

## AT THE THRESHOLD.

"Ah! there is silly Nanny with the child!  
And here am I, a chopping wood, you see!  
For Tom has got the fit and drinking wild—  
We've a hand pull to manage such as he!  
Drink makes him mad and he will have his way;  
I wouldn't be the one to speak him nay;  
But, Lord! his heart is right, his love is tried,  
And we've a trick that serves our purpose best—  
I chop the sticks and make a bright fire-side,  
And Nanny, though she's witless, does the rest!"

For though he'd frown on me when he's in drink  
His girl can manage him and bring him round;  
Though she's no brains to use, no head to think,  
Though Nature stunted her, her heart is sound,  
Well, father sees her moving 'bout the place  
With kindly ways and tender quiet face,  
And thinks, I know, how Nature has denied  
His Nanny wits, but made her all good-will—  
Then, his eyes fall on the bright fire-side,  
And he feels ashamed to use his brains so ill!"

"He thinks how witless ones are good and kind,  
How even silly beasts have gentle ways,  
And all the while the freight fills his mind  
With homely thoughts of cozier, brighter days;  
And by the time I bring his cup of tea,  
His drink is conquered, he was warned to me!  
His eyes grow dim, he holds his arms out wide,  
Poor Nanny brings the baby to his breast!  
Ay! there's our plan! Make up a bright fire-side,  
And leave a man's own love to do the rest!"

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

## THE RIVALS.

A ROMANCE OF ILFRACOMBE.

There are gay and more fashionable watering-places than Ilfracombe, but there are none that offers such attractions to the lovers of the beautiful. Nowhere does the sea break on such bold rocks; nowhere are there such deep, clear pools, such lovely sea-weed, such treasures of sea-flowers and anemones; nowhere such a shore to ramble and climb over. In point of drives and excursions inland and along the coast there are few places like it; but its great glory is its sea and its rocks, its pools and its sea-weeds. Such, too, was Gerald Mayfield's opinion; and he appreciated it the more because he enjoyed the beauties and hunted for the sea-weeds and anemones with Maud Heneage. They were not old acquaintances. It was but a fortnight since they had arrived upon the outside of the coach from Barnstaple together. So pleasant had been that journey to the young man that he had at once decided to stay at the Grand Hotel, where Maud and her mother were going to stop, instead of going into lodging, as he had before intended.

Gerald Mayfield was junior partner in the house of Mayfield & Harper, Australian and Cape merchants. His father had been the head of the firm, and at his death Gerald, who had just left college, came into the business. He was now thirty, a tall, strongly-built man, with a quiet manner. Not a handsome man, but with a good deal of character and resolution in his face. Until he saw Maud Heneage he had never been really in love. He had always supposed that he should marry some day or other, but had gone on leading a quiet club life, and had been but little in the society of women. During this fortnight he had been almost continually with Maud Heneage, sometimes with her mother as a companion, sometimes with a party of three or four others from the hotel, occasionally by themselves, or rather chaperoned only by Mrs. Heneage, sitting on the rocks in the distance reading. By the end of that time he loved her with all his heart, but as yet he had hardly even begun to wonder whether she would in time come to love him.

Before breakfast Gerald always went for his swim, walking round to the cove and coming back by the row-boat across to the pier. He was a strong swimmer, and his custom was to swim out through the mouth of the little inlet into the rougher water outside. One morning a bather went out just before him and swam steadily seaward. "T at fellow will be getting into a mess," Gerald said to himself. "The tide is running up, and he will find difficulty in getting back again." Keeping a hundred yards or so out, as was his custom, for about ten minutes, Gerald turned towards the mouth of the cove, not having given a second thought to the swimmer who had preceded him. Just as he was opposite to the great rocks at the entrance he heard a shout far behind him. He stopped to listen, and again the shout for "help" came distinctly to his ears.

"I thought that fool would get into a scrape," he muttered, turning round and making off with a long, steady, even stroke in the direction of the man, whose head he could see nearly three hundred yards out, giving a loud shout as he started to encourage him with the knowledge that help was coming. He arrived just in time; the swimmer was utterly exhausted, and had lost both pluck and presence of mind. Once he disappeared altogether, and Gerald, who was still nearly thirty yards off, thought that he would arrive too late. However, he came up again, and splashed and struggled wildly for a moment or two, but was just sinking when Gerald arrived. The latter caught him by the arm, and the man strove desperately to throw his arm around him.

