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[NOTE: There is a short list of bookmarks, or pointers, at the end of the
file for those who may wish to sample the author's ideas before making an

entire meal of them. D.W.]

THE TRESPASSER

By Gilbert Parker

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INTRODUCTION

While I was studying the life of French Canada in the winter of 1892, in the city of Quebec or in secluded parishes, there was forwarded to me from my London home a letter from Mr. Arrowsmith, the publisher, asking me to write a novel of fifty thousand or sixty thousand words for what was called his Annual. In this Annual had appeared Hugh Conway's 'Called Back' and Anthony Hope's 'Prisoner of Zenda', among other celebrated works of fiction. I cabled my acceptance of the excellent offer made me, and the summer of 1893 found me at Audierne, in Brittany, with some artist friends--more than one of whom has since come to eminence--living what was really an out-door literary life; for the greater part of 'The Trespasser' was written in a high-walled garden on a gentle hill, and the remainder in a little tower-like structure of the villa where I lodged,

which was all windows. The latter I only used when it rained, and the garden was my workshop. There were peaches and figs on the walls, pleasant shrubs surrounded me, and the place was ideally quiet and serene. Coffee or tea and toast was served me at 6.30 o'clock A.M., my pad was on my knee at 8, and then there was practically uninterrupted work till 12, when 'dejeuner a la fourchette', with its fresh sardines, its omelettes, and its roast chicken, was welcome. The afternoon was spent on the sea-shore, which is very beautiful at Audierne, and there I watched my friends painting sea-scapes. In the late afternoon came letter-writing and reading, and after a little and simple dinner at 6.30 came bed at 9.45 or thereabouts. In such conditions for many weeks I worked on *The Trespasser*; and I think the book has an outdoor spirit which such a life would inspire.

It was perhaps natural that, having lived in Canada and Australia, and having travelled greatly in all the outer portions of the Empire, I should be interested in and impelled to write regarding the impingement of the outer life of our far dominions, through individual character, upon the complicated, traditional, orderly life of England. That feeling found expression in *The Translation of a Savage*, and I think that in neither case the issue of the plot or the plot--if such it may be called--nor the main incident, was exaggerated. Whether the treatment was free from exaggeration, it is not my province to say. I only know what I attempted to do. The sense produced by the contact of the outer life with a refined, and perhaps overrefined, and sensitive, not to say meticulous, civilisation, is always more sensational than the touch of the representative of "the thousand years" with the wide, loosely organised free life of what is still somewhat hesitatingly called the Colonies, though the same remark could be applied to all new lands, such as the United States. The representative of the older life makes no signs, or makes little collision at any rate, when he touches the new social organisms of the outer circle. He is not emphatic; he is typical, but not individual; he seeks seclusion in the mass. It is not so with the more dynamic personality of the over-sea citizen. For a time at least he remains in the old civilisation an entity, an isolated, unabsorbed fact which has capacities for explosion. All this was in my mind when *The Trespasser* was written, and its converse was 'The Pomp of the Lavillettes', which showed the invasion of the life of the outer land by the representative of the old civilisation.

I do not know whether I had the thought that the treatment of such themes was interesting or not. The idea of *The Trespasser* was there in my mind, and I had to use it. At the beginning of one's career, if one were to calculate too carefully, impulse, momentum, daring, original conception would be lost. To be too audacious, even to exaggerate, is no crime in youth nor in the young artist. As a farmer once said to me regarding a frisky mount, it is better to smash through the top bar than to have spring-halt.

The Trespasser took its place, and, as I think, its natural place, in the development of my literary life. I did not stop to think whether it was a happy theme or not, or whether it had popular elements. These things did not concern me. When it was written I should not have known what was

a popular theme. It was written under circumstances conducive to its artistic welfare; if it has not as many friends as 'The Right of Way' or 'The Seats of the Mighty' or 'The Weavers' or 'The Judgment House', that is not the fault of the public or of the critics.

TO DOUGLAS ROBINSON, Esq.,

AND

FRANK A. HILTON, Esq.

My dear Douglas and Frank:

I feel sure that this dedication will give you as much pleasure as it does me. It will at least be evidence that I do not forget good days in your company here and there in the world. I take pleasure in linking your names; for you, who have never met, meet thus in the porch of a little house that I have built.

