

He made me no reply. My aunt's apron was covering her face, and when she took it away, I observed that those eager almost angry eyes were red with weeping. I began to feel a movement at my heart, the first fluttering physical sign of a waking love towards her.

"Don't cry, auntie," I said. "I don't see anything to cry about. Grannie has got what she wanted."

She made me no answer, and I sat down to my breakfast. I don't know how it was, but I could not eat it. I rose and took my way to the hollow in the field. I felt a strange excitement, not sorrow. Grannie was actually dead at last. I did not quite know what it meant. I had never seen a dead body. Neither did I know that she had died while I slept with my hand in hers. Nannie had found her quite cold. Had we been a talking family, I might have been uneasy until I had told the story of my last interview with her; but I never thought of saying a word about it. I cannot help thinking now that I was waked up and sent to the old woman, my great grandmother, in the middle of the night, to help her to die in comfort. Who knows? What we can neither prove nor comprehend forms, I suspect, the infinitely larger part of our being.

When I was taken to see what remained of grannie, I experienced nothing of the dismay which some children feel at the sight of death. It was as if she had seen something just in time to leave the look of it behind her there, and so the final expression was a revelation. For a while there seems to remain this one link between some dead bodies and their living spirits. But my aunt, with a common superstition, would have me touch the face. That, I confess, made me shudder; the cold of death is so unlike any other cold! I seemed to feel it in my hand all the rest of the day.

I saw what *seemed* grannie—I am too near death myself to consent to call a dead body the man or the woman—had in the grave for which she had longed, and returned home with a sense that somehow there was a barrier broken down between me and my uncle and aunt. I felt as near my uncle now as I had ever been. That evening he did not go to his own room, but sat with my aunt and me in the kitchen-hall. We pulled the great high-backed oaken settle before the fire, and my aunt made a great blaze, for it was very cold. They sat one in each corner, and I sat between them, and told them many things concerning the school. They asked me questions and encouraged my prattle, seeming well pleased that the old silence should be broken. I fancy I brought them a little nearer to each other that night. It was after a funeral, and yet they both looked happier than I had ever seen them before.

CHAPTER IX.

SIN AND REPENT.

The Christmas holidays went by more rapidly than I had expected. I took myself with enlarged faculty to my book-mending, and more than ever enjoyed making my uncle's old volumes tidy. When I returned to school, it was with real sorrow at parting from uncle, and even towards my aunt I now felt a growing attraction.

I shall not dwell upon my school history. That would be to spin out my narrative unnecessarily. I shall only relate such occurrences as are guide-posts in the direction of those main events which properly constitute my history.

I had been about two years with Mr. Elder. The usual holidays had intervened, upon which occasions I found the pleasures of home so multiplied by increase of liberty and the enlarged confidence of my uncle, who took me about with him everywhere, that they were now almost capable of rivalling those of school. But before I relate an incident which occurred in the second autumn, I must say a few words about my character at this time.

My reader will please to remember that I had never been driven, or oppressed in any way. The affair of the watch was quite an isolated instance, and so immediately followed by the change and fresh life of school, that it had not left a mark behind. Nothing had occurred to generate in me any fear before the face of man. I had been vaguely uneasy in relation to my grandmother, but that uneasiness had almost vanished before her death. Hence the faith natural to childhood had received no check. My aunt was at worst cold; she had never been harsh; while over Nannie I was absolute ruler. The only time that evil had threatened me, I had been faithfully defended by my guardian uncle. At school, while I found myself more under law, I yet found myself possessed of greater freedom. Every one was friendly and more than kind. From all this the result was that my nature was unusually trusting.

