

vest are terrible. . . . If we further consider the difficulty of communication—for the roads in Persia consist of narrow paths trodden down by horses, asses, and camels, carts being almost unknown—it will be understood that the descriptions of the famine published by the papers, if a little over-coloured, are substantially true. That parents have eaten their own children in Yezed, Kirman, and other towns of Southern Persia is a fable; but my private accounts from that country confirm the news that men have died of hunger in the public streets. . . . A dearth of provisions was already observed in Western Iran last year, when Nasreddin Shah went on a pilgrimage to the grave of the national martyr, Hussein, at Kerbela, with a suite of several thousand soldiers, mollahs, and travellers. . . . We had our earliest news of the famine from the south, because that part of Persia is in more frequent communication with India, and there is an English Chargé-d'Affaires at Bender Bushire. But now we hear that the distress in Eastern Khorassan, which has always been behind the other parts of the country in culture and social prosperity, is far greater; . . . and even in Azerbaijan, the most fertile of the Persian provinces, things are not much better."—*Illustrated London News*.

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WILFRID CUMBERMEDE.

An Autobiographical Story.

BY GEORGE MACDONALD,

Author of "Alec Forbes," etc.

CHAPTER XLVI.—(Continued.)

"Yes—I see it won't do. And yet if I were to represent the thing to Sir Giles?—He doesn't care for old books—"

"You forget, again, Charley, that the volume is of great money-value. Perhaps my late slip has made me fastidious—but though the book be mine—and if I had it, the proof of the contrary would lie with them—I could not take advantage of Sir Giles' ignorance to recover it."

"I might, however, get Clara—she is a favourite with him, you know—"

"I will not hear of it," I said, interrupting him, and he was forced to yield.

"No, Charley," I said again; "I must bear it. Harder things have been borne, and men have got through the world and out of it notwithstanding. If there isn't another world, why should we care much for the loss of what must go with the rest?—and if there is, why should we care at all?"

"Very fine, Wilfrid! but when you come to the practice—why, the less said the better."

"But that is the very point: we don't come to the practice. If we did, then the ground of it would be proved unobjectionable."

"True;—but if the practice be unattainable—"

"It would take much proving to prove that to my—dissatisfaction I should say; and more failure besides, I can tell you, than there will be time for in this world. If it were proved, however—don't you see it would disprove both suppositions equally? If such a philosophical spirit be unattainable, it discredits both sides of the alternative on either of which it would have been reasonable."

"There is a sophism there of course, but I am not in the mood for pulling your logic to pieces," returned Charley, still pacing up and down the room.

In sum, nothing would come of all our talk but the assurance that the volume was equally irrecoverable with the sword, and indeed with my poor character—at least in the eyes of my immediate neighbours.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE LETTERS AND THEIR STORY.

As soon as Charley went to bed, I betook myself to my grandmother's room, in which, before discovering my loss, I had told Styles to kindle a fire. I had said nothing to Charley about my ride, and the old church, and the marriage-register. For the time, indeed, I had almost lost what small interest I had taken in the matter—my new bereavement was so absorbing and painful; but feeling certain when he left me, that I should not be able to sleep, but would be tormented all night by innumerable mental mosquitoes if I made the attempt, and bethinking me of my former resolution, I proceeded to carry it out.

The fire was burning brightly, and my reading lamp was on the table, ready to be lighted. But I sat down first in my grandmother's chair and mused for I know not how long. At length my wandering thoughts rehearsed again the excursion with Mr. Coningham. I pulled the copy of the marriage-entry from my pocket, and in reading it over again, my curiosity was sufficiently roused to send me to the bureau. I lighted my lamp at last, unlocked what had seemed to my childhood a treasury of unknown marvels, took from it the packet of yellow withered letters, and sat down again by the

