

vulgar curiosity. He is evidently a most determined beast, of gigantic strength and stature, and it would be well, now that he shows a social tendency, to meet him respectfully but with self-possession. His appearance, it is true, is against him, but, for aught we know, his disposition may be good; and so far from there being any reason for ladies to faint away when he puts his head out of the water, there is, it is to be feared, far more reason to expect that the serpent himself will be overcome by faintness at some of the sights to be witnessed at many of the watering-places on our coast.—*all Mail Gazette.*

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WILFRID CUMBERMEDE.

An Autobiographical Story.

BY GEORGE MACDONALD.

Author of "Alec Forbes," etc.

CHAPTER XXX.—Continued.

He was looking at me strangely: his eye glittered with what, under other circumstances, I might have taken for satisfaction; but he turned his face away and rose, saying, with a curiously altered tone, as he took up his hat.

"I'm very sorry to have offended you, Mr. Cumbermede. I sincerely beg your pardon. I thought our old—friendship may I not call it?—would have justified me in merely reporting what I had heard. I see now that I was wrong. I ought to have shown more regard for your feelings at this trying time. But again I assure you I was only reporting, and had not the slightest intention of making myself a go-between in the matter. One word more: I have no doubt I could let the field for you—at good grazing rental. That I think you can hardly object to."

"I should be much obliged to you," I replied—"for a term of not more than seven years—but without the house, and with the stipulation expressly made that I have right of way in every direction through it."

"Reasonable enough," he answered.

"One thing more," I said: "all these affairs must be pure matters of business between us."

"As you please," he returned, with, I fancied, a shadow of disappointment if not of displeasure on his countenance. "I should have been more gratified if you had accepted a friendly office; but I will do my best for you, notwithstanding."

"I had no intention of being unfriendly, Mr. Coningham," I said. "But when I think of it, I fear I may have been rude, for the bare proposal of selling this Naboth's vineyard of mine would go far to make me rude to any man alive. It sounds like an invitation to dishonour myself in the eyes of my ancestors."

"Ah! you do care about your ancestors?" he said, half musingly, and looking into his hat.

"Of course I do! Who is there does not?"

"Only some ninety-nine hundredths of the English nation."

"I cannot well forget," I returned, "what my ancestors have done for me."

"Whereas most people only remember that their ancestors can do no more for them. I declare I am almost glad I offended you. It does one good to hear a young man speak like that in these degenerate days, when a buck would rather be the son of a rich brewer than a decayed gentleman. I will call again about the end of the week—that is if you will be here—and report progress."

His manner, as he took his leave, was at once more friendly and more respectful than it had yet been—a change which I attributed to his having discovered in me more firmness than he had expected, in regard, if not of my rights, at least of my social position.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ARRANGEMENTS.

My custom at this time, and for long after I had finally settled down in the country, was to rise early in the morning—often, as I used when a child, before sunrise, in order to see the first east of the sun upon the new-born world. I believed then, as I believe still, that lovely as the sunset is, the sunrise is more full of mystery, poetry, and even, I had almost said, pathos. But often ere he was well up I had begun to imagine what the evening would be like, and with what softly mingled, all but imperceptible gradations it would steal into night. Then when the night came, I would wander about my little field, vainly endeavouring to picture the glory with which the next day's sun would rise upon me. Hence the morning and evening became well known to me; and yet I shrink from saying it, for each is endless in the variety of its change. And the longer I was alone, I became the more enamoured of solitude, with the labour to which, in any case, it was so helpful; and began indeed to be in some danger of losing

sight of my relation to "a world of men," for with that world my imagination and my love for Charley were now my sole recognizable links.

In the fore-part of the day, I read and wrote; and in the after-part found both employment and pleasure in arranging my uncle's books, amongst which I came upon a good many treasures whereof I was now able in some measure to appreciate the value—thinking often, amidst their ancient dust and odours, with something like indignant pity, of the splendid collection, as I was sure it must be, mouldering away in utter neglect at the neighbouring Hall.

I was on my knees in the midst of a pile which I had drawn from a cupboard under the shelves, when Mrs. Herbert showed Mr. Coningham in. I was annoyed, for my uncle's room was sacred; but as I was about to take him to my own, I saw such a look of interest upon his face that it turned me aside, and I asked him to take a seat.

"If you do not mind the dust," I added.

"Mind the dust!" he exclaimed,—"of old books! I count it almost sacred. I am glad

modes of thinking were. The end was, that, after finishing the work I had on hand, I collected my few belongings, gave up my lodging, bade Charley good-bye, receiving from him a promise to visit me at my own house if possible, and took my farewell of London for a season, determined not to return until I had produced a work which my now more enlarged judgment might consider fit to see the light. I had laid out all my spare money upon books, with which in a few heavy trunks I now went back to my solitary dwelling. I had no care upon my mind, for my small fortune along with the rent of my field was more than sufficient for my maintenance in the almost anchoritic seclusion in which I intended to live, and hence I had every advantage for the more definite projection and prosecution of a work which had been gradually shaping itself in my mind for months past.

Before leaving for London, I had already spoken to a handy lad employed upon the farm, and he had kept himself free to enter my service when I should require him. He was the more necessary to me that I still had my mare Lillith, from which nothing but fate

have been useless to go searching in the formless mass for this or that volume, but, unable to grant Sir Giles the desire of his heart in respect of my poor field, I did not care to ask of him the comparatively small favour of being allowed to burrow in his dust-heap of literature.