"Keep quiet," Gerald said sternly. "If you struggle I'll let you go."  
There was no mistaking the firmness of that tone, or that the threat would be carried out. The man ceased to struggle at once.

"That's right," Gerald said. "Now lie on your back; I'll take you by the hair and tow you as easily as possible."

As he spoke he looked round and saw the boat

coming out from the cove with its load of bathers. He shouted at once and an answering shout came back and the boat's head was turned toward them.

"That's all right," he said cheerfully to the other. "Now I'll tread water and you can put your hand on my shoulder and keep your mouth above water comfortably till the boat comes up."

With the prospect of help close at hand the man regained his courage, and was soon able to dispense with Gerald's help and to support himself until the boat came up, and he was taken on board. Gerald swam gently back, and by the time he reached the cove the man had already begun to dress. Gerald's clothes lay close to where he was sitting, for at Ilfracombe *à fresco* dressing is the rule, the two or three little wooden boxes on wheels being insufficient for a tithe of the bathers.

As he approached, the man stood up and held out his hand.

"I owe you my life," he said: "another few seconds and I should have gone under."

"Yes; it was a near shave for you," Gerald answered. "But there was no difficulty in saving you; it was not like jumping off a bridge for a shrieking woman, or into the sea when a ship is running before a gale. I saved your life, certainly, but it was with no more trouble and risk than if I had been standing on shore and had thrown you a rope."

"I was a fool to swim out so far," the man said; "but I have been out as far before. I suppose there was some sort of a tide, for after I turned I did not seem to make any way toward shore."

"To tell you the truth," Gerald said, "I thought you a fool when I saw you swimming out. One ought never to go out far from shore at any of these watering-places till one has found out all about the set of the tide. There, now you are dressed, I should advise you to run back at a sharp pace, for your lips are blue and you look pinched all over, and drink a strong cup of coffee directly you get in."

"I will take your advice," the other said. "But when can I see you again? My name is Gossett, and I am at the big hotel."

"My name is Mayfield, and I am staying there, too."

"I don't know why, but I don't like him," Gerald said to himself as he looked after Gossett, as he went up the steep path from the cove.

"They say that a man you have saved from drowning is sure to do you some harm; not that I am fool enough to believe that, but I don't like him. Somehow or other, I should say he was shift. But there, I dare say it's prejudice, and that he is a good fellow enough, though certainly not a strong man, anyway."

Physically the man did not look strong, and the word did not trouble itself as to his mental strength. Paul Gossett was manager of the Metropolitan and suburban bank, a good position for a man of his age. A popular man generally with a constant smile and a gentle manner. Much liked by his directors and considered a very eligible man, indeed, at Clapham, where he lived.

Gerald Mayfield went for a sharp walk after his bath, and most of the visitors at the hotel had finished breakfast when he went in. Half an hour later Mrs. Heneage and her daughter came in dressed for a walk. As a matter of course, he took his hat.

"What are your plans for this morning?"

"I do not feel equal to much walking this morning," Mrs. Heneage said, "so I think I shall sit down behind the Lantern rock. Maud will stay there with me, and in the afternoon we will go along the Tor walks."

"Very well," Gerald said: "I will see you comfortably seated, and then I shall go for a walk inland and be back to lunch."

Three minutes later, at a turn of the walk, they came suddenly upon Paul Gossett.

"Why, Mrs. Heneage, this is indeed a pleasure," he said, as he shook hands with mother and daughter, with a warmth that showed that their acquaintance was an intimate one. "How long have you been down here? and how long are you going to stay?"

Then as his eye fell for the first time on Gerald, who was at this moment wishing in his heart that he had arrived just too late that morning to save his life, he recognized him.

"Ah, Mr. Mayfield, I did not recognize you. I had not seen you dressed before, which must be my excuse. Do you know, Mrs. Heneage, this gentleman saved my life this morning?"

Mrs. Heneage and Maud uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"It was a mere nothing," Gerald said almost rudely. "He was tired; so I swam out to him, and he put his hand on my shoulder till a boat came. It is not worth mentioning."

Maud looked up in surprise at the tone in which Gerald had spoken, but Paul Gossett, without apparently noticing the rudeness of Gerald's tone, went on.

"No, Mrs. Heneage, it is of no use for Mr. Mayfield to try and put aside the obligation in that way. It was, I can assure you, a most gallant action of his. And I am ashamed to say that I lost my presence of mind, and was within an ace of drowning us both."

And he proceeded to relate the story.

