

## THE STORY OF ELIZABETH.

BY MISS THACKERAY,

[Daughter of the Great English Novelist.]

CONTINUED.

Can't you fancy poor Sir John leaning against a pile of baggage, smoking a cigar, and looking up wistfully. As he slid past he actually caught the tone of her voice. Like a drowning man who can see in one instant years of his past life flashing before him, Sir John saw Elly—a woman with lines of care in her face,—there, standing in the light of the lamp, with the red streams of sunset beyond, and the night closing in all round about; and then he saw her as he had seen her once—a happy, unconscious girl, brightening, smiling at his coming; as the picture travelled on, a sad girl meeting him in the street by chance—a desperate, almost broken-hearted woman, looking up gravely into his face in the theatre. Puff! puff!—it was all over, she was still smiling before his eyes. One last glimpse of the two, and they had disappeared. He slipped away right out of her existence, and she did not even guess that he had been near. She stood unwitting for an instant, watching the boat as it tossed out to sea, and then said, 'Now we will go home.' A sudden gloom and depression seemed to have come over her. She walked along quite silently, and did not seem to heed the presence of her companion.

## CHAPTER V.

Before he went to bed that night Dampier wrote the end of his letter to Prue. He described, rather amusingly, the snubbing in which Sir John had received his advances, the glances of disfavor with which Aunt Jean listened to his advice. 'So this is all the gratitude one gets for interfering in the most sensible manner. If you are as ungrateful, Prue, for this immense long letter, I shall, indeed, have labored in vain. It is one o'clock. Bong! there it went from the tower. Good-night, dear; your beloved brother is going to bed. Love to Miles. Kiss the children all round for their and your affectionate W. D.'

Will Dampier was not in the least like his letter. I know two or three men who are manly enough, who write gentle, gossiping letters like women. He was a big, commonplace young man, straight-minded and tender-hearted, with immense energy, and great good spirits. He believed in himself; indeed, he tried so heartily and conscientiously to do what was right, that he could not help knowing more or less that he was a good fellow. And then he had a happy knack of seeing one side of a question, and having once determined that so and so was the thing to be done, he could do so and so without one doubt or compunction. He belonged to the school of athletic Christianity. I heard some one once say that there are some of that sect who would almost make out cock-fighting to be a religious ceremony. William Dampier did not go so far as this; but he heartily believed that nothing was done with a Christian and manly spirit. He rode across the country, he smoked pipes, he went out shooting, he played billiards and cricket, he rowed up and down the river in his boat, and he was charming with all the grumbling old men and women in his parish. He preached capital sermons—short, brisk, well-considered. He enjoyed life and all its good things with a grateful temper, and made most people happy about him.

One day, Elly began to think what a different creed Will Dampier's was from her step-father's, only she did not put her thoughts into words. It was not her way. Tourneur, with a great heart, set on the greatest truth, feeling the constant presence of those mightier dispensations, cared but little for the affairs of to-day; they seemed to him subordinate, immaterial; they lost all importance from comparison with that awful reality that this man had so vividly realized to himself. To Dampier, it was through the simple language of his daily life that he could best express what good was in him. He saw wisdom and mercy, he saw order and progression, he saw infinite variety and wonder in all natural things, in all life, at all places and hours. By looking at this world, he could best understand and adore the next.

And yet Tourneur's was the loftiest spirit: to him had come a certain knowledge and understanding, of which Dampier had scarce a conception. Dampier, who felt less keenly, could well be more liberal, more forbearing. One of these two told Elly that we were put into the world to live in it, and to be thankful for our creation; to do our duty, and to labor until the night should come when no man can work. The other said, sadly, you are born only to overcome the flesh, to crush it under foot, to turn away from all that you like most, innocent or not. What do I care? Are you an immortal spirit, or are you a clod of earth? Will you suffer that this all-wondrous, all-precious gift should be clogged, and stifled, and choked, and destroyed, may be, by despicable daily concerns? Tourneur himself set an example of what he preached by his devoted, humble, holy self-denying life. And yet Elly turned with a sense of infinite relief to the other creed; she could understand it, sympathize with it, try to do good, though to be good was beyond her frail powers. Already she was learning to be thankful, to be cheerful, to be unselfish, to be keenly penitent for her many shortcomings.

