

### III. THE MILL BECOMES AN IMPORTANT CENTRE OF OPERATIONS

The next morning Miss Garland awoke with an impression that something more than usual was going on, and she recognized as soon as she could clearly reason that the proceedings, whatever they might be, lay not far away from her bedroom window. The sounds were chiefly those of pickaxes and shovels. Anne got up, and, lifting the corner of the curtain about an inch, peeped out.

A number of soldiers were busily engaged in making a zigzag path down the incline from the camp to the river-head at the back of the house, and judging from the quantity of work already got through they must have begun very early. Squads of men were working at several equidistant points in the proposed pathway, and by the time that Anne had dressed herself each section of the length had been connected with those above and below it, so that a continuous and easy track was formed from the crest of the down to the bottom of the steep.

The down rested on a bed of solid chalk, and the surface exposed by the roadmakers formed a white ribbon, serpentine from top to bottom.

Then the relays of working soldiers all disappeared, and, not long after, a troop of dragoons in watering order rode forward at the top and began to wind down the new path. They came lower and closer, and at last were immediately beneath her window, gathering themselves up on the space by

the mill-pond. A number of the horses entered it at the shallow part, drinking and splashing and tossing about. Perhaps as many as thirty, half of them with riders on their backs, were in the water at one time; the thirsty animals drank, stamped, flounced, and drank again, letting the clear, cool water dribble luxuriously from their mouths. Miller Loveday was looking on from over his garden hedge, and many admiring villagers were gathered around.

Gazing up higher, Anne saw other troops descending by the new road from the camp, those which had already been to the pond making room for these by withdrawing along the village lane and returning to the top by a circuitous route.

Suddenly the miller exclaimed, as in fulfilment of expectation, 'Ah, John, my boy; good morning!' And the reply of 'Morning, father,' came from a well-mounted soldier near him, who did not, however, form one of the watering party. Anne could not see his face very clearly, but she had no doubt that this was John Loveday.

There were tones in the voice which reminded her of old times, those of her very infancy, when Johnny Loveday had been top boy in the village school, and had wanted to learn painting of her father. The deeps and shallows of the mill-pond being better known to him than to any other man in the camp, he had apparently come down on that account, and was cautioning some of the horsemen against riding too far in towards the mill-head.

Since her childhood and his enlistment Anne had seen him only once, and then but casually, when he was home on a short furlough. His figure was not much changed from what it had been; but the many sunrises and sunsets

which had passed since that day, developing her from a comparative child to womanhood, had abstracted some of his angularities, reddened his skin, and given him a foreign look. It was interesting to see what years of training and service had done for this man. Few would have supposed that the white and the blue coats of miller and soldier covered the forms of father and son.

Before the last troop of dragoons rode off they were welcomed in a body by Miller Loveday, who still stood in his outer garden, this being a plot lying below the mill-tail, and stretching to the water-side. It was just the time of year when cherries are ripe, and hang in clusters under their dark leaves. While the troopers loitered on their horses, and chatted to the miller across the stream, he gathered bunches of the fruit, and held them up over the garden hedge for the acceptance of anybody who would have them; whereupon the soldiers rode into the water to where it had washed holes in the garden bank, and, reining their horses there, caught the cherries in their forage-caps, or received bunches of them on the ends of their switches, with the dignified laugh that became martial men when stooping to slightly boyish amusement. It was a cheerful, careless, unpremeditated half-hour, which returned like the scent of a flower to the memories of some of those who enjoyed it, even at a distance of many

years after, when they lay wounded and weak in foreign lands.

Then dragoons and horses wheeled off as the others had done; and troops of the German Legion next came down and entered in panoramic procession the space below Anne's eyes, as if on purpose to gratify her. These were notable by their mustachios, and queues wound tightly with brown ribbon to the level of their broad shoulder-blades. They were charmed, as the others had been, by the head and neck of Miss Garland in the little square window overlooking the scene of operations, and saluted her with devoted foreign civility, and in such overwhelming numbers that the modest girl suddenly withdrew herself into the room, and had a private blush between the chest of drawers and the washing-stand.

When she came downstairs her mother said, 'I have been thinking what I ought to wear to Miller Loveday's to-night.'

'To Miller Loveday's?' said Anne.

