients; and a fine systematic stinginess may be accompanied with a seasoning that quite spoils its relish. Now, good Mr Glegg himself was stingy in the most amiable manner; his neighbors called him 'near,' which always means that the person in question is a lovable skinflint. If you expressed a preference for cheese-parings, Mr Glegg would remember to save them for you, with a good-natured delight in gratifying your palate, and he was given to pet all animals which required no appreciable keep. There was no humbug or hypocrisy about Mr Glegg; his eyes would have watered with true feeling over the sale of a widow's furniture, which a five-pound note from his side pocket would have prevented; but a donation of five pounds to a person 'in a small way of life' would have seemed to him a mad kind of lavishness rather than 'charity,' which had always presented itself to him as a contribution of small aids, not a neutralizing of misfortune. And Mr Glegg was just as fond of saving other people's money as his own; he would have ridden as far round to avoid a turnpike when his expenses were to be paid for him, as when they were to come out of his own pocket, and was quite zealous in trying to induce indifferent acquaintances to adopt a cheap substitute for blacking. This inalienable habit of saving, as an end in itself, belonged to the industrious men of business of a former generation, who made their fortunes slowly, almost as the tracking of the fox belongs to the harrier, - it constituted them a 'race,' which is nearly lost in these days of rapid money-getting, when lavishness comes close on the back of want. In old-fashioned times an 'independence' was hardly ever made without a little miserliness as a condition, and you would have found that quality in every provincial

district, combined with characters as various as the fruits from which we can extract acid. The true Harpagnons were always marked and exceptional characters; not so the worthy tax-payers, who, having once pinched from real necessity, retained even in the midst of their comfortable retirement, with their wallfruit and wine-bins, the habit of regarding life as an ingenious process of nibbling out one's livelihood without leaving any perceptible deficit, and who would have been as immediately prompted to give up a newly taxed luxury when they had had their clear five hundred a year, as when they had only five hundred pounds of capital. Mr Glegg was one of these men, found so impracticable by chancellors of the exchequer; and knowing this, you will be the better able to understand why he had not swerved from the conviction that he had made an eligible marriage, in spite of the too-pungent seasoning that nature had given to the eldest Miss Dodson's virtues. A man with an affectionate disposition, who finds a wife to concur with his fundamental idea of life, easily comes to persuade himself that no other woman would have suited him so well, and does a little daily snapping and quarrelling without any sense of alienation. Mr Glegg, being of a reflective turn, and no longer occupied with wool, had much wondering meditation on the peculiar constitution of the female mind as unfolded to him in his domestic life; and yet he thought Mrs Glegg's household ways a model for her sex. It struck him as a pitiable irregularity in other women if they did not roll up their table-napkins with the same tightness and emphasis as Mrs Glegg did, if their pastry had a less leathery consistence, and their damson cheese a less venerable hardness than hers; nay, even the peculiar combination of grocery and druglike odors in Mrs Glegg's private cupboard impressed him as the only right thing in the way of cupboard smells. I am not sure that he would not have longed for the quarrelling again, if it had ceased for an entire week; and it is certain that an acquiescent, mild wife would have left his meditations comparatively jejune and barren of mystery.

Mr Glegg's unmistakable kind-heartedness was shown in this, that it pained him more to see his wife at variance with others, - even with Dolly, the servant, - than to be in a state of cavil with her himself; and the quarrel between her and Mr Tulliver vexed him so much that it quite nullified the pleasure he would otherwise have had in the state of his early cabbages, as he walked in his garden before breakfast the next morning. Still, he went in to breakfast with some slight hope that, now Mrs Glegg had 'slept upon it,' her anger might be subdued enough to give way to her usually strong sense of family decorum. She had been used to boast that there had never been any of those deadly quarrels among the Dodsons which had disgraced other families; that no Dodson had ever been 'cut off with a shilling,' and no cousin of the Dodsons disowned; as, indeed, why should they be? For they had no cousins who had not money out at use, or some houses of their own, at the very least.

