

Robert Rowe and Sophy Flaxman were two of the most determined foes on the green. Sophy Flaxman was a fat, fair, blue-eyed, little vixen of thirteen, when her parents first came to live on the green. They were considered very respectable persons in their degree, and made a great deal of money by rearing and fattening poultry for market, and selling eggs. Sophy was chiefly employed in attending to this department, and every fine day was to be seen sitting on a little turf hillock, which she called her throne, surrounded by a numerous family of dependents, hens, turkeys, ducks, and goslings—that is, I should say, whenever she was sufficiently early in the field to obtain possession of this favorite eminence, which was an object of contention among several of the children; and Sophy having neither brothers nor cousins to championise her, was often driven from her position by the uncivilised natives of the soil, who regarded her as a stranger and interloper on the green. Sophy was better dressed and better mannered than any of her juvenile neighbours, and she evidently cherished ideas of her own superiority that gave universal offence. Her mother, when she first sent her forth on her daily vocation, strictly charged her “to form no acquaintances, much less intimacies, among them, but to take her knitting and her book in her bag, and keep herself to herself.”

This was prudent advice, but its observance rendered the damsel very unpopular on the green, and was the means of exposing her to a variety of annoyances from the other young people, but more especially from Robert Rowe, a sturdy sunburned imp, remarkable for his roguish black eyes and ragged gaberdine, who, more out of mischief than malice perhaps, took great delight in teasing Sophy, and disarranging all her plans for the day. Robert was the eldest of a family of eight brothers and sisters, all as rude and ragged as himself. His parents had neither cow, pig, nor poultry. They were indifferent managers, as many of the peasantry are, and for want of a little prudence and forethought lost the advantage of improving their means by availing themselves of the free keep which Bird’s-eye Green afforded for live stock of various kinds. Threepence a-week, scrupulously set aside

for half a year, would have purchased a pig, and this pig, if a young sow, would, in the course of two years, have brought a most profitable increase; but the family of the Rowes were short-sighted people, who never provided for the future.

Robert Rowe, their first-born son, was the hired keeper of a whole herd of swine belonging to a substantial farmer on the green, and with these the youthful hog-herd lived on terms of almost brotherly affection and intimacy, and, greatly to Sophy Flaxman’s indignation, he daily led them to the spot which it was her pleasure to occupy, for the pleasure of putting her and her feathered followers to the rout.

Sophy did not put up with this injurious treatment tamely. She had vituperated Robert and his master’s pigs by every term of contemptuous meaning which might be permitted to pass lips feminine, and, seconded by a pair of very potent allies, the gander and the turkey-cock, she had defended her position with the intrepidity of a Thracian amazon, and sometimes worsted her antagonists. As for Robert’s occasional overtures for a cessation of hostilities on terms of peace and good-will, she always rejected them with the most unqualified expressions of scorn. “His enmity might be endured,” she said, or as much as said, “but his friendship was inadmissible.”

Robert attributed this lofty language to pride, and redoubled his persecutions with the view of rendering himself a person of greater importance in her sight. Sophy would have proved a match in her retaliations for any of the provocations with which her rustic foe assailed her, but, unfortunately, her friend the turkey-cock came in for a mortal injury in one of these diurnal encounters; and the luckless damsel, after the loss of this auxiliary, could no longer maintain her ground against Robert and his grunting attendants, who were daily becoming more formidable: so she now deemed it most prudent, after suffering a complete defeat in two or three pitched battles, to retire from the contested spot whenever Robert Rowe and his master’s herd made an advance. This she did, however, with the most unequivocal gestures of disdain, commencing with one of those silent but expressive declarations of hostility and contempt,