You, my dear Douglas, will find herein scenes, times, and things familiar to you; and you, my dear Frank, reflections of hours when we camped by an idle shore, or drew about the fire of winter nights, and told tales worth more than this, for they were of the future, and it is of the past.

Always sincerely yours,
GILBERT PARKER.

THE TRESPASSER

CHAPTER I

ONE IN SEARCH OF A KINGDOM

Why Gaston Belward left the wholesome North to journey afar, Jacques Brillon asked often in the brawling streets of New York, and oftener in the fog of London as they made ready to ride to Ridley Court. There was a railway station two miles from the Court, but Belward had had enough of railways. He had brought his own horse Saracen, and Jacques's broncho also, at foolish expense, across the sea, and at a hotel near Euston Station master and man mounted and set forth, having seen their worldly goods bestowed by staring porters, to go on by rail.

In murky London they attracted little notice; but when their hired guide left them at the outskirts, and they got away upon the highway towards the Court, cottagers stood gaping. For, outside the town there was no fog, and the fresh autumn air drew the people abroad.

"What is it makes 'em stare, Jacques?" asked Belward, with a humorous sidelong glance.

Jacques looked seriously at the bright pommel of his master's saddle and the shining stirrups and spurs, dug a heel into the tender skin of his broncho, and replied:

"Too much silver all at once."

He tossed his curling black hair, showing up the gold rings in his ears, and flicked the red-and-gold tassels of his boots.

"You think that's it, eh?" rejoined Belward, as he tossed a shilling to a beggar.

"Maybe, too, your great Saracen to this tot of a broncho, and the grand homme to little Jacques Brillon." Jacques was tired and testy.

The other laid his whip softly on the half-breed's shoulder.

"See, my peacock: none of that. You're a spanking good servant, but you're in a country where it's knuckle down man to master; and what they do here you've got to do, or quit--go back to your pea-soup and caribou. That's as true as God's in heaven, little Brillon. We're not on the buffalo trail now. You understand?"

Jacques nodded.

"Hadn't you better say it?"

The warning voice drew up the half-breed's face swiftly, and he replied:

"I am to do what you please."

"Exactly. You've been with me six years--ever since I turned Bear Eye's moccasins to the sun; and for that you swore you'd never leave me. Did it on a string of holy beads, didn't you, Frenchman?"

"I do it again."

He drew out a rosary, and disregarding Belward's outstretched hand, said:

"By the Mother of God, I will never leave you!" There was a kind of wondering triumph in Belward's eyes, though he had at first shrunk from Jacques's action, and a puzzling smile came.

"Wherever I go, or whatever I do?"

"Whatever you do, or wherever you go."

He put the rosary to his lips, and made the sign of the cross.

His master looked at him curiously, intently. Here was a vain, naturally

indolent half-breed, whose life had made for selfishness and independence, giving his neck willingly to a man's heel, serving with blind reverence, under a voluntary vow.

"Well, it's like this, Jacques," Belward said presently; "I want you, and I'm not going to say that you'll have a better time than you did in the North, or on the Slope; but if you'd rather be with me than not, you'll find that I'll interest you. There's a bond between us, anyway. You're half French, and I'm one-fourth French, and more. You're half Indian, and I'm one-fourth Indian--no more. That's enough. So far, I haven't much advantage. But I'm one-half English--King's English, for there's been an offshoot of royalty in our family somewhere, and there's the royal difference. That's where I get my brains--and manners."

"Where did you get the other?" asked Jacques, shyly, almost furtively.

"Money?"

"Not money--the other."

Belward spurred, and his horse sprang away viciously. A laugh came back on Jacques, who followed as hard as he could, and it gave him a feeling of awe. They were apart for a long time, then came together again, and rode for miles without a word. At last Belward, glancing at a sign-post before an inn door, exclaimed at the legend--"The Whisk o' Barley,"--and drew rein. He regarded the place curiously for a minute. The landlord came out. Belward had some beer brought.

A half-dozen rustics stood gaping, not far away. He touched his horse with a heel. Saracen sprang towards them, and they fell back alarmed. Belward now drank his beer quietly, and asked question after question of the landlord, sometimes waiting for an answer, sometimes not--a kind of cross-examination. Presently he dismounted.