I was sitting, one hot noon, almost in despair over a certain little point concerning which I could find no definite information, when Mr. Coningham called. After some business matters had been discussed, I mentioned, merely for the sake of talk, the difficulty I was in—the sole disadvantage of a residence in the country as compared with London, where the British Museum was the unfailing resort of all who required such aid as I was in want of.

"But there is the library at Moldwarp Hall," he said.

"Yes, there it is; but there is not *here*."

"I have no doubt Sir Giles would make you welcome to borrow what books you wanted. He is a good-natured man, Sir Giles."

I explained my reason for not troubling him.

"Besides," I added, "the library is in such absolute chaos that I might with less loss of time run up to London, and find any volume I happened to want among the old-book-shops. You have no idea what a mess Sir Giles' books are in—scarcely two volumes of the same book to be found even in proximity. It is one of the most painful sights I ever saw."

He said little more, but from what followed I suspect either he or his father spoke to Sir Giles on the subject; for, one day, as I was walking past the park-gates, which I had seldom entered since my return, I saw him just within, talking to old Mr. Coningham. I saluted him in passing, and he not only returned the salutation in a friendly manner, but made a step towards me as if he wished to speak to me. I turned and approached him. He came out, and shook hands with me.

"I know who you are, Mr. Cumbermede, although I have never had the pleasure of speaking to you before," he said frankly.

"There you are mistaken, Sir Giles," I returned; "but you could hardly be expected to remember the little boy who, many years ago, having stolen one of your apples, came to you to comfort him."

He laughed heartily.

"I remember the circumstance well," he said. "And you were that unhappy culprit? Ha! ha! ha! To tell the truth, I have thought of it many times. It was a remarkably fine thing to do."

"What! steal the apple, Sir Giles?"

"Make the instant reparation you did."

"There was no reparation in asking you to box my ears."

"It was all you could do, though."

"To ease my own conscience, it was. There is always a satisfaction, I suppose, in suffering for your sins. But I have thought a thousand times of your kindness in shaking hands with me instead. You treated me as the angels treat the repentant sinner, Sir Giles."

"Well, I certainly never thought of it in that light," he said; then, as if wishing to change the subject,—"Don't you find it lonely now your uncle is gone?" he asked.

"I miss him more than I can tell."

"A very worthy man he was—too good for this world by all accounts."

"He's not the worse off for that now, Sir Giles, I trust."

"No; of course not," he returned quickly, with the usual shrinking from slightest allusion to what is called the other world. "Is there anything I can do for you? You are a literary man, they tell me. There are a good many books of one sort and another lying at the Hall. Some of them might be of use to you. They are at your service. I am sure you are to be trusted even with mouldy books, which from what I hear must be a greater temptation to you now than red-checked apples," he added with another merry laugh.

"I will tell you what, Sir Giles," I answered. "It has often grieved me to think of the state of your library. It would be scarcely possible for me to find a book in it now. But if you would trust me, I should be delighted, in my spare hours, of which I can command a good many, to put the whole in order for you."

"I should be under the greatest obligation I have always intended having some capable man down from London to arrange it. I am no great reader myself, but I have the highest respect for a good library. It ought never to have got into the condition in which I found it."

"The books are fast going to ruin, I fear."

"Are they indeed?" he exclaimed, with some consternation. "I was not in the least aware of that. I thought so long as I let no one meddle with them, they were safe enough."

"The law of the moth and rust holds with books as well as other unused things," I answered.

"Then, pray, my dear sir, undertake the thing at once," he said, in a tone to which the unceremoniousness of self-reproach gave a touch of importuness. "But really," he added, "it seems trespassing on your goodness much too



"To my astonishment she drew it half way."

you know how to value them."

What right had he to be glad? How did he know I valued them? How could I but value them? I rebuked my offence, however, and after a little talk about them, in which he revealed much more knowledge than I should have expected, it vanished. He then informed me of an arrangement he and Lord Ingleswold's factor had been talking over in respect of the farm; also of an offer he had had for my field. I considered both sufficiently advantageous in my circumstances, and the result was that I closed with both.

A few days after this arrangement, I returned to London, intending to remain for some time. I had a warm welcome from Charley, but could not help fancying an unacknowledged something dividing us. He appeared, notwithstanding, less oppressed, and, in a word, more like other people. I proceeded at once to finish two or three papers and stories, which late events had interrupted. But within a week London had grown to me stifling and unendurable, and I longed unspeakably for the free air of my field, and the loneliness of my small castle. If my reader regard me as already a hypochondriac, the sole disproof I have to offer is, that I was then diligently writing what some years afterwards obtained a hearty reception from the better class of the reading public. Whether my habits were healthy or not, whether my love of solitude was natural or not, I cannot but hope from this that my

should ever part me. I had no difficulty in arranging with the new tenant for her continued accommodation at the farm; while, as Herbert still managed its affairs, the services of his wife were available as often as I required them. But my man soon made himself capable of doing everything for me, and proved himself perfectly trustworthy.

I must find a name for my place—for its own I will not write; let me call it The Moat; there were signs, plain enough to me after my return from Oxford, that there had once been a moat about it, of which the hollow I have mentioned as the spot where I used to lie and watch for the sun's first rays, had evidently been a part. But the remains of the moat lay at a considerable distance from the house, suggesting a large area of building at some former period, proof of which, however, had entirely vanished, the house bearing every sign of a narrow completeness.

The work I had undertaken required a constantly recurring reference to books of the sixteenth century; and although I had provided as many as I thought I should need, I soon found them insufficient. My uncle's library was very large for a man in his position, but it was not by any means equally developed; and my necessities made me think often of the old library at the Hall, which might contain somewhere in its ruins every book I wanted. Not only, however, would it