We had a whole holiday, and, all seven, set out to enjoy ourselves. It was a delicious morning in autumn, clear and cool, with a great light in the east, and the west nowhere. Neither the autumnal tints, nor the sharpening wind had any sadness in those young years which we call the old years afterwards. How strange it seems to have—all of us—to say with the Jewish poet: I have been young and

now an old! A wood in the distance, rising up the slope of a hill, was our goal, for we were after hazel-nuts. Frolicking, scampering, leaping over stiles, we felt the road vanish under our feet. When we gained the wood, although we failed in our quest, we found plenty of amusement; that grew everywhere. At length it was time to return, and we resolved on going home by another road—one we did not know.

After walking a good distance, we arrived at a gate and lodge, where we stopped to inquire the way. A kind-faced woman informed us that we should shorten it much by going through the park, which, as we seemed respectable boys, she would allow us to do. We thanked her, entered, and went walking along a smooth road, through open sward, clumps of trees, and an occasional piece of artful neglect in the shape of rough hillocks covered with wild shrubs, such as briar and broom. It was very delightful, and we walked along merrily. I can yet recall the individual shapes of certain hawthorn trees we passed, whose extreme age had found expression in a wild grotesqueness, which would have been ridiculous, but for a dim, painful resemblance to the distortion of old age in the human family.

After walking some distance, we began to doubt whether we might not have missed the way to the gate of which the woman had spoken. For a wall appeared, which, to judge from the tree-tops visible over it, must surround a kitchen garden or orchard; and from this we feared we had come too nigh the house. We had not gone much farther before a branch, projecting over the wall, from whose tip, as if the tempter had gone back to his old tricks, hung a rosy-checked apple, drew our eyes and arrested our steps. There are grown people who cannot, without an effort of the imagination, figure to themselves the attraction between a boy and an apple; but I suspect there are others the memories of whose boyish freaks will render it yet more difficult for them to understand a single moment's contemplation of such an object without the endeavour to appropriate it. To them the boy seems made for the apple, and the apple for the boy. Rosy, round-faced, spectacled Mr. Elder, however, had such a fine sense of honour in himself that he had been to a rare degree successful in developing a similar sense in his boys, and I do believe that not one of us would, under any circumstances, except possibly those of terrifying compulsion, have pulled that apple. We stood in rapt contemplation for a few moments, and then walked away. But although there are no degrees in Virtue, who will still demand her uttermost farthing, there are degrees in the virtuousness of human beings.

As we walked away, I was the last, and was just passing from under the branch when something struck the ground at my heel. I turned. An apple must fall some time, and for this apple that some time was then. It lay at my feet. I lifted it and stood gazing at it—I need not say with admiration. My mind fell a working. The adversary was there and the angel too. The apple had dropped at my feet; I had not pulled it. There it would lie wasting, if some one with less right than I—said the prince of special pleaders—was not the second to find it. Besides, what fell in the road was public property. Only this was not a public road, the angel reminded me. My will flattered from side to side, now turning its ear to my conscience, now turning away and hearkening to my impulse. At last, weary of the strife, I determined to settle it by a just contempt of trifles—and, half in desperation, bit into the ruddy cheek.

The moment I saw the wound my teeth had made, I knew what I had done, and my heart died within me. I was self-condemned. It was a new and an awful sensation—a sensation that could not be for a moment endured. The misery was too intense to leave room for repentance even. With a sudden resolve born of despair, I shoved the type of the broken law into my pocket and followed my companions. But I kept at some distance behind them, for as yet I dared not hold further communication with respectable people. I did not, and do now believe, that there was one amongst them who would have done as I had done. Probably also none of them would have thought of my way of deliverance from unendurable self-contempt. The curse had passed upon me, but I saw a way of escape.