"Excuse my interrupting you," Gerald said; "but as I don't want to listen to my own exploits, I will go off for my walk."

"That fellow has come down on purpose to see Maud Heneage," Gerald said to himself, as he strode along the country road. "I should not be surprised if they are engaged, or next door to it. Well," after a long pause, "I had no reason in the world to suppose that she cared a

button for me; I don't suppose she ever gave the matter a thought, one way or another."

It was late in the afternoon when Gerald returned to the hotel, having walked some thirty miles since starting. He had by this time made up his mind that he would stand aside and see what came of it. If Maud Heneage was in love with this man, the matter would soon be settled, and it was not for him to act as spoiler to their wooing. This resolution he proceeded to carry into execution; and for the next week started early upon long walks, and did not return until late, leaving the field open to his rival, an opportunity of which Paul Gossett was not slow to avail himself. He had months before resolved to win Maud Heneage. She was pretty, stylish and had money. Hitherto his wooing had progressed but slowly, but now he made the most of the opportunity left for him by his rival's folly. For Gerald Mayfield had indeed thrown down the cards when the game was in his hands. Although he was wholly unskilled in wooing, Maud Heneage had sufficient experience in being wooed to feel that this man loved her. And the thought was not unpleasant to her. She felt that he was strong and tender and true; and when a girl feels this of a man, unless her affections are pre-engaged, there is but little doubt what her answer will be when the question is asked. When, therefore, Gerald suddenly gave up walking with her, and left her to the care of Paul Gossett, she was alike surprised and pained. Had she had an opportunity of speaking with him alone, she would have frankly asked him if she had offended him, but he seemed to avoid all opportunity for explanation, and, from pride and pique, she laughed and talked gayly with Gossett, who was always beside her. Gossett had from the first understood that he had a rival in the man who had saved his life, and dimly fathomed the motives that actuated him in leaving the course clear for him.

"The man is a quixotic ass," he said to himself. "I believe she likes him, and he is throwing away his chances; but the sooner I get him out of the way, the better."

At the end of the week Gerald came into the smoking-room of the hotel late one evening. Gossett was alone there. For a time they chatted on different matters, and then Gossett said:

"I am sorry I don't see more of you, but you seem always out, and I—well, I hardly look upon myself as a free man."

"May I ask," Gerald said, after a moment's pause, "if you are engaged to Miss Heneage?"

"Well, after what I owe you," Gossett said, "I do not like there to be any concealment between us. There is, and has been for some time, a sort of engagement between us. It is not actually an engagement, because her mother objects to long engagements, and is anxious that her daughter should not marry until she is three-and-twenty. So, you understand, there is no avowed engagement, although in point of fact it comes to the same thing. It is a secret between us two now, and I should not tell you; but I know that I can rely upon your not mentioning it or noticing it in any way. In a few weeks she will be within six months of three-and-twenty, and then it will be publicly announced."

Gerald was silent for a short time, and then said quietly:

"You are a fortunate man. I suspected that it was so from the first time I saw you address her. And now I will say good night and good-bye. I am going up to town to-morrow. Will you say good-bye for me to Mrs. Heneage and her daughter?"

"A very good stroke," Paul Gossett said to himself as he went out. "Now something of the same sort the other side, and I think the game's mine. He's hard hit, and won't care about seeing us after marriage, and if he does, and it happens to come out, it won't matter then."

The next morning at breakfast he said carelessly to Maud Heneage:

"That queer fellow Mayfield went up to town this morning. He asked me to say good-bye to you and Mrs. Heneage."

"Has he gone for good?" Maud asked, after a short silence, and Paul Gossett could see that she had grown suddenly pale.

"Oh, yes; from what he said, I fancy his wife had come back from some visit or other and wanted him home."

"His wife!" Maud Heneage said.

"Yes; did he never speak to you about her?" Maud did not answer, nor did she go out for her usual walk that morning.

"Married!" she thought to herself, as she sat alone in her room looking out on the sea; "married!" Then she had been utterly mistaken in her judgment of faces; and yet, as she sat there, she was unconsciously making excuses for him. He had, she felt sure, loved her, but he might not have known it himself, and when he realized it he had withdrawn from her. He ought to have told her. It was wrong, very wrong; but yet he may have meant no deliberate harm. He might be unhappy with his wife, and so avoided the subject, thinking that, so long as she was but a chance acquaintance, it was no affair of hers. So, with an aching heart, she made excuses for him and blushed to find herself doing so.