As the time drew near when answer to her note might be expected, Miss Dampier grew anxious and fidgety, dropped her stitches, looked out for the post, and wondered why no letter came. Elly was only a little silent, a little thoughtful. She used to go out by herself and take long walks. One day Will, returning from one of his own peregrinations, came upon her setting on the edge of a cliff staring at the distant coast of France. It lay blue, pale like a dream-country, and glimmered in the horizon. We would believe that there was reality, busy life in all a nest, going on beyond those calm, heavenly-looking hills! Another time his aunt sent him out to look for her, and he found her at the end of the pier, leaning against the chain, and still gazing towards France.

In his rough, friendly manner he said, 'I wish you would look another way sometimes, Miss Gilmour, up or down, or in the glass even. You make me feel very guilty, for to tell the truth I—I advised John—'

'I thought so,' Elly cried, interrupting. 'And you were quite right. I advised him, too,' she said with a smile. 'Don't you think he has taken your advice?'

Will looked down uncomfortably. 'I think so,' he said in a low tone.

And, meanwhile, Miss Dampier was sitting in the window and sunshine, knitting castles in the air.

'Suppose he does not take this as an answer? Suppose Lætitia has found somebody else, suppose the door opens and he comes in, and the sun shines into the room, and then he seizes Elly's hand, and says, 'Though you give me up I will not give up the hope of calling you mine,' and Elly glances up bright, blushing, happy. . . . Suppose Lady Dampier is furious, and dear Tishy makes peace? I should like to see Elizabeth mistress of the dear old house. I think my mother was like her. I don't approve of cousins' marriages. . . . How charming she would look coming along the old gallery.' Look at the old maid in the window building castles in the air through her spectacles. But it is a ridiculous sight; she is only a fat, foolish old woman. All her fancies are but follies flying away with caps and jingling bells—they vanish through the window as the door opens and the young people come in.

'Here is a letter for you the porter gave me in the hall,' said Will as carelessly as he could; Jean saw Elly's eyes busy glancing at the writing.

## HOTEL DU RHIN.

'MY DEAR AUNT JEAN:—Many thanks for your note, and the enclosure. My mother and Lætitia are with me, and we shall all go back to Friar's bush on Thursday. Elly's decision is the wisest under the circumstances, and we had better abide by it. Give her my love, Lætitia knows nothing, as my mother has had the grace to be silent.

'Yours affectionately, J. C. D.

'P. S.—You will be good to her, won't you?'

Miss Dampier read the note imperturbably, but while she read there seemed to run through her a cold thrill of disappointment which was so unendurable that after a minute she got up and left the room.

When she came back, Elly said with a sigh, 'Where is he?'

'At Paris,' said Miss Dampier. 'They have saved him all trouble and come to him. He sends you his love, Elly, which is very handsome of him, considering how much it is worth.'

'It has been worth a great deal to me,' said Elly, in her sweet voice. 'It is all over; but I am grateful still, and always shall be. I was very rash; he was very kind. Let me be grateful, dear Aunt Jean, to those who are good to me.' And she kissed the old woman's shrivelled hand.

Miss Gilmour cheered up wonderfully from that time. I am sure that if she had been angry with him, if she had thought herself hardly used, if she had had more of what people call self-respect, less of that sweet humility of nature it would not have been so.

As the short, happy, delightful six weeks which she was to spend with Miss Dampier came to an end, she began to use all her philosophy and good resolves to reconcile herself to going home. Will Dampier was gone. He had only been able to stay a week. They missed him. But still they managed to be very comfortable together. Tea-talk, long walks, long hours on the sands, novels and story-books, idleness and contentment—why couldn't it go on forever? Elly said. Aunt Jean laughed, and said they might as well be a couple of jelly-fish at once: And so the time went by; but one day, just before she went away, Mr. Will appeared again unexpectedly.