As he stood questioning, chiefly about Ridley Court and its people, a coach showed on the hill, and came dashing down and past. He lifted his eyes idly, though never before had he seen such a coach as swings away from Northumberland Avenue of a morning. He was not idle, however; but he had not come to England to show surprise at anything. As the coach passed his face lifted above the arm on the neck of the horse, keen, dark, strange. A man on the box-seat, attracted at first by the uncommon horses and their trappings, caught Belward's eyes. Not he alone, but Belward started then. Some vague intelligence moved the minds of both, and their attention was fixed till the coach rounded a corner and was gone.

The landlord was at Belward's elbow.

"The gentleman on the box-seat be from Ridley Court. That's Maister Ian Belward, sir."

Gaston Belward's eyes half closed, and a sombre look came, giving his face a handsome malice. He wound his fingers in his horse's mane, and

put a foot in the stirrup.

"Who is 'Maister Ian'?"

"Maister Ian be Sir William's eldest, sir. On'y one that's left, sir. On'y three to start wi': and one be killed i' battle, and one had trouble wi' his faither and Maister Ian; and he went away and never was heard on again, sir. That's the end on him."

"Oh, that's the end on him, eh, landlord? And how long ago was that?"

"Becky, lass," called the landlord within the door, "wheniver was it Maister Robert turned his back on the Court--iver so while ago? Eh, a fine lad that Maister Robert as iver I see!"

Fat laborious Becky hobbled out, holding an apple and a knife. She blinked at her husband, and then at the strangers.

"What be askin' o' the Court?" she said. Her husband repeated the question.

She gathered her apron to her eyes with an unctuous sob:

"Doan't a' know when Maister Robert went! He comes, i' the house 'ere and says, 'Becky, gie us a taste o' the red-top-and where's Jock?' He was always thinkin' a deal o' my son Jock. 'Jock be gone,' I says, 'and I knows nowt o' his comin' back'--meanin', I was, that day. 'Good for Jock!' says he, 'and I'm goin' too, Becky, and I knows nowt o' my comin' back.' 'Where be goin', Maister Robert?' I says. 'To hell, Becky,' says he, and he laughs. 'From hell to hell. I'm sick to my teeth o' one, I'll try t'other'--a way like that speaks he."

Belward was impatient, and to hurry the story he made as if to start on. Becky, seeing, hastened. "Dear a' dear! The red-top were afore him, and I tryin' to make what become to him. He throws arm 'round me, smacks me on the cheek, and says he: 'Tell Jock to keep the mare, Becky.' Then he flings away, and never more comes back to the Court. And that day one year my Jock smacks me on the cheek, and gets on the mare; and when I ask: 'Where be goin'?' he says: 'For a hunt i' hell wi' Maister Robert, mother.' And from that day come back he never did, nor any word. There was trouble wi' the lad-wi' him and Maister Robert at the Court; but I never knowed nowt o' the truth. And it's seven-and-twenty years since Maister Robert went."

Gaston leaned over his horse's neck, and thrust a piece of silver into the woman's hands.

"Take that, Becky Lawson, and mop your eyes no more."

She gaped.

"How dost know my name is Becky Lawson? I havena been ca'd so these three-and-twenty years--not since a' married good man here, and put

Jock's father in 's grave yander."

"The devil told me," he answered, with a strange laugh, and, spurring, they were quickly out of sight. They rode for a couple of miles without speaking. Jacques knew his master, and did not break the silence. Presently they came over a hill, and down upon a little bridge. Belward drew rein, and looked up the valley. About two miles beyond the roofs and turrets of the Court showed above the trees. A whimsical smile came to his lips.

"Brillon," he said, "I'm in sight of home."

The half-breed cocked his head. It was the first time that Belward had called him "Brillon"--he had ever been "Jacques." This was to be a part of the new life. They were not now hunting elk, riding to "wipe out" a camp of Indians or navvies, dining the owner of a rancho or a deputation from a prairie constituency in search of a member, nor yet with a senator at Washington, who served tea with canvas-back duck and tooth-picks with dessert. Once before had Jacques seen this new manner--when Belward visited Parliament House at Ottawa, and was presented to some notable English people, visitors to Canada. It had come to these notable folk that Mr. Gaston Belward had relations at Ridley Court, and that of itself was enough to command courtesy. But presently, they who would be gracious for the family's sake, were gracious for the man's. He had that which compelled interest--a suggestive, personal, distinguished air. Jacques knew his master better than any one else knew him; and yet he knew little, for Belward was of those who seem to give much confidence, and yet give little--never more than he wished.