A few yards further, they found the road we thought we had missed. It struck off into a hollow, the sides of which were covered with trees. As they turned into it they looked back and called me to come on. I ran as if I wanted to overtake them, but the moment they were out of sight, left the road for the grass, and set off at full speed in the same direction as before. I had not gone far before I was in the midst of trees, overflowing the hollow in which my companions had disappeared, and spreading themselves over the level above. As I entered their shadow, my old awe of the trees returned upon me—an awe I had nearly forgotten, but revived by my crime. I pressed along, however, for to turn back would have been more dreadful than any fear. At length, with a sudden turn, the road left the trees behind, and what a scene opened before me! I stood on the verge of a large space of greensward, smooth and

well-kept as a lawn, but somewhat irregular in surface. From all sides it rose towards the centre. There a broad, low rock seemed to grow out of it, and upon the rock stood the lordliest house my childish eyes had ever beheld. Take situation and all, and I have scarcely yet beheld one to equal it. Half castle, half old English country seat, it covered the rock with a huge square of building, from various parts of which rose towers, mostly square also, of different heights. I stood for one brief moment entranced with awful delight. A building which has grown for ages, the outcome of the life of powerful generations, has about it a majesty which, in certain moods, is overpowering. For one brief moment I forgot my sin and its sorrow. But memory awoke with a fresh pang. To this lordly place I, poor miserable sinner, was a debtor by wrong and shame. Let no one laugh at me because my sin was small; it was enough for me, being that of one who had stolen for the first time, and that without previous declension, and searing of the conscience. I hurried towards the building, anxiously looking for some entrance.

I had approached so near that, seated on its rock, it seemed to shoot its towers into the zenith, when, rounding a corner, I came to a part where the height sank from the foundation of the house to the level by a grassy slope, and at the foot of the slope, espied an elderly gentleman, in a white hat, who stood with his hands in his breeches-pockets, looking about him. He was tall and stout, and carried himself in what seemed to me a stately manner. As I drew near him I felt somewhat encouraged by a glimpse of his face, which was rubeund and, I thought, good-natured; but, approaching him rather from behind, I could not see it well. When I addressed him, he started.

"Please, sir," I said, "is this your house?"

"Yes, my man; it is my house," he answered, looking down on me with bent neck, his hands still in his pockets.

"Please, sir," I said, but here my voice began to tremble, and he grew dim and large through the veil of my gathering tears. I hesitated.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked, in a tone half-jocular, half-kind.

I made a great effort and recovered my self-possession.

"Please, sir," I repeated, "I want you to box my ears."

"Well, you are a funny fellow! What should I box your ears for, pray?"

"Because I have been very wicked," I answered; and, putting my hand in my pocket, I extracted the bitten apple, and held it up to him.

"Ho! ho!" he said, beginning to guess what I must mean, but hardly the less bewildered for that: "is that one of my apples?"

"Yes, sir; it fell down from a branch that hung over the wall. I took it up, and—and—I took a bite of it, and—and—I'm so sorry!"

Here I burst into a fit of crying, which I choked as much as I could. I remember quite well how, as I stood holding out the apple, my arm would shake with the violence of my sobs.

"I'm not fond of bitten apples," he said. "You had better eat it up now."

This brought me to myself. If he had shown me sympathy, I should have gone on crying.

"I would rather not. Please box my ears."

"I don't want to box your ears. You're welcome to the apple. Only don't take what is not your own another time."

"But, please, sir, I'm so miserable!"

"Home with you! and eat your apple as you go," was his unconsoling response.

"I can't eat it; I'm so ashamed of myself."

"When people do wrong, I suppose they must be ashamed of themselves. That's all right, isn't it?"

"Why won't you box my ears, then," I persisted.

It was my sole but unavailing prayer. He turned away towards the house. My trouble rose to agony. I made some wild motion of despair, and threw myself on the grass. He turned, looked at me for a moment in silence, and then said in a changed tone:

"My boy, I am sorry for you. I beg you will not trouble yourself any more. The affair is not worth it. Such a trifle! What can I do for you?"

I got up. A new thought of possible relief had crossed my mind.

"Please, sir, if you won't box my ears, will you shake hands with me?"

"To be sure I will," he answered, holding out his hand, and giving mine a very kindly shake. "Where do you live?"

"I am at school at Aldwick, at Mr. Elder's."

