

CHAPTER XVI

Reader, we are about to see Angela again, and to see a good deal of her; but you must be prepared for a change in her personal appearance, for the curtain has been down for ten years since last you met the child whose odd propensities excited Pigott's wonder and indignation and Mr. Fraser's interest; and ten years, as we all know, can work many changes in the history of the world and individuals. In ten years some have been swept clean off the board, and their places taken by others; a few have grown richer, many poorer, some of us sadder, some wiser, and all of us ten years older. Now, this was exactly what had happened to little Angela--that is, the Angela we knew as little, and ten years make curious differences between the slim child of nine and a half and the woman of nearly twenty.

When we last saw her, Angela was about to commence her education. Let us re-introduce ourselves on the memorable evening when, after ten years of study, Mr. Fraser, a master by no means easily pleased, expressed himself unable to teach her any more.

It is Christmas Eve. Drip, drop, drip, falls the rain from the leafless boughs on to the sodden earth. The apology for daylight that has been doing its dull duty for the last few hours is slowly effacing itself, and the gale is celebrating the fact, and showing its joy at the closing-in of the melancholy night by howling its loudest through the trees, and flogging the flying scud it has brought with it from

the sea, till it whirls across the sky like a succession of ghostly racehorses.

This is outside the vicarage; let us look within. In a well-worn arm-chair in the comfortable study, near to a table covered with books and holding some loose sheets of foolscap in his hand, sits Mr. Fraser. His hair is a little greyer than when he began Angela's education, about as grey as rather accommodating hair will get at the age of fifty-three; otherwise his general appearance is much the same, and his face as refined and gentlemanlike as ever. Presently he lays down the sheets of paper which he has been studying attentively, and says:

"Your solution is perfectly sound, Angela; but you have arrived at it in a characteristic fashion, and by your own road. Not but what your method has some merits--for one thing, it is more concise than my own; but, on the other hand, it shows a feminine weakness. It is not possible to follow every step from your premises to your conclusion, correct as it is."

"Ah!" says a low voice, with a happy ripple in it, the owner of which is busy with some tea-things out of range of the ring of light thrown by the double reading-lamp, "you often blame me for jumping to conclusions; but what does it matter, provided they are right? The whole secret is that I used the equivalent algebraic formula, but suppressed the working in order to puzzle you," and the voice laughed sweetly.

"That is not worthy of a mathematician," said Mr. Fraser, with some irritation; "it is nothing but a trick, a *tour de force*."

"The solution is correct, you say?"

"Quite."

"Then I maintain that it is perfectly mathematical; the object of mathematics is to arrive at the truth."

"*Vox et preterea nihil.* Come out of that corner, my dear. I hate arguing with a person I cannot see. But there, there, what is the use of arguing at all? The fact is, Angela, you are a first-class mathematician, and I am only second-class. I am obliged to stick to the old tracks; you cut a Roman road of your own. Great masters are entitled to do that. The algebraic formula never occurred to me when I worked the problem out, and it took me two days to do."

"You are trying to make me vain. You forget that whatever I know, which is just enough to show me how much I have to learn, I have learnt from you. As for being your superior in mathematics, I don't think that, as a clergyman, you should make such a statement. Here is your tea." And the owner of the voice came forward into the ring of light.

She was tall beyond the ordinary height of woman, and possessed unusual beauty of form, that the tight-fitting grey dress she wore was well calculated to display. Her complexion, which was of a dazzling fairness, was set off by the darkness of the lashes that curled over the deep grey eyes. The face itself was rounded and very lovely, and surmounted by an ample forehead, whilst her hair, which was twisted into a massive knot, was of a tinge of chestnut gold, and marked with deep-set ripples. The charm of her face, however, did not, as is so often the case, begin and end with its physical attractions. There was more, much more, in it than that. But how is it possible to describe on paper a presence at once so full of grace and dignity, of the soft loveliness of woman, and of a higher and more spiritual beauty? There hangs in the Louvre a picture by Raphael, which represents a saint passing with light steps over the prostrate form of a dragon. There is in that heaven-inspired face, the equal of which has been rarely, if ever, put on canvas, a blending of earthly beauty and of the calm, awe-compelling spirit-gaze--that gaze, that holy dignity which can only come to such as are in truth and in deed "pure in heart"--that will give to those who know it a better idea of what Angela was like than any written description.