'Yes. The party is to-night. He has been in here this morning to tell me that he has seen his son, and they have fixed this evening.'

'Do you think we ought to go, mother?' said Anne slowly, and looking at the smaller features of the window-flowers.

'Why not?' said Mrs. Garland.

'He will only have men there except ourselves, will he? And shall we be right to go alone among 'em?'

Anne had not recovered from the ardent gaze of the gallant York Hussars, whose voices reached her even now in converse with Loveday.

'La, Anne, how proud you are!' said Widow Garland. 'Why, isn't he our nearest neighbour and our landlord? and don't he always fetch our faggots from the wood, and keep us in vegetables for next to nothing?'

'That's true,' said Anne.

'Well, we can't be distant with the man. And if the enemy land next autumn, as everybody says they will, we shall have quite to depend upon the miller's waggon and horses. He's our only friend.'

'Yes, so he is,' said Anne. 'And you had better go, mother; and I'll stay at home. They will be all men; and I don't like going.'

Mrs. Garland reflected. 'Well, if you don't want to go, I don't,' she said. 'Perhaps, as you are growing up, it would be better to stay at home this time. Your father was a professional man, certainly.' Having spoken as a mother, she sighed as a woman.

'Why do you sigh, mother?'

'You are so prim and stiff about everything.'

'Very well--we'll go.'

'O no--I am not sure that we ought. I did not promise, and there will be no trouble in keeping away.'

Anne apparently did not feel certain of her own opinion, and, instead of supporting or contradicting, looked thoughtfully down, and abstractedly brought her hands together on her bosom, till her fingers met tip to tip.

As the day advanced the young woman and her mother became aware that great preparations were in progress in the miller's wing of the house. The partitioning between the Lovedays and the Garlands was not very thorough, consisting in many cases of a simple screwing up of the doors in the dividing walls; and thus when the mill began any new performances they proclaimed themselves at once in the more private dwelling. The smell of Miller Loveday's pipe came down Mrs. Garland's chimney of an evening with the greatest regularity. Every time that he poked his fire they knew from the vehemence or deliberateness of the blows the precise state of his mind; and when he wound his clock on Sunday nights the whirr of that monitor reminded the widow to wind hers. This transit of noises was most perfect where Loveday's lobby adjoined Mrs. Garland's pantry; and Anne, who was occupied for some time in the latter apartment, enjoyed the privilege of hearing the visitors arrive and of catching stray sounds and words without the connecting phrases that made them entertaining, to

judge from the laughter they evoked. The arrivals passed through the house and went into the garden, where they had tea in a large summer-house, an occasional blink of bright colour, through the foliage, being all that was visible of the assembly from Mrs. Garland's windows. When it grew dusk they all could be heard coming indoors to finish the evening in the parlour.

Then there was an intensified continuation of the above-mentioned signs of enjoyment, talkings and haw-haws, runnings upstairs and runnings down, a slamming of doors and a clinking of cups and glasses; till the proudest adjoining tenant without friends on his own side of the partition might have been tempted to wish for entrance to that merry dwelling, if only to know the cause of these fluctuations of hilarity, and to see if the guests were really so numerous, and the observations so very amusing as they seemed.

The stagnation of life on the Garland side of the party-wall began to have a very gloomy effect by the contrast. When, about half-past nine o'clock, one of these tantalizing bursts of gaiety had resounded for a longer time than usual, Anne said, 'I believe, mother, that you are wishing you had gone.'

'I own to feeling that it would have been very cheerful if we had joined in,' said Mrs. Garland, in a hankering tone. 'I was rather too nice in listening to you and not going. The parson never calls upon us except in

his spiritual capacity. Old Derriman is hardly genteel; and there's nobody left to speak to. Lonely people must accept what company they can get.'

'Or do without it altogether.'

'That's not natural, Anne; and I am surprised to hear a young woman like you say such a thing. Nature will not be stifled in that way. . . .'

(Song and powerful chorus heard through partition.) 'I declare the room on the other side of the wall seems quite a paradise compared with this.'

'Mother, you are quite a girl,' said Anne in slightly superior accents.

'Go in and join them by all means.'