There was one evening-cloud which had always disappeared from Mrs Glegg's brow when she sat at the breakfast-table. It was her fuzzy front of curls; for as she occupied herself in household matters in the morning it would have been a mere extravagance to put on anything so superfluous to the making of leathery pastry as a fuzzy curled front. By half-past ten decorum demanded the front; until then Mrs Glegg could economize it, and society would never be any the wiser. But the absence of that cloud only left it more apparent that the cloud of severity remained; and Mr Glegg, perceiving this, as he sat down to his milkporridge, which it was his old frugal habit to stem his morning hunger with, prudently resolved to leave the first remark to Mrs Glegg, lest, to so delicate an article as a lady's temper, the slightest touch should do mischief. People who seem to enjoy their ill temper have a way of keeping it in fine condition by inflicting privations on themselves. That was Mrs Glegg's way. She made her tea weaker than usual this morning, and declined butter. It was a hard case that a vigorous mood for quarrelling, so highly capable of using an opportunity, should not meet with a single remark from Mr Glegg on which to exercise itself. But by and by it appeared that his silence would answer the purpose, for he heard himself apostrophized at last in that tone peculiar to the wife of one's bosom.

'Well, Mr Glegg! it's a poor return I get for making you the wife I've made you all these years. If this is the way I'm to be treated, I'd better ha' known it before my poor father died, and then, when I'd wanted a home, I should ha' gone elsewhere, as the choice was offered me.'

Mr Glegg paused from his porridge and looked up, not with any new amazement, but simply with that quiet, habitual wonder with which we regard constant mysteries.

'Why, Mrs G., what have I done now?'

'Done now, Mr Glegg? *done now?* - I'm sorry for you.'

Not seeing his way to any pertinent answer, Mr Glegg reverted to his porridge.

'There's husbands in the world,' continued Mrs Glegg, after a pause, 'as 'ud have known how to do something different to siding with everybody else against their own wives. Perhaps I'm wrong and you can teach me better. But I've allays heard as it's the husband's place to stand by the wife, instead o' rejoicing and triumphing when folks insult her.'

'Now, what call have you to say that?' said Mr Glegg, rather warmly, for though a kind man, he was not as meek as Moses. 'When did I rejoice or triumph over you?'

'There's ways o' doing things worse than speaking out plain, Mr Glegg. I'd sooner you'd tell me to my face as you make light of me, than try to make out as everybody's in the right but me, and come to your breakfast in the morning, as I've hardly slept an hour this night, and sulk at me as if I was the dirt under your feet.'

'Sulk at you?' said Mr Glegg, in a tone of angry facetiousness. 'You're like a tipsy man as thinks everybody's had too much but himself.'

'Don't lower yourself with using coarse language to *me*, Mr Glegg! It makes you look very small, though you can't see yourself,' said Mrs Glegg, in a tone of energetic compassion. 'A man in your place should set an example, and talk more sensible.'

'Yes; but will you listen to sense?' retorted Mr Glegg, sharply. 'The best sense I can talk to you is what I said last night, - as you're i' the wrong to think o' calling in your money, when it's safe enough if you'd let it alone, all because of a bit of a tiff, and I was in hopes you'd ha' altered your mind this morning. But if you'd like to call it in, don't do it in a hurry now, and breed more enmity in the family, but wait till there's a pretty mortgage to be had without any trouble. You'd have to set the lawyer to work now to find an investment, and make no end o' expense.'

Mrs Glegg felt there was really something in this, but she tossed her head and emitted a guttural interjection to indicate that her silence was only an armistice, not a peace. And, in fact hostilities soon broke out again.

'I'll thank you for my cup o' tea, now, Mrs G.,' said Mr Glegg, seeing that she did not proceed to give it him as usual, when he had finished his porridge. She lifted the teapot with a slight toss of the head, and said, -

'I'm glad to hear you'll *thank* me, Mr Glegg. It's little thanks *I* get for what I do for folks i' this world. Though there's never a woman o' *your* side o' the family, Mr Glegg, as is fit to stand up with me, and I'd say it if I was on my dying bed. Not but what I've allays conducted myself civil to your kin, and there isn't one of 'em can say the contrary, though my equils they aren't, and nobody shall make me say it.'

'You'd better leave finding fault wi' my kin till you've left off quarrelling with you own, Mrs G.,' said Mr Glegg, with angry sarcasm. 'I'll trouble you for the milk-jug.'

'That's as false a word as ever you spoke, Mr Glegg,' said the lady, pouring out the milk with unusual profuseness, as much as to say, if he wanted milk he should have it with a vengeance. 'And you know it's

false. I'm not the woman to quarrel with my own kin; *you* may, for I've known you to do it.'

'Why, what did you call it yesterday, then, leaving your sister's house in a tantrum?'