"Yes, monsieur, in sight of home," Jacques replied, with a dry cadence.

"Say 'sir,' not 'monsieur,' Brillon; and from the time we enter the Court yonder, look every day and every hour as you did when the judge asked you who killed Tom Daly."

Jacques winced, but nodded his head. Belward continued:

"What you hear me tell is what you can speak of; otherwise you are blind and dumb. You understand?" Jacques's face was sombre, but he said quickly: "Yes--sir."

He straightened himself on his horse, as if to put himself into discipline at once--as lead to the back of a racer.

Belward read the look. He drew his horse close up. Then he ran an arm over the other's shoulder.

"See here, Jacques. This is a game that's got to be played up to the hilt. A cat has nine lives, and most men have two. We have. Now listen. You never knew me mess things, did you? Well, I play for keeps in this; no monkeying. I've had the life of Ur of the Chaldees; now for Babylon. I've lodged with the barbarian; here are the roofs of ivory. I've had my day with my mother's people; voila! for my father's. You

heard what Becky Lawson said. My father was sick of it at twenty-five, and got out. We'll see what my father's son will do. . . . I'm going to say my say to you, and have done with it. As like as not there isn't another man that I'd have brought with me. You're all right. But I'm not going to rub noses. I stick when I do stick, but I know what's got to be done here; and I've told you. You'll not have the fun out of it that I will, but you won't have the worry. Now, we start fresh. I'm to be obeyed; I'm Napoleon. I've got a devil, yet it needn't hurt you, and it won't. But if I make enemies here--and I'm sure to--let them look out. Give me your hand, Jacques; and don't you forget that there are two Gaston Belwards, and the one you have hunted and lived with is the one you want to remember when you get raw with the new one. For you'll hear no more slang like this from me, and you'll have to get used to lots of things."

Without waiting reply, Belward urged on his horse, and at last paused on the top of a hill, and waited for Jacques. It was now dusk, and the landscape showed soft, sleepy, and warm.

"It's all of a piece," Belward said to himself, glancing from the trim hedges, the small, perfectly-tilled fields and the smooth roads, to Ridley Court itself, where many lights were burning and gates opening and shutting. There was some affair on at the Court, and he smiled to think of his own appearance among the guests.

"It's a pity I haven't clothes with me, Brillon; they have a show going there."

He had dropped again into the new form of master and man. His voice was cadenced, gentlemanly. Jacques pointed to his own saddle-bag.

"No, no, they are not the things needed. I want the evening-dress which cost that cool hundred dollars in New York."

Still Jacques was silent. He did not know whether, in his new position, he was expected to suggest. Belward understood, and it pleased him.

"If we had lost the track of a buck moose, or were nosing a cache of furs, you'd find a way, Brillon."

"Voila," said Jacques; "then, why not wear the buckskin vest, the red-silk sash, and the boots like these?"--tapping his own leathers. "You look a grand seigneur so."

"But I am here to look an English gentleman, not a grand seigneur, nor a company's trader on a break. Never mind, the thing will wait till we stand in my ancestral halls," he added, with a dry laugh.

They neared the Court. The village church was close by the Court-wall. It drew Belward's attention. One by one lights were springing up in it. It was a Friday evening, and the choir were come to practise. They saw buxom village girls stroll in, followed by the organist, one or two young men and a handful of boys. Presently the horsemen were seen, and a

staring group gathered at the church door. An idea came to Belward.

"Kings used to make pilgrimages before they took their crowns, why shouldn't I?" he said half-jestingly. Most men placed similarly would have been so engaged with the main event that they had never thought of this other. But Belward was not excited. He was moving deliberately, prepared for every situation. He had a great game in hand, and he had no fear of his ability to play it. He suddenly stopped his horse, and threw the bridle to Jacques, saying:

"I'll be back directly, Brillon."

He entered the churchyard, and passed to the door. As he came the group under the crumbling arch fell back, and at the call of the organist went to the chancel. Belward came slowly up the aisle, and paused about the middle. Something in the scene gave him a new sensation. The church was old, dilapidated; but the timbered roof, the Norman and Early English arches incongruously side by side, with patches of ancient distemper and paintings, and, more than all, the marble figures on the tombs, with hands folded so foolishly,--yet impressively too, brought him up with a quick throb of the heart. It was his first real contact with England; for he had not seen London, save at Euston Station and in the north-west district. But here he was in touch with his heritage. He rested his hand upon a tomb beside him, and looked around slowly.