"You're a long way from home!"

"Am I, sir? Will you tell me how to go? But it's of no consequence. I don't mind anything now you've forgiven me. I shall soon run home."

"Come with me first. You must have something to eat."

I wanted nothing to eat, but how could I oppose anything he said? I followed him at once, drying my eyes as I went. He led me to a great gate which I had passed before,

and opening a wicket, took me across a court, and through another building where I saw many servants going about; then across a second court which was paved with large flags, and so to a door which he opened calling—

"Mrs. Wilson! Mrs. Wilson! I want you a moment."

"Yes, Sir Giles," answered a tall, stiff-looking, elderly woman, who presently appeared descending, with upright spine, a corkscrew staircase of stone.

"Here is a young gentleman, Mrs. Wilson, who seems to have lost his way. He is one of Mr. Elder's pupils at Aldwick. Will you get him something to eat and drink, and then send him home?"

"I will, Sir Giles."

"Good-bye, my man," said Sir Giles, again shaking hands with me. Then turning anew to the housekeeper, for such I found she was, he added:

"Couldn't you find a bag for him, and fill it with some of those brown pippins? They're good eating, ain't they?"

"With pleasure, Sir Giles."

Thereupon Sir Giles withdrew, closing the door behind him, and leaving me with the sense of life from the dead.

"What's your name, young gentleman?" asked Mrs. Wilson, with, I thought, some degree of sternness.

"Wilfrid Cumbermède," I answered.

She stared at me a little, with a stare which would have been a start in most women. I was by this time calm enough to take a quiet look at her. She was dressed in black silk, with a white neckerchief crossing in front, and black mittens on her hands. After gazing at me fixedly for a moment or two, she turned away and ascended the stair, which went up straight from the door, saying—

"Come with me, Master Cumbermède. You must have some tea before you go."

To be continued.

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[Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.]

TALES OF THE LINKS OF LOVE.

BY ALEXANDER SOMERVILLE.

LILLYMERE.

CHAPTER XXIX.

EVENTS CULMINATE.

The Duke of Sheerness, addressing Mr. Reuben, told what had passed with De Feri, junior, remarking, in conclusion, on young Canada similarly as quoted. To which the secretary rejoined:

"Sharpness and shallowness, your Grace, come of the exalting atmosphere."

"This youth isn't shallow, Mr. Secretary. Mentally, the boy is a man, and expert. What was the meaning of his 'officially annexing' a document from El Abra?"

"In his professional avocations he stole it. To abstract 'officially' for benefit of a third party, and private gain of the thief, is to annex."

"Can't we treat with El Abra?"

"That wealthy personage, your Grace, wouldn't be likely to treat with us."

"Not for money, I admit; but have we no other influences to bear on him?"

"Some of your Grace's American friends might reach him, were his possession of the Lillymère document not part of a conspiracy intended to be developed hereafter. Against British society and institutions El Abra cherishes a mania."

"That is a sentiment very exceptional in Americans, don't you think?"

"El Abra, like Jubal, is not a native American. He is the product of events."

"The proprietor of the Jubal House, do you mean, who draws so remarkably? Senator Pensyldine addressed him, and he in reply styled himself American."

"He is a foreigner naturalized. The native born citizen of education and social culture, as your Grace may daily observe, doesn't draw and snivel."

"Is Jubal Canadian?"

"Jubal and Zena are products of events. They were settlers in Canada until the woman was taken with desire to become the mother of a President of the United States. Then they moved to the other side, and became citizens in order that the son expected might be in manhood eligible for highest offices. No child came. Zena is at present confidential mistress of two or more women married on this side the line, who dwell beyond it occasionally on chance of giving birth to Presidents. Your Grace spoke to one of them two days since, while she was on flight to her nest on one of the Thousand Islands, in St. Lawrence river."

"Who was she, Mr. Secretary? Don't remember meeting any insane woman two days ago."