Elly was sitting in the sun on the beach, throwing idle stones into the sea. She had put down her novel on the shingle beside her. It was *Deerbrook*, I think—an old favorite of Jean Dampier's. Everybody knows what twelve o'clock is like on a fine day at the sea-side. It means little children, nurses in clean cotton gowns, groups of young ladies scattered here and there; it means a great cheerfulness and tranquility, a delightful glitter, and life and light; happy folks plashing in the water, bathing-dresses drying in the sun, all sorts of aches, pains, troubles, vanishing like mist in its friendly beams. Elly was thinking: 'Yes, how pleasant and nice it is, and how good, how dear Aunt Jean is! Only six months! I will try and spend them better than I ever spent six months before. Eugh! If it was not for Mme. Jacob . . . I really do love my stepfather, and could live happily enough with him.' (Splash.) Suddenly an idea came to Elly—the Pasteur Boulot was the idea. 'Why should not he marry Mme. Jacob? He admires her immensely. Ah! what fun that would be!' (Splash, splash, a couple of stones.) And then tramp, tramp, on the shingle behind her, and a cheery man's voice says, 'Here you are!'

Elly stares up in some surprise, and looks pleased, and attempts to get up, but Will Dampier—he was the man—sits down beside her, opens his umbrella and looks very odd. 'I only came down for the day,' he said, after a little preliminary talk. 'I have been with Aunt Jean; she tells me you are going home to-morrow.'

'Yes,' says Elly, with a sigh; 'but I'm to come back and see her in a little time.'

'I'm glad of that,' says the clergyman. 'What sort of place do you live in at Paris?'

'It is rather a dull place, says Elly, 'I am very fond of my stepfather; besides him, there is Anthony and five young pupils, there is an old French cook, and a cross maid, and my mother, and a horri— a sister of Monsieur Tourneur's, and Tou-Tou, and Lou-Lou, and me.'

'Why, that is quite a little colony,' said Dampier. 'And what will you do when you get back?'

'I must see,' said the girl, smiling. 'Till now I have done nothing at all; but that is stupid work. I shall teach Tou-Tou and Lou-Lou a little, and mind the house if my mother will let me, and learn to cook from Françoise. I have a notion that it may be useful some day or other.'

'Do, by all my means,' said Will; 'it is a capital idea. But as years go on, what do you mean to do? Tou-Tou and Lou-Lou will grow up, and you will have mastered the art of French cookery—'

'How can you ask such things? Elly said, looking out at the sea. 'I cannot tell, or make schemes for the future.'

'Pray forgive me,' said Will, 'for asking such a question; but have you any idea of marrying M. Anthony eventually?'

'He is a dear old fellow,' said Elly, flushing up. 'I am not going to answer any such questions. I am not half good enough for him—that is my answer.'

'But suppose—?'

'Pray don't suppose. I am not going to marry anybody, or to think about such things ever again. Do you imagine that I am not the wiser for all my experience?'

'Are you wise now?' said Will, still in his odd manner. ('Look at that pretty little fishing-smack,' Elly interrupted.) 'Show it,' he went on, never heeding, 'by curing yourself of your fancy for my cousin John; by curing yourself, and becoming some day a really useful personage and member of society.'

Elly stared at him, as well she might. 'Come back to England some day,' he continued, still looking away, 'to your home, to your best vocation in life, to be happy and useful, and well beloved,' he said, with a sweet infection in his voice; 'that is no very hard fate.'

'What are you talking about?' said Elly. 'How can I cure myself? How can I ever forget what is past? I am not going to be discontented, or to be particularly happy at home. I am going to try, to try and do my best.'

'Well, then, do your best to get cured of this hopeless nonsense,' said Mr. William Dampier, 'and turn your thoughts to real good sense, to the real business of life, and to making yourself and others happy, instead of wasting and mauling away the next few best years of your life, regretting and hankering after what is past and unattainable. For some strong minds, who can defy the world, and stand alone without the need of sympathy and sustenance, it is a fine thing to be faithful to a chimera,' he said with a pathetic ring in his voice. 'But, I assure you, infidelity is better still sometimes, more human, more natural, particularly for a confiding and uncertain person like yourself.'