fire to read, in my great-grandmother's chair, the letters of Wilfrid Cumbermede Daryll—for so he signed himself in all of them—my great-grandfather. There were amongst them a few of her own in reply to his—badly written and badly spelt, but perfectly intelligible. I will not transcribe any of them—I have them to show if needful—but not at my command at the present moment;—for I am writing neither where I commenced my story—on the outskirts of an ancient city, nor at the Moat, but in a dreary old square in London; and those letters lie locked again in the old bureau, and have lain unvisited through thousands of desolate days and slow-creeping nights, in that room which I cannot help feeling sometimes as if the ghost of that high-spirited, restless-hearted grandmother of mine must now and then revisit, sitting in the same old chair, and wondering to find how far it has all receded from her—wondering also to think what a work she made, through her long and weary life, about things that look to her now such trifles.

I do not then transcribe any of the letters, but give, in a connected form, what seem to me the facts I gathered from them; not hesitating to present, where they are required, self-evident conclusions as if they were facts mentioned in them. I repeat that none of my names are real, although they all point at the real names.

Wilfrid Cumbermede was the second son of Richard and Mary Daryll of Moldwarp Hall. He was baptized Cumbermede from the desire to keep in memory the name of a celebrated ancestor, the owner in fact of the disputed sword—itself alluded to in the letters,—who had been more mindful of the supposed rights of his king than the next king was of the privations undergone for his sake, for Moldwarp Hall at least was never recovered from the roundhead branch of the family into whose possession it had drifted. In the change, however, which creeps on with new generations, there had been in the family a reaction of sentiment in favour of the more distinguished of its progenitors; and Richard Daryll, a man of fierce temper and overbearing disposition, had named his son after the cavalier. A tyrant in his family, at least in the judgment of the writers of those letters, he apparently found no trouble either with his wife or his eldest or youngest son; while, whether his own fault or not, it was very evident that from Wilfrid his annoyances had been numerous.

A legal feud had for some time existed between the Ahab of Moldwarp Hall and the Naboth of the Moat, the descendant of an ancient yeoman family of good blood, and indeed related to the Darylls themselves, of the name of Woodruffe. Sir Richard had cast covetous eyes upon the field surrounding Stephen's comparatively humble abode, which had at one time formed a part of the Moldwarp property. In searching through some old parchments, he had found, or rather, I suppose, persuaded himself he had found sufficient evidence that this part of the property of the Moat, then of considerable size, had been willed away in contempt of the entail which covered it, and belonged by right to himself and his heirs. He had therefore instituted proceedings to recover possession, during the progress of which their usual bickerings and disputes augmented in fierceness. A decision having at length been given in favour of the weaker party, the mortification of Sir Richard was unendurable to himself, and his wrath and unreasonableness in consequence, equally unendurable to his family. One may then imagine the paroxysm of rage with which he was seized when he discovered that, during the whole of the legal process, his son Wilfrid had been making love to Elizabeth Woodruffe, the only child of his enemy. In Wilfrid's letters, the part of the story which follows is fully detailed for Elizabeth's information, of which the reason is also plain—that the writer had spent such a brief period afterwards in Elizabeth's society, that he had not been able for very shame to recount the particulars.

No sooner had Sir Richard come to a knowledge of the hateful fact, evidently through one of his servants, than, suppressing the outburst of his rage for the moment, he sent for his son Wilfrid, and informed him, his lips quivering with suppressed passion, of the discovery he had made; accused him of having brought disgrace on the family, and of having been guilty of falsehood and treachery; and ordered him to go down on his knees and abjure the girl before heaven, or expect a father's vengeance.

But evidently Wilfrid was as little likely as any man to obey such a command. He boldly avowed his love for Elizabeth, and declared his intention of marrying her. His father, foaming with rage, ordered his servants to seize him. Overmastered in spite of his struggles, he bound him to a pillar, and taking a horse-whip, lashed him furiously; then, after his rage was thus in a measure appeased, ordered them to carry him to his bed. There he remained, hardly able to move, the whole of that night and the next day. On the following night, he made his escape from the Hall, and took refuge with a farmer-friend a few miles off—in the neighbourhood, probably, of Umberden Church.