'O no--not now,' said her mother, resignedly shaking her head. 'It is too late now. We ought to have taken advantage of the invitation. They would look hard at me as a poor mortal who had no real business there, and the miller would say, with his broad smile, "Ah, you be obliged to come round."' "

While the sociable and unaspiring Mrs. Garland continued thus to pass the evening in two places, her body in her own house and her mind in the miller's, somebody knocked at the door, and directly after the elder Loveday himself was admitted to the room. He was dressed in a suit between grand and gay, which he used for such occasions as the present, and his blue coat, yellow and red waistcoat with the three lower buttons



unfastened, steel-buckled shoes and speckled stockings, became him very well in Mrs. Martha Garland's eyes.

'Your servant, ma'am,' said the miller, adopting as a matter of propriety the raised standard of politeness required by his higher costume. 'Now, begging your pardon, I can't hae this. 'Tis unnatural that you two ladies should be biding here and we under the same roof making merry without ye. Your husband, poor man--lovely picters that a' would make to be sure--would have been in with us long ago if he had been in your place. I can take no nay from ye, upon my honour. You and maidy Anne must come in, if it be only for half-an-hour. John and his friends have got passes till twelve o'clock to-night, and, saving a few of our own village folk, the lowest visitor present is a very genteel German corporal. If you should hae any misgivings on the score of respectability, ma'am, we'll pack off the underbred ones into the back kitchen.'

Widow Garland and Anne looked yes at each other after this appeal.

'We'll follow you in a few minutes,' said the elder, smiling; and she rose with Anne to go upstairs.

'No, I'll wait for ye,' said the miller doggedly; 'or perhaps you'll alter your mind again.'

While the mother and daughter were upstairs dressing, and saying

laughingly to each other, 'Well, we must go now,' as if they hadn't wished to go all the evening, other steps were heard in the passage; and the miller cried from below, 'Your pardon, Mrs. Garland; but my son John has come to help fetch ye. Shall I ask him in till ye be ready?'

'Certainly; I shall be down in a minute,' screamed Anne's mother in a slanting voice towards the staircase.

When she descended, the outline of the trumpet-major appeared half-way down the passage. 'This is John,' said the miller simply. 'John, you can mind Mrs. Martha Garland very well?'

'Very well, indeed,' said the dragoon, coming in a little further. 'I should have called to see her last time, but I was only home a week. How is your little girl, ma'am?'

Mrs. Garland said Anne was quite well. 'She is grown-up now. She will be down in a moment.'

There was a slight noise of military heels without the door, at which the trumpet-major went and put his head outside, and said, 'All right--coming in a minute,' when voices in the darkness replied, 'No hurry.'

'More friends?' said Mrs. Garland.

'O, it is only Buck and Jones come to fetch me,' said the soldier. 'Shall

I ask 'em in a minute, Mrs Garland, ma'am?'

'O yes,' said the lady; and the two interesting forms of Trumpeter Buck and Saddler-sergeant Jones then came forward in the most friendly manner; whereupon other steps were heard without, and it was discovered that Sergeant-master-tailor Brett and Farrier-extraordinary Johnson were outside, having come to fetch Messrs. Buck and Jones, as Buck and Jones had come to fetch the trumpet-major.

As there seemed a possibility of Mrs. Garland's small passage being choked up with human figures personally unknown to her, she was relieved to hear Anne coming downstairs.

'Here's my little girl,' said Mrs. Garland, and the trumpet-major looked with a sort of awe upon the muslin apparition who came forward, and stood quite dumb before her. Anne recognized him as the trooper she had seen from her window, and welcomed him kindly. There was something in his honest face which made her feel instantly at home with him.

At this frankness of manner Loveday--who was not a ladies' man--blushed, and made some alteration in his bodily posture, began a sentence which had no end, and showed quite a boy's embarrassment. Recovering himself, he politely offered his arm, which Anne took with a very pretty grace. He conducted her through his comrades, who glued themselves perpendicularly to the wall to let her pass, and then they went out of the door, her mother following with the miller, and supported by the body of troopers,

the latter walking with the usual cavalry gait, as if their thighs were rather too long for them. Thus they crossed the threshold of the mill-house and up the passage, the paving of which was worn into a gutter by the ebb and flow of feet that had been going on there ever since Tudor times.