The choir began the psalm for the following Sunday. At first he did not listen; but presently the organist was heard alone, and then the choir afterwards sang:

"Woe is me, that I am constrained to dwell with Mesech:
And to have my habitation among the tents of Kedar."

Simple, dusty, ancient church, thick with effigies and tombs; with inscriptions upon pillars to virgins departed this life; and tablets telling of gentlemen gone from great parochial virtues: it wakened in Belward's brain a fresh conception of the life he was about to live--he did not doubt that he would live it. He would not think of himself as unacceptable to old Sir William Belward. He glanced to the tomb under his hand. There was enough daylight yet to see the inscription on the marble. Besides, a single candle was burning just over his head. He stooped and read:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY
OF
SIR GASTON ROBERT BELWARD, BART.,
OF RIDLEY COURT, IN THIS PARISH OF GASTONBURY,
WHO,
AT THE AGE OF ONE AND FIFTY YEARS,
AFTER A LIFE OF DISTINGUISHED SERVICE FOR HIS KING
AND COUNTRY,
AND GRAVE AND CONSTANT CARE OF THOSE EXALTED WORKS
WHICH BECAME A GENTLEMAN OF ENGLAND;
MOST NOTABLE FOR HIS LOVE OF ARTS AND LETTERS;

SENSIBLE IN ALL GRACES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS;
GIFTED WITH SINGULAR VIRTUES AND INTELLECTS;
AND
DELIGHTING AS MUCH IN THE JOYS OF PEACE
AS IN THE HEAVY DUTIES OF WAR:
WAS SLAIN BY THE SIDE OF HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS,
THE BELOVED AND ILLUSTRIOUS PRINCE RUPERT,
AT THE BATTLE OF NASEBY,
IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD MDCXLV.

"A Sojourner as all my Fathers were."

"Gaston Robert Belward!"

He read the name over and over, his fingers tracing the letters.

His first glance at the recumbent figure had been hasty. Now, however, he leaned over and examined it. It lay, hands folded, in the dress of Prince Rupert's cavaliers, a sword at side, and great spurs laid beside the heels.

"Gaston Robert Belward!"

As this other Gaston Robert Belward looked at the image of his dead ancestor, a wild thought came: Had he himself not fought with Prince Rupert? Was he not looking at himself in stone? Was he not here to show England how a knight of Charles's time would look upon the life of the Victorian age? Would not this still cold Gaston be as strange at Ridley Court as himself fresh from tightening a cinch on the belly of a broncho? Would he not ride from where he had been sojourning as much a stranger in his England as himself?

For a moment the idea possessed him. He was Sir Gaston Robert Belward, Baronet. He remembered now how, at Prince Rupert's side, he had sped on after Ireton's horse, cutting down Roundheads as he passed, on and on, mad with conquest, yet wondering that Rupert kept so long in pursuit while Charles was in danger with Cromwell: how, as the word came to wheel back, a shot tore away the pommel of his saddle; then another, and another, and with a sharp twinge in his neck he fell from his horse. He remembered how he raised himself on his arm and shouted "God save the King!" How he loosed his scarf and stanchd the blood at his neck, then fell back into a whirring silence, from which he was roused by feeling himself in strong arms, and hearing a voice say: "Courage, Gaston." Then came the distant, very distant, thud of hoofs, and he fell asleep; and memory was done.

He stood for a moment oblivious to everything: the evening bird fluttering among the rafters, the song of the nightingale without, the sighing wind in the tower entry, the rustics in the doorway, the group in the choir. Presently he became conscious of the words sung:

"A thousand ages in Thy sight
Are like an evening gone;

Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.

"Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly, forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day."

He was himself again in an instant. He had been in a kind of dream. It seemed a long time since he had entered the church--in reality but a few moments. He caught his moustache in his fingers, and turned on his heel with a musing smile. His spurs clinked as he went down the aisle; and, involuntarily, he tapped a boot-leg with his riding-whip. The singing ceased. His spurs made the only sound. The rustics at the door fell back before him. He had to go up three steps to reach the threshold. As he stood on the top one he paused and turned round.