'I'd no quarrel wi' my sister, Mr Glegg, and it's false to say it. Mr Tulliver's none o' my blood, and it was him quarrelled with me, and drove me out o' the house. But perhaps you'd have had me stay and be swore at, Mr Glegg; perhaps you was vexed not to hear more abuse and foul language poured out upo' your own wife. But, let me tell you, it's *your* disgrace.'

'Did ever anybody hear the like i' this parish?' said Mr Glegg, getting hot. 'A woman, with everything provided for her, and allowed to keep her own money the same as if it was settled on her, and with a gig new stuffed and lined at no end o' expense, and provided for when I die beyond anything she could expect - to go on i' this way, biting and snapping like a mad dog! It's beyond everything, as God A 'mighty should ha' made women so.' (These last words were uttered in a tone of sorrowful agitation. Mr Glegg pushed his tea from him, and tapped the table with both his hands.)

'Well, Mr Glegg, if those are your feelings, it's best they should be known,' said Mrs Glegg, taking off her napkin, and folding it in an excited manner. 'But if you talk o' my being provided for beyond what I could expect, I beg leave to tell you as I'd a right to expect a many things as I don't find. And as to my being like a mad dog, it's well if you're not cried shame on by the county for your treatment of me, for it's what I can't bear, and I won't bear - - '

Here Mrs Glegg's voice intimated that she was going to cry, and breaking off from speech, she rang the bell violently.

'Sally,' she said, rising from her chair, and speaking in rather a choked voice, 'light a fire up-stairs, and put the blinds down. Mr Glegg, you'll please to order what you'd like for dinner. I shall have gruel.'

Mrs Glegg walked across the room to the small book-case, and took down Baxter's 'Saints' Everlasting Rest,' which she carried with her up-stairs. It was the book she was accustomed to lay open before her on special occasions, - on wet Sunday mornings, or when she heard of a death in the family, or when, as in this case, her quarrel with Mr Glegg had been set an octave higher than usual.

But Mrs Glegg carried something else up-stairs with her, which, together with the 'Saints' Rest' and the gruel, may have had some

influence in gradually calming her feelings, and making it possible for her to endure existence on the ground-floor, shortly before tea-time. This was, partly, Mr Glegg's suggestion that she would do well to let her five hundred lie still until a good investment turned up; and, further, his parenthetic hint at his handsome provision for her in case of his death. Mr Glegg, like all men of his stamp, was extremely reticent about his will; and Mrs Glegg, in her gloomier moments, had forebodings that, like other husbands of whom she had heard, he might cherish the mean project of heightening her grief at his death by leaving her poorly off, in which case she was firmly resolved that she would have scarcely any weeper on her bonnet, and would cry no more than if he had been a second husband. But if he had really shown her any testamentary tenderness, it would be affecting to think of him, poor man, when he was gone; and even his foolish fuss about the flowers and garden-stuff, and his insistence on the subject of snails, would be touching when it was once fairly at an end. To survive Mr Glegg, and talk eulogistically of him as a man who might have his weaknesses, but who had done the right thing by her, notwithstanding his numerous poor relations; to have sums of interest coming in more frequently, and secrete it in various corners, baffling to the most ingenious of thieves (for, to Mrs Glegg's mind, banks and strong-boxes would have nullified the pleasure of property; she might as well have taken her food in capsules); finally, to be looked up to by her own family and the neighborhood, so as no woman can ever hope to be who has not the praeterite and present dignity comprised in being a 'widow well left,' - all this made a flattering and conciliatory view of the future. So that when good Mr Glegg, restored to good humor by much hoeing, and moved by the sight of his wife's empty chair, with her knitting rolled up in the corner, went up-stairs to her, and observed that the bell had been tolling for poor Mr Morton, Mrs Glegg answered magnanimously, quite as if she had been an uninjured woman: 'Ah! then, there'll be a good business for somebody to take to.'

Baxter had been open at least eight hours by this time, for it was nearly five o'clock; and if people are to quarrel often, it follows as a corollary that their quarrels cannot be protracted beyond certain limits.

Mr and Mrs Glegg talked quite amicably about the Tullivers that evening. Mr Glegg went the length of admitting that Tulliver was a sad man for getting into hot water, and was like enough to run through his property; and Mrs Glegg, meeting this acknowledgment half-way, declared that it was beneath her to take notice of such a man's conduct, and that, for her sister's sake, she would let him keep the five hundred a while longer, for when she put it out on a mortgage she should only get four per cent.