At times, but, ah, how rarely! we may have seen some such look as that she wore on the faces of those around us. It may be brought by a great sorrow, or be the companion of an overwhelming joy. It may announce the consummation of some sublime self-sacrifice, or convey the swift assurance of an everlasting love. It is to be found alike on the

features of the happy mother as she kisses her new-born babe, and on the pallid countenance of the saint sinking to his rest. The sharp moment that brings us nearer God, and goes nigh to piercing the veil that hides His presence, is the occasion that calls it into being. It is a beauty born of the murmuring sound of the harps of heaven; it is the light of the eternal lamp gleaming faintly through its earthly casket.

This spirit-look, before which all wickedness must feel ashamed, had found a home in Angela's grey eyes. There was a strange nobility about her. Whether it dwelt in the stately form, or on the broad brow, or in the large glance of the deep eyes, it is not possible to say; but it was certainly a part of herself as self-evident as her face or features. She might well have been the inspiration of the lines that run:

"Truth in her might, beloved,
Grand in her sway;
Truth with her eyes, beloved,
Clearer than day;
Holy and pure, beloved,
Spotless and free;
Is there one thing, beloved,
Fairer than thee?"

Mr. Fraser absently set down the tea that Angela was giving him when we took the liberty to describe her personal appearance.

"Now, Angela, read a little."

"What shall I read?"

"Oh! anything you like; please yourself."

Thus enjoined, she went to a bookshelf, and, taking down two volumes, handed one to Mr. Fraser, and then, opening her copy at haphazard, announced the page to her companion, and, sitting down, began to read.

What sound is this, now soft and melodious as the sweep of a summer gale over a southern sea, and now again like to the distant stamp and rush and break of the wave of battle? What can it be but the roll of those magnificent hexameters with which Homer charms a listening world. And rarely have English lips given them with a juster cadence.

"Stop, my dear, shut up your book; you are as good a Greek scholar as I can make you. Shut up your book for the last time. Your education, my dear Angela, is satisfactorily completed. I have succeeded with you----"

"Completed, Mr. Fraser!" said Angela, open-eyed. "Do you mean to say

that I am to stop now just as I have begun to learn?"

"My dear, you have learnt everything that I can teach you, and, besides, I am going away the day after to-morrow."

"Going away!" and then and there, without the slightest warning, Angela--who, for all her beauty and learning, very much resembled the rest of her sex--burst into tears.

"Come, come, Angela," said Mr. Fraser, in a voice meant to be gruff, but only succeeding in being husky, for, oddly enough, it is trying even to a clergyman on the wrong side of middle-age to be wept over by a lovely woman; "don't be nonsensical; I am only going for a few months."

At this intelligence she pulled up a little.

"Oh," she said, between her sobs, "how you frightened me! How could you be so cruel! Where are you going to?"

"I am going for a long trip in southern Europe. Do you know that I have scarcely been away from this place for twenty years, so I mean to celebrate the conclusion of our studies by taking a holiday."

"I wish you would take me with you."

Mr. Fraser coloured slightly, and his eye brightened. He sighed as he answered--

"I am afraid, my dear, that it would be impossible."

Something warned Angela not to pursue the subject.

"Now, Angela, I believe that it is usual, on the occasion of the severance of a scholastic connection, to deliver something in the nature of a farewell oration. Well, I am not going to do that, but I want you to listen to a few words."

She did not answer, but, drawing a stool to a corner of the fireplace, she wiped her eyes and sat down almost at his feet, clasping her knees with her hands, and gazing rather sadly into the fire.

"You have, dear Angela," he began, "been educated in a somewhat unusual way, with the result that, after ten years of steady work that has been always interesting, though sometimes arduous, you have acquired information denied to the vast majority of your sex, whilst at the same time you could be put to the blush in many things by a school-girl of fifteen. For instance, though I firmly believe that you could at the present moment take a double first at the University, your knowledge of English literature is almost nil, and your history of the weakest. All a woman's ordinary accomplishments, such as drawing, playing, singing, have of necessity been to a great extent

neglected, since I was not able to teach them to you myself, and you have had to be guided solely by books and by the light of Nature in giving to them such time as you could spare.

"Your mind, on the other hand, has been daily saturated with the noblest thoughts of the intellectual giants of two thousand years ago, and would in that respect be as much in place in a well-educated Grecian maiden living before the time of Christ as in an English girl of the nineteenth century.

"I have educated you thus, Angela, partly by accident and partly by design. You will remember when you began to come here some ten years since--you were a little thing then--and I had offered to give you some teaching, because you interested me, and I saw that you were running wild in mind and body. But, when I had undertaken the task I was somewhat puzzled how to carry it out. It is one thing to offer to educate a little girl, and another to do it. Not knowing where to begin, I fell back upon the Latin grammar, where I had begun myself, and so by degrees you slid into the curriculum of a classical and mathematical education. Then, after a year or two, I perceived your power of work and your great natural ability, and I formed a design. I said to myself, 'I will see how far a woman cultivated under favourable conditions can go. I will patiently teach this girl till the literature of Greece and Rome become as familiar to her as her mother-tongue, till figures and symbols hide no mysteries from her, till she can read the heavens like a book. I will teach her mind to

follow the secret ways of knowledge, I will train it till it can soar above its fellows like a falcon above sparrows.' Angela, my proud design, pursued steadily through many years, has been at length accomplished; your bright intellect has risen to the strain I have put upon it, and you are at this moment one of the best all-round scholars of my acquaintance."

She flushed to the eyes at this high praise, and was about to speak, but he stopped her with a motion of the hand, and went on:

"I have recognized in teaching you a fact but too little known, that a classical education, properly understood, is the foundation of all learning. There is little that is worth saying which has not already been beautifully said by the ancients, little that is worthy of meditation on which they have not already profoundly reflected, save, indeed, the one great subject of Christian meditation. This foundation, my dear Angela, you possess to an eminent degree. Henceforth you will need no assistance from me or any other man, for, to your trained mind, all ordinary knowledge will be easy to assimilate. You will receive in the course of a few days a parting present from myself in the shape of a box of carefully chosen books on European literature and history. Devote yourself to the study of these, and of the German language, which was your mother's native tongue, for the next year, and then I shall consider that you are fairly finished, and then, too, my dear Angela, I shall expect to reap a full reward for my labours."

"What is it that you will expect of me?"

"I shall expect, Angela," and he rose from his chair and walked up and down the room in his excitement--"I shall expect to see you take your proper place in your generation. I shall say: 'Choose your own line, become a critical scholar, a practical mathematician, or--and perhaps that is what you are most suited for with your imaginative powers--a writer of fiction. For remember that fiction, properly understood and directed to worthy aims, is the noblest and most far-reaching, as it is also the most difficult of the arts.' In watching the success that will assuredly attend you in this or any other line, I shall be amply rewarded for my trouble."

Angela shook her head with a gesture of doubt, but he did not wait for her to answer.

"Well, my dear, I must not keep you any longer--it is quite dark and blowing a gale of wind--except to say one more word. Remember that all this is--indirectly perhaps, but still none the less truly--a means to an end. There are two educations, the education of the mind and the education of the soul; unless you minister to the latter, all the time and toil spent upon the former will prove to little purpose. The learning will, it is true, remain; but it will be as the quartz out of which the gold has been already crushed, or the dry husks of corn. It will be valueless and turn to no good use, will serve only to feed the

swine of intellectual voluptuousness and infidelity. It is, believe me, the higher learning of the soul that gilds our earthly lore. The loftier object of all education is so to train the intellect that it may become competent to understand something, however little, of the nature of our God, and to the true Christian the real end of learning is the appreciation of His attributes as exemplified in His mysteries and earthly wonders. But perhaps that is a subject on which you are as well fitted to discourse as I am, so I will not enter into it.

'Finis,' my dear, 'finis.'"

Angela's answer to this long oration was a simple one. She rose slowly from her low seat, and, putting her hands upon Mr. Fraser's shoulders, kissed him on the forehead and said--

"How shall I ever learn to be grateful enough for all I owe you? What should I have been now but for you? How good and patient you have been to me!"

This embrace affected the clergyman strangely; he put his hand to his heart, and a troubled look came into his eyes. Thrusting her gently away from him, he sat down.

"Angela," he said presently, "go away now, dear, I am tired to-night; I shall see you at church to-morrow to say good-by."

And so she went homewards, through the wind and storm, little knowing

that she left her master to struggle with a tempest far more tremendous than that which raged around her.

As for him, as the door closed, he gave a sigh of relief.

"Pray God I have not put it off too long," he said to himself. "And now for to-morrow's sermon. Sleep for the young! laughter for the happy! work for old fools--work, work, work!"

And thus it was that Angela became a scholar.