

CHAPTER IV

Philip went to college in due course, and George departed to learn his business as a lawyer in Roxham, but it will not be necessary for us to enter into the details of their respective careers during this period of their lives.

At college Philip did fairly well, and, being a Caresfoot, did not run into debt. He was, as his great bodily strength gave promise of, a first-class athlete, and for two years stroked the Magdalen boat. Nor did he altogether neglect his books, but his reading was of a desultory and out-of-the-way order, and much directed towards the investigation of mystical subjects. Fairly well liked amongst the men with whom he mixed, he could hardly be called popular; his temperament was too uncertain for that. At times he was the gayest of the gay, and then when the fit took him he would be plunged into a state of gloomy depression that might last for days. His companions, to whom his mystical studies were a favourite jest, were wont to assert that on these occasions he was preparing for a visit from his familiar, but the joke was one that he never could be prevailed upon to appreciate. The fact of the matter was that these fits of gloom were constitutional with him, and very possibly had their origin in the state of his mother's mind before his birth, when her whole thoughts were coloured by her morbid and fanciful terror of her husband, and her frantic anxiety to conciliate him.

During the three years that he spent at college, Philip saw but little of George, since, when he happened to be down at Bratham, which was not often, for he spent most of his vacations abroad, George avoided coming there as much as possible. Indeed, there was a tacit agreement between the two young men that they would see as little of each other as might be convenient. But, though he did not see much of himself, Philip was none the less aware that George's influence over his father was, if anything, on the increase. The old squire's letters were full of him and of the admirable way in which he managed the estate, for it was now practically in his hands. Indeed, to his surprise and somewhat to his disgust, he found that George began to be spoken of indifferently with himself as the "young squire." Long before his college days had come to an end Philip had determined that he would do his best, as soon as opportunity offered, to reduce his cousin to his proper place, not by the violent means to which he had resorted in other days, but rather by showing himself to be equally capable, equally assiduous, and equally respectful and affectionate.

At last the day came when he was to bid farewell to Oxford for good, and in due course he found himself in a second-class railway carriage --thinking it useless to waste money, he always went second--and bound for Roxham.

Just before the train left the platform at Paddington, Philip was agreeably surprised out of his meditations by the entry into his carriage of an extremely elegant and stately young lady, a foreigner

as he judged from her strong accent when she addressed the porter. With the innate gallantry of twenty-one, he immediately laid himself out to make the acquaintance of one possessed of such proud, yet melting blue eyes, such lovely hair, and a figure that would not have disgraced Diana; and, with this view, set himself to render her such little services as one fellow-traveller can offer to another. They were accepted reservedly at first, then gratefully, and before long the reserve broke down entirely, and this very handsome pair dropped into a conversation as animated as the lady's broken English would allow. The lady told him that her name was Hilda von Holtzhausen, that she was of a German family, and had come to England to enter a family as companion, in order to obtain a perfect knowledge of the English language. She had already been to France and acquired French; when she knew English, then she had been promised a place as school-mistress under government in her own country. Her father and mother were dead, and she had no brothers or sisters, and very few friends.

Where was she going to? She was going to a place called Roxham; here it was written on the ticket. She was going to be companion to a dear young lady, very rich, like all the English, whom she had met when she had travelled with her French family to Jersey, a Miss Lee.

"You don't say so!" said Philip. "Has she come back to Rewtham?"

"What, do you, then, know her?"

"Yes--that is, I used to three years ago. I live in the next parish."

"Ah! then perhaps you are the gentleman of whom I have heard her to speak, Mr. Car-es-foot, whom she did seem to appear to love; is not that the word?--to be very fond, you know."

Philip laughed, blushed, and acknowledged his identity with the gentleman whom Miss Lee "did seem to appear to love."

"Oh! I am glad; then we shall be friends, and see each other often--shall we not?"

He declared unreservedly that she should see him very often.

From Fraulein von Holtzhausen Philip gathered in the course of their journey a good many particulars about Miss Lee. It appeared that, having attained her majority, she was coming back to live at her old home at Rewtham, whither she had tried to persuade her Aunt Chambers to accompany her, but without success, that lady being too much attached to Jersey to leave it. During the course of a long stay on the island, the two girls had become fast friends, and the friendship had culminated in an offer being made by Maria Lee to Fraulein von Holtzhausen to come and live with her as a companion, a proposal that exactly suited the latter.

The mention of Miss Lee's name had awakened pleasant recollections in

Philip's mind, recollections that, at any other time, might have tended towards the sentimental; but, when under fire from the blue eyes of this stately foreigner, it was impossible for him to feel sentimental about anybody save herself. "The journey is over all too soon," was the secret thought of each as they stepped on to the Roxham platform. Before they had finally said good-bye, however, a young lady with a dainty figure, in a shady hat and pink and white dress, came running along the platform.

"Hilda, Hilda, here I am! How do you do, dear? Welcome home," and she was about to seal her welcome with a kiss, when her eye fell upon Philip standing by.

"Oh, Philip!" she cried with a blush, "don't you know me? Have I changed much? I should have known you anywhere; and I am glad to see you, awfully glad (excuse the slang, but it is such a relief to be able to say 'awful' without being pulled up by Aunt Chambers). Just think, it is three years since we met. Do you remember Grumps? How do I look? Do you think you will like me as much as you used to?"

"I think that you are looking the same dear girl that you always used to look, only you have grown very pretty, and it is not possible that I shall like you more than I used to."