So, this was home: this church more so even than the Court hard by. Here his ancestors--for how long he did not know, probably since the time of Edward III--idled time away in the dust; here Gaston Belward had been sleeping in effigy since Naseby Field. A romantic light came into his face. Again, why not? Even in the Hudson's Bay country and in the Rocky Mountains, he had been called, "Tivi, The Man of the Other." He had been counted the greatest of Medicine Men--one of the Race: the people of the Pole, who lived in a pleasant land, gifted as none others of the race of men. Not an hour before Jacques had asked him where he got "the other." No man can live in the North for any time without getting the strain of its mystery and romance in him. Gaston waved his hand to the tomb, and said half-believingly:

"Gaston Robert Belward, come again to your kingdom."

He turned to go out, and faced the rector of the parish,--a bent, benign-looking man,--who gazed at him astonished. He had heard the strange speech. His grave eyes rested on the stalwart stranger with courteous inquiry. Gaston knew who it was. Over his left brow there was a scar. He had heard of that scar before. When the venerable Archdeacon Varcoe was tutor to Ian and Robert Belward, Ian, in a fit of anger, had thrown a stick at his brother. It had struck the clergyman, leaving a scar.

Gaston now raised his hat. As he passed, the rector looked after him, puzzled; the words he had heard addressed to the effigy returning. His eyes followed the young man to the gate, and presently, with a quick lifting of the shoulders, he said:

"Robert Belward!" Then added: "Impossible! But he is a Belward."

He saw Gaston mount, then entered and went slowly up the aisle. He paused beside the tomb of that other Belward. His wrinkled hand rested on it.

"That is it," he said at last. "He is like the picture of this Sir Gaston. Strange."

He sighed, and unconsciously touched the scar on his brow. His dealings with the Belwards had not been all joy. Begun with youthful pride and affectionate interest, they had gone on into vexation, sorrow, failure, and shame. While Gaston was riding into his kingdom, Lionel Henry Varcoe was thinking how poor his life had been where he had meant it to be useful. As he stood musing and listening to the music of the choir, a girl came softly up the aisle, and touched him on the arm.

"Grandfather, dear," she said, "aren't you going to the Court? You have a standing invitation for this night in the week. You have not been there for so long."

He fondled the hand on his arm.

"My dearest, they have not asked me for a long time."

"But why not to-night? I have laid out everything nicely for you--your new gaiters, and your D. C. L. coat with the pretty buttons and cord."

"How can I leave you, my dear? And they do not ask you!"

The voice tried for playfulness, but the eyes had a disturbed look.

"Me? Oh! they never ask me to dinner--you know that. Tea and formal visits are enough for Lady Belward, and almost too much for me. There is yet time to dress. Do say you will go. I want you to be friendly with them."

The old man shook his head.

"I do not care to leave you, my dearest."

"Foolish old fatherkins! Who would carry me off?--'Nobody, no, not I, nobody cares for me.'" Suddenly a new look shot up in her face.

"Did you see that singular handsome man who came from the church--like some one out of an old painting? Not that his dress was so strange; but there was something in his face--something that you would expect to find in--in a Garibaldi. Silly, am I not? Did you see him?"

He looked at her gravely.

"My dear," he said at last, "I think I will go after all, though I shall be a little late."

"A sensible grandfather. Come quickly, dear." He paused again.

"But I fear I sent a note to say I could not dine."

"No, you did not. It has been lying on your table for two days."

"Dear me--dear me! I am getting very old."

They passed out of the church. Presently, as they hurried to the rectory near by, the girl said:

"But you haven't answered. Did you see the stranger? Do you know who he is?"

The rector turned, and pointed to the gate of Ridley Court. Gaston and Brillon were just entering. "Alice," he said, in a vague, half-troubled way, "the man is a Belward, I think."

"Why, of course!" the girl replied with a flash of excitement. "But he's so dark, and foreign-looking! What Belward is he?"

"I do not know yet, my dear."

"I shall be up when you come back. But mind, don't leave just after dinner. Stay and talk; you must tell me everything that's said and done --and about the stranger."

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH HE CLAIMS HIS OWN

Meanwhile, without a word, Gaston had mounted, ridden to the castle, and passed through the open gates into the court-yard. Inside he paused. In the main building many lights were burning. There came a rattle of wheels behind him, and he shifted to let a carriage pass. Through the window of the brougham he could see the shimmer of satin, lace, and soft white fur, and he had an instant's glance of a pretty face.