Here I would suggest a conjecture of my own—namely, that my ancestor's room was the same I had occupied, so—fatally, shall I say?—to myself, on the only two occasions on which I had slept at the Hall; that he escaped by the stair to the roof, having first removed the tapestry from the door, as a memorial to himself and a sign to those he left; that he carried with him the sword and the volume—both probably lying in his room at the time, and the latter little valued by any other. But all this, I repeat, is pure conjecture.

As soon as he was sufficiently recovered, he communicated with Elizabeth, prevailed upon her to marry him at once at Umberden church, and within a few days, as near as I could judge, left her to join, as a volunteer, the army of the Duke of Cumberland, then fighting the French in the Netherlands. Probably from a morbid fear lest the disgrace his father's brutality had inflicted should become known in his regiment, he dropped the surname of Daryll when he joined it; and—for what precise reasons I cannot be certain—his wife evidently never called herself by any other name than Cumbermede. Very likely she kept her marriage a secret, save from her own family, until the birth of my grandfather, which certainly took place before her husband's return. Indeed I am almost sure that he never returned from that campaign, but died fighting, not unlikely at the battle of Laffeldt; and that my grannie's letters, which I found in the same packet, had been, by the kindness of some comrade, restored to the young widow.

When I had finished reading the letters, and had again thrown myself back in the old chair, I began to wonder why nothing of all this should ever have been told me. That the whole history should have dropped out of the knowledge of the family, would have been natural enough, had my great-grandmother, as well as my great-grandfather, died in youth; but that she should have outlived her son, dying only after I, the representative of the fourth generation, was a boy at school, and yet no whisper have reached me of these facts, appeared strange. A moment's reflection showed me that the causes and the reasons of the fact must have lain with my uncle. I could not but remember how both he and my aunt had sought to prevent me from seeing my grannie alone, and how the last had complained of this in terms far more comprehensible to me now than they were then. But what could have been the reasons for this their obstruction of the natural flow of tradition? They remained wrapt in a mystery which the outburst from it of an occasional gleam of conjectured light only served to deepen.

The letters lying open on the table before me, my eyes rested upon one of the dates—the third day of March, 1747. It struck me that this date involved a discrepancy with that of the copy I had made from the register. I referred to it, and found my suspicion correct. According to the copy, my ancestors were not married until the 15th of January, 1748. I must have made a blunder—and yet I could hardly believe I had, for I had reason to consider myself accurate. If there was no mistake, I should have to reconstruct my facts, and draw fresh conclusions.

By this time, however, I was getting tired and sleepy and cold; my lamp was nearly out; my fire was quite gone; and the first of a frosty dawn was beginning to break in the east. I rose and replaced the papers, reserving all further thought on the matter for a condition of circumstances more favourable to a correct judgment. I blew out the lamp, groped my way to bed in the dark, and was soon fast asleep, in despite of insult, mortification, perplexity, and loss.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

ONLY A LINK.

It may be said of the body in regard of sleep as well as in regard of death, "It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power." For me, the next morning, I could almost have said, "I was sown in dishonour and raised in glory." No one can deny the power of the wearied body to paralyze the soul; but I have a correlate theory which I love, and which I expect to find true—that while the body wears the mind, it is the mind that restores vigour to the body, and then, like the man who has built him a stately palace, rejoices to dwell in it. I believe that, if there be a living, conscious love at the heart of the universe, the mind, in the quiescence of its consciousness in sleep, comes into a less disturbed contact with its origin, the heart of the creation; whence gifted with calmness and strength for itself, it grows able to impart comfort and restoration to the weary frame. The cessation of labour affords but the necessary occasion; makes it possible, as it were, for the occupant of an outlying station in the wilderness to return to his father's house for fresh supplies of all that is needful for life and energy. The child-soul goes home at night, and returns in the morning to the labours of the school. Mere physical rest could never of its own negative self build up the frame in such light and vigour as come through sleep.