"I have no right to think of him," she cried; "he is a married man and nothing to me. Thank heaven I never gave him cause to think I cared for him; thank heaven, if we meet to-morrow, I at least need not feel ashamed. It is all over now," she said wearily, after a pause.

"They say every woman meets her ideal once in her life; I have met mine, but he was already another's. Well, it does not matter who I marry now."

Six months later the papers had the announcement of the marriage of Paul Gossett and Maud Heneage; and upon the day that the notice made its appearance Gerald Mayfield said to his partner:

"I have been thinking for some time, Harper, that it would be well if we had a house of our own at Melbourne. I am sure we should largely increase our business. I have not been well lately, and want a change badly. What do you say to my going out for a year or two and starting a house there? Once set fairly afloat we could take Purvis in as a partner, and I could come back again."

"You surprise me, Mayfield. I think that a branch house would pay well, but I don't see how we can spare you. I have noticed you have not been yourself for some time, but two or three months' holiday would set you up."

"No," Gerald said. "I want a change of work as well as of scene. I have been hard hit, old man, very hard hit; and her marriage is in the *Times* this morning. I knew it would be there soon; still as long as it didn't appear there might be a chance. It's all over now, and I feel that I must get away for a bit."

And so, after long consultation, it was finally settled. It was a busy time at home, and for the moment Gerald's presence was essential; but it was at last arranged that early in June he should sail for Melbourne. A week before leaving he went to a large dinner-party. He was one of the last to arrive, and his hostess said:

"I will introduce you at once, Mr. Mayfield, to the lady you are to take down to dinner," and Gerald was led across the room. "Mrs. Gossett—Mr. Mayfield," she said, and then turned away to repeat the ceremony elsewhere.

Gerald bowed in silence. The shock and the surprise took away all power of speech or of collective thought.

"There was no occasion for an introduction, Mr. Mayfield," Maud said, gently holding out her hand. "We are old acquaintances, though you did treat us shabbily by running away without saying good-bye."

Gerald touched the hand extended to him, murmured something in reply to the question, and then fell back a few steps until it should be time to offer his arm.

"He looks ill," Maud said to herself. "It is very awkward, and he is evidently ashamed of himself. Poor fellow, I expect he is very unhappy. What mistakes we all make!"

Maud had been married but four months, but she spoke as if she was conscious that she, too, had made a mistake. In the few minutes which elapsed before dinner was announced, Gerald had recovered from the shock that the meeting had given him, and was enabled, as he took her down, to follow the lead she had given him, and to talk to her as to an indifferent acquaintance. The party was a large one, and the conversation was not, therefore, general. They chatted together upon indifferent subjects—the opera, the last new book, the parliamentary struggle, the Derby which was to be run on the morrow. Not a word was said of Ilfracombe.

"Mr. Gossett is not here," Gerald said, looking round the table.

"No; he promised to come, but he is so busy at the bank he could not get away; and as Mrs. Patterson is a cousin of mine, I was able to come alone."

When dinner was nearly over Maud said:

"You are not looking well, Mr. Mayfield."

"I have not been quite well," Mrs. Gossett, for some time. Overwork, I suppose. I am going abroad to Australia, next week, probably for some years."

Maud looked up at him.

"For some years, Mr. Mayfield? Do you mean it?"

"Yes, Mrs. Gossett. I have been restless and unsettled here for some months, so I am going to open a branch of our business out there. Some one must go; and I am glad to be the one."

"Is Mrs. Mayfield here? Of course she goes with you?"

"Mrs. Mayfield? Do you think I am married, Maud?"

She did not notice the Christian name.

"Are you not?"

"Married! I married! Who can have told you such a monstrous thing?"

For a full minute Maud did not answer. She was looking down into her plate, and the colour had all died out of her face.

"I heard it mentioned," she said. "Certainly some one said so. I suppose it was a mistake. There was nothing monstrous in it."

"It would be monstrous to me," Gerald said. "Believe me, Mrs. Gossett, whoever may henceforth tell you that Gerald Mayfield is married, you can tell them it is not so. I shall never marry—never."

For a time no further word was spoken. The colour did not return to her cheek. Presently she said,

"I am going to ask you a strange question: one I should not ask were it not that you are going away, and that, perhaps—perhaps we shall not meet again. It is as well to clear up misunderstandings. Why did you leave Ilfracombe so suddenly without even saying good-bye?"

"May I tell you the truth?"

Mrs. Gossett bowed her head.

"Because I heard—of course there's no secret now—because I heard from Gossett that you