"I think they must teach you to pay compliments at Oxford, Philip," she answered, flushing with pleasure, "but it is all rubbish for you

to say that I am pretty, because I know I am not"--and then, confidentially, glancing round to see that there was nobody within hearing (Hilda was engaged with a porter in looking after her things): "Just look at my nose, and you will soon change your mind. It's broader, and flatter, and snubbier than ever. I consider that I have got a bone to pick with Providence about that nose. Ah! here comes Hilda. Isn't she lovely! There's beauty for you if you like. She hasn't got a nose. Come and show us to the carriage. You will come and lunch with us to-morrow, won't you? I am so glad to get back to the old house again; and I mean to have such a garden! 'Life is short, and joys are fleeting,' as Aunt Chambers always says, so I mean to make the best of it whilst it lasts. I saw your father yesterday. He is a dear old man, though he has such awful eyes. I never felt so happy in my life as I do now. Good-bye. One o'clock." And she was gone, leaving Philip with something to think about.

Philip's reception at home was cordial and reassuring. He found his father considerably aged in appearance, but as handsome and upright as ever, and to all appearance heartily glad to see him.

"I am glad to see you back, my boy," he said. "You come to take your proper place. If you look at me, you will see that you won't have long to wait before you take mine. I can't last much longer, Philip, I feel that. Eighty-two is a good age to have reached. I have had my time, and put the property in order, and now I suppose I must make room. I went with the clerk, old Jakes, and marked out my grave yesterday.

There's a nice little spot the other side of the stone that they say marks where old yeoman Caresfoot, who planted Caresfoot's Staff, laid his bones, and that's where I wish to be put, in his good company. Don't forget that when the time comes, Philip. There's room for another if you care to keep it for yourself, but perhaps you will prefer the vault."

"You must not talk of dying yet, father. You will live many years yet."

"No, Philip; perhaps one, perhaps two, not more than two, perhaps a month, perhaps not a day. My life hangs on a thread now." And he pointed to his heart. "It may snap any day, if it gets a strain. By the way, Philip, you see that cupboard? Open it! Now, you see that stoppered bottle with the red label? Good. Well now, if ever you see me taken with an attack of the heart (I have had one since you were away, you know, and it nearly carried me off), you run for that as hard as you can go, and give it me to drink, half at a time. It is a tremendous restorative of some sort, and old Caley says that, if I do not take it when the next attack comes, there'll be an end of 'Devil Caresfoot';" and he rapped his cane energetically on the oak floor.

"And so, Philip, I want you to go about and make yourself thoroughly acquainted with the property, so that you may be able to take things over when I die without any hitch. I hope that you will be careful and do well by the land. Remember that a big property like this is a

sacred trust.

"And now there are two more things that I will take this opportunity to say a word to you about. First, I see that you and your cousin George don't get on well, and it grieves me. You have always had a false idea of George, always, and thought that he was underhand. Nothing could be more mistaken than such a notion. George is a most estimable young man, and my dear brother's only son. I wish you would try to remember that, Philip--blood is thicker than water, you know--and you will be the only two Caresfoots left when I am gone. Now, perhaps you may think that I intend enriching George at your expense, but that is not so. Take this key and open the top drawer of that secretaire, and give me that bundle. This is my will. If you care to look over it, and can understand it--which is more than I can--you will see that everything is left to you, with the exception of that outlying farm at Holston, those three Essex farms that I bought two years ago, and twelve thousand pounds in cash. Of course, as you know, the Abbey House, and the lands immediately round, are entailed--it has always been the custom to entail them for many generations. There, put it back. And now the last thing is, I want you to get married, Philip. I should like to see a grandchild in the house before I die. I want you to marry Maria Lee. I like the girl. She comes of a good old Marlshire stock--our family married into hers in the year 1703. Besides, her property would put yours into a ring-fence. She is a sharp girl too, and quite pretty enough for a wife. I hope you will think it over, Philip."

"Yes, father; but perhaps she will not have me. I am going to lunch there to-morrow."

"I don't think you need be afraid, Philip; but I won't keep you any longer. Shake hands, my boy. You'll perhaps think of your old father kindly when you come to stand in his shoes. I hope you will, Philip. We have had many a quarrel, and sometimes I have been wrong, but I have always wished to do my duty by you, my boy. Don't forget to make the best of your time at lunch to-morrow."

Philip went out of his father's study considerably touched by the kindness and consideration with which he had been treated, and not a little relieved to find his position with reference to his succession to the estate so much better than he had anticipated, and his cousin George's so much worse.

"That red-haired fox has plotted in vain," he thought, with secret exultation. And then he set himself to consider the desirability of falling in with his father's wishes as regards marriage. Of Maria he was, as the reader is aware, very fond; indeed, a few years before he had been in love with her, or something very like it; he knew too that she would make him a very good wife, and the match was one that in every way commended itself to his common sense and his interests. Yes, he would certainly take his father's advice. But every time he said this to himself--and he said it pretty often that evening--there would

arise before his mind's eye a vision of the sweet blue eyes of Miss Lee's stately companion. What eyes they were, to be sure! It made Philip's blood run warm and quick merely to think of them; indeed, he could almost find it in his heart to wish that Hilda was Maria and Maria was in Hilda's shoes.

What between thoughts of the young lady he had set himself to marry, and of the young lady he did not mean to marry, but whose eyes he admired, Philip did not sleep so well as usual that night.