It was from no blessed vision that I woke the next morning, but from a deep and dream-

less sleep. Yet the moment I became aware of myself and the world, I felt strong and courageous, and I began at once to look my affairs in the face. Concerning that which was first in consequence, I soon satisfied myself: I could not see that I had committed any serious fault in the whole affair. I was not at all sure that a lie in defence of the innocent, and to prevent the knowledge of what no one had any right to know, was wrong—seeing such involves no injustice on the one side, and does justice on the other. I have seen reason since to change my mind, and count my liberty restricted to silence—not extending, that is, to the denial or assertion of what the will of God, inasmuch as it exists or does not exist, may have declared to be or not to be fact. I now think that to lie is, as it were, to snatch the reins out of God's hand.

At all events, however, I had done the Brothertons no wrong. "What matter then," I said to myself, "of what they believe me guilty, so long as before God and my own conscience I am clear and clean?"

Next came the practical part:—What was I to do? To right myself either in respect of their opinion, or in respect of my lost property, was more hopeless than important, and I hardly wasted two thoughts upon that. But I could not remain where I was, and soon came to the resolution to go with Charley to London at once, and taking lodgings in some obscure recess near the inns of court, there to give myself to work and work alone, in the foolish hope that one day fame might buttress reputation. In this resolution I was more influenced by the desire to be near the brother of Mary Osborne, than the desire to be near my friend Charley, strong as that was: I expected thus to hear of her oftener, and even cherished the hope of coming to hear from her—of inducing her to honour me with a word or two of immediate communication. For I could see no reason why her opinions should prevent her from corresponding with one who, whatever might or might not seem to him true, yet cared for the truth, and must treat with respect every form in which he could deserv its predominating presence.

I would have asked Charley to set out with me that very day but for the desire to clear up the discrepancy between the date of my ancestor's letters, all written within the same year, and that of the copy I had made of the registration of their marriage—with which object I would compare the copy and the original. I wished also to have some talk with Mr. Coningham concerning the contents of the letters which at his urgency I had now read. I got up and wrote to him therefore, asking him to ride with me again to Umberden Church, as soon as he could make it convenient, and sent Styles off at once on the mare to carry the note to Miustercombe and bring me back an answer.

As we sat over our breakfast, Charley said suddenly,

"Clara was regretting yesterday that she had not seen the Moat. She said you had asked her once, but had never spoken of it again."

"And now I suppose she thinks, because I'm in disgrace with her friends at the Hall, that she mustn't come near me," I said with another bitterness than belonged to the words.

"Wilfrid!" he said reproachfully; "she didn't say anything of the sort. I will write and ask her if she couldn't contrive to come over. She might meet us at the park gates."

"No," I returned; "there isn't time. I mean to go back to London—perhaps to-morrow evening. It is like turning you out, Charley, but we shall be nearer each other in town than we were last time."

"I am delighted to hear it," he said. "I had been thinking myself that I had better go back this evening. My father is expected home in a day or two, and it would be just like him to steal a march on my chambers. Yes, I think I shall go to-night."

"Very well, old boy," I answered. "That will make it all right. It's a pity we couldn't take the journey together, but it doesn't matter much. I shall follow you as soon as I can."

"Why can't you go with me?" he asked.

Thereupon I gave him a full report of my excursion with Mr. Coningham, and the after reading of the letters, with my reason for wishing to examine the register again; telling him that I had asked Mr. Coningham to ride with me once more to Umberden Church.

When Styles returned, he informed me that Mr. Coningham at first proposed to ride back with him, but probably bethinking himself that another sixteen miles would be too much for my mare, had changed his mind and sent me the message that he would be with me early the next day.

After Charley was gone, I spent the evening in a thorough search of the old bureau. I found in it several quaint ornaments besides those already mentioned, but only one thing which any relation to my story would justify specific mention of—namely, an ivory label, discoloured with age, on which was traceable the very number Sir Giles had read from the scabbard of Sir Wilfrid's sword. Clearly then my sword was the one mentioned in the book, and as clearly it had not been at Moldwarp Hall for a long time before I lost it there. If