Was he thinking of to-day as he spoke? Was he only thinking of Elly, and preaching only to her?

'You mean I had better marry him?' said Elly, while her eyes filled up with tears, and she knocked one stone against another. 'And yet Aunt Jean says "No!"—that I need not think of it. It seems to me as if I—I had rather jump into the sea at once,' said the girl, dashing the stones away, 'though I love him dearly, dearly, dear old fellow!'

'I did not exactly mean M. Anthony,' said Will, looking round for the first time, and smiling at her tears and his own talk.

Elizabeth was puzzled still. For, in truth, her sad experience had taught her to put but little faith in kindness and implications of kindness—to attach little meaning to the good-nature and admiration a beautiful young woman was certain to meet with on every side. It had not occurred to her that Will, who had done so little, seen her so few times, could be in love with her; when John, for whom she would have died, who said and looked so much, had only been playing with her, and pitying her as if she had been a child; and she said, still with tears, but not caring much—

'I shall never give a different answer. I believe you are right, but I have not the courage to try. I think I could try and be good if I stay as I am; but to be bound and chained to Anthony all the rest of my life—once I thought it possible; but now— You who advise it do not know what it is!'

'But I never advised it,' Will said; you won't understand me. Dear Elizabeth, why won't you see that is of myself that I am speaking?'

Elly felt for moment as if the sea had rushed up suddenly and caught her away on its billows, and then the next moment she found that she was only sitting crying in the sun, on the sands.

'Look here: every day I live, I get worse and worse,' she sobbed. 'I flirt with one person after another—I don't deserve that you should ever speak to me again—I can't try and talk about myself—I do like you, and—and yet I know that the only person I care for really is the one who does not care for me; and if I married you to-morrow, and I saw John coming along the street I should rush away to meet him. I don't want to marry him, and I don't know what I want. But, indeed, I have tried to be good. You are stronger than me, don't be hard upon me.'

'My dear little girl,' said Will, loyally and kindly, 'don't be unhappy, you have not flirted with me. I couldn't be hard upon you if I tried: you are a faithful little soul. Shall I tell you about myself? Once not so very long ago, I liked Tishy almost as well as you like John. There, now, you see that you have done no great harm, and only helped to cheer me up again, and I am sure that you and I will be just as good friends as ever. As for John,' he added, in quite a different tone, 'the sooner you forget all about him the better.'

Will took her hand, which was lying limp on the shingle, said 'Good-by,' took up his umbrella, and walked away.

And so, by some strange arrangement, Elly put away from her a second time the love of a good and honorable man, and turned back impotently to the memory—it was no more—of a dead and buried passion. Was this madness or wisdom? Was this the decree of fate or of folly?

She sat all in a maze, staring at the sea and the wavelets, and in half an hour rushed into the sitting-room, flung her arms round Miss Dampier's neck, and told her all that had happened.

Elly expected, she did not know why, that there would be some great difference when she got back to the old house at Paris. Her heart sank as Clementine, looking just as usual, opened the great door, and stepped forward to help with the box. She went into the courtyard. Those cocks and hens were pecking between the stones, the poplar-trees shivering, Françoise in her blue gown came out of the kitchen: it was like one of the dreams which used to haunt her pillow. This sameness and monotony was terrible. Already in one minute it seemed to her that she had never been away. Her mother and father were out. Mme. Jacob came down stairs with the children to greet her and see her. Ah! they had got new frocks, and were grown—that was some relief. Tou-Tou and Lou-Lou were not more delighted with their little check black-and-white alpaca than Elly was.

TO BE CONTINUED.

Sir Charles Lyell has been elected President of the British Association. His last work on the antiquity of man has produced a profound sensation, but it is understood he has by no means succeeded in carrying the learned world generally with him.