The carriage drew up to the steps, and presently three ladies and a brusque gentleman passed into the hall-way, admitted by powdered footmen. The incident had a manner, an air, which struck Gaston, he knew not why. Perhaps it was the easy finesse of ceremonial. He looked at Brillon. He had seen him sit arms folded like that, looking from the top of a bluff down on an Indian village or a herd of buffaloes. There was wonder, but no shyness or agitation, on his face; rather the naive, naked look of a child. Belward laughed.

"Come, Brillon; we are at home."

He rode up to the steps, Jacques following. A foot man appeared and stared. Gaston looked down on him neutrally, and dismounted. Jacques did the same. The footman still stared. Another appeared behind. Gaston eyed the puzzled servant calmly.

"Why don't you call a groom?" he presently said. There was a cold gleam in his eye.

The footman shrank.

"Yessir, yessir," he said confusedly, and signalled. The other footman came down, and made as if to take the bridle. Gaston waved him back. None too soon, for the horse lunged at him.

"A rub down, a pint of beer, and water and feed in an hour, and I'll come to see him myself late to-night." Jacques had loosened the saddle-bags and taken them off. Gaston spoke to the horse, patted his neck, and gave him to the groom. Then he went up the steps, followed by Jacques. He turned at the door to see the groom leading both horses off, and eyeing Saracen suspiciously. He laughed noiselessly.

"Saracen 'll teach him things," he said. "I might warn him, but it's best for the horses to make their own impressions."

"What name, sir?" asked a footman.

"You are--?"

"Falby, Sir."

"Falby, look after my man Brillon here, and take me to Sir William."

"What name, sir?"

Gaston, as if with sudden thought, stepped into the light of the candles, and said in a low voice: "Falby, don't you know me?"

The footman turned a little pale, as his eyes, in spite of themselves, clung to Gaston's. A kind of fright came, and then they steadied.

"Oh yes, sir," he said mechanically.

"Where have you seen me?"

"In the picture on the wall, sir."

"Whose picture, Falby?"

"Sir Gaston Belward, Sir."

A smile lurked at the corners of Gaston's mouth.

"Gaston Belward. Very well, then you know what to say to Sir William. Show me into the library."

"Or the justices' room, sir?"

"The justices' room will do."

Gaston wondered what the justices' room was. A moment after he stood in it, and the dazed Falby had gone, trying vainly to reconcile the picture

on the wall, which, now that he could think, he knew was very old, with this strange man who had sent a curious cold shiver through him. But, anyhow, he was a Belward, that was certain: voice, face, manner showed it. But with something like no Belward he had ever seen. Left to himself, Gaston looked round on a large, severe room. Its use dawned on him. This was part of the life: Sir William was a Justice of the Peace. But why had he been brought here? Why not to the library as himself had suggested? There would be some awkward hours for Falby in the future. Gaston had as winning a smile, as sweet a manner, as any one in the world, so long as a straight game was on; but to cross his will with the other--he had been too long a power in that wild country where his father had also been a power! He did not quite know how long he waited, for he was busy with plans as to his career at Ridley Court. He was roused at last by Falby's entrance. A keen, cold look shot from under his straight brows.

"Well?" he asked.

"Will you step into the library, sir? Sir William will see you there."

Falby tried to avoid his look, but his eyes were compelled, and Gaston said:

"Falby, you will always hate to enter this room." Falby was agitated.

"I hope not, sir."

"But you will, Falby, unless--"

"Yessir?"

"Unless you are both the serpent and the dove, Falby."

"Yessir."

As they entered the hall, Brillon with the saddle-bags was being taken in charge, and Gaston saw what a strange figure he looked beside the other servants and in these fine surroundings. He could not think that himself was so bizarre. Nor was he. But he looked unusual; as one of high civilisation might, through long absence in primitive countries, return in uncommon clothing, and with a manner of distinguished strangeness: the barbaric to protect the refined, as one has seen a bush of firs set to shelter a wheat-field from a seawind, or a wind-mill water cunningly-begotten flowers.

As he went through the hall other visitors were entering. They passed him, making for the staircase. Ladies with the grand air looked at him curiously, and two girls glanced shyly from the jingling spurs and tasselled boots to his rare face.

One of the ladies suddenly gave a little gasping cry, and catching the arm of her companion, said:

"Reine, how like Robert Belward! Who--who is he?"

The other coolly put up her pince-nez. She caught Gaston's profile and the turn of his shoulder.

"Yes, like, Sophie; but Robert never had such a back, nor anything like the face."

She spoke with no attempt to modulate her voice, and it carried distinctly to Gaston. He turned and glanced at them.

"He's a Belward, certainly, but like what one I don't know; and he's terribly eccentric, my dear! Did you see the boots and the sash? Why, bless me, if you are not shaking! Don't be silly--shivering at the thought of Robert Belward after all these years."

So saying, Mrs. Warren Gasgoyne tapped Lady Dargan on the arm, and then turned sharply to see if her daughters had been listening. She saw that they had; and though herself and not her sister was to blame, she said:

"Sophie, you are very indiscreet! If you had daughters of your own, you would probably be more careful--though Heaven only knows, for you were always difficult!"

With this they vanished up the staircase, Mrs. Gasgoyne's daughters, Delia and Agatha, smiling at each other and whispering about Gaston.

Meanwhile the seeker after a kingdom was shown into Sir William Belward's study. No one was there. He walked to the mantelpiece, and, leaning his arm on it, looked round. Directly in front of him on the wall was the picture of a lady in middle-life, sitting in an arbour. A crutch lay against one arm of her chair, and her left hand leaned on an ebony silver-topped cane. There was something painful, haunting, in the face--a weirdness in the whole picture. The face was looking into the sunlight, but the effect was rather of moonlight--distant, mournful. He was fascinated; why, he could not tell. Art to him was an unknown book, but he had the instinct, and he was quick to feel. This picture struck him as being out of harmony with everything else in the room. Yet it had, a strange compelling charm.

Presently he started forward with an exclamation. Now he understood the vague, eerie influence. Looking out from behind the foliage was a face, so dim that one moment it seemed not to be there, and then suddenly to flash in--as a picture from beyond sails, lightning-like, across the filmy eyes of the dying. It was the face of a youth, elf-like, unreal, yet he saw his father's features in it.

He rubbed his eyes and looked again. It seemed very dim. Indeed, so delicately, vaguely, had the work been done that only eyes like Gaston's, trained to observe, with the sight of a hawk and a sense of the mysterious, could have seen so quickly or so distinctly. He drew slowly back to the mantel again, and mused. What did it mean? He was sure that the woman was his grandmother.

At that moment the door opened, and an alert, white-haired man stepped in quickly, and stopped in the centre of the room, looking at his visitor. His deep, keen eyes gazed out with an intensity that might almost be fierceness, and the fingers of his fine hands opened and shut nervously. Though of no great stature, he had singular dignity. He was in evening-dress, and as he raised a hand to his chin quickly, as if in surprise or perplexity, Gaston noticed that he wore a large seal-ring. It is singular that while he was engaged with his great event, he was also thinking what an air of authority the ring gave.

For a moment the two men stood at gaze without speaking, though Gaston stepped forward respectfully. A bewildered, almost shrinking look came into Sir William's eyes, as the other stood full in the light of the candles.

Presently the old man spoke. In spite of conventional smoothness, his voice had the ring of distance, which comes from having lived through and above painful things.

"My servant announced you as Sir Gaston Belward. There is some mistake?"

"There is a mistake," was the slow reply. "I did not give my name as Sir Gaston Belward. That was Falby's conclusion, sir. But I am Gaston Robert Belward, just the same."

Sir William was dazed, puzzled. He presently made a quick gesture, as if driving away some foolish thought, and, motioning to a chair, said:

"Will you be seated?"

They both sat, Sir William by his writing-table. His look was now steady and penetrating, but he met one just as firm.

"You are--Gaston Robert Belward? May I ask for further information?"

There was furtive humour playing at Gaston's mouth. The old man's manner had been so unlike anything he had ever met, save, to an extent, in his father, that it interested him. He replied, with keen distinctness:

"You mean, why I have come--home?"

Sir William's fingers trembled on a paper-knife. "Are you-at home?"

"I have come home to ask for my heritage--with interest compounded, sir."

Sir William was now very pale. He got to his feet, came to the young man, peered into his face, then drew back to the table and steadied himself against it. Gaston rose also: his instinct of courtesy was acute--absurdly civilised--that is, primitive. He waited. "You are Robert's son?"

"Robert Belward was my father."

"Your father is dead?"

"Twelve years ago."

Sir William sank back in his chair. His thin fingers ran back and forth along his lips. Presently he took out his handkerchief and coughed into it nervously. His lips trembled. With a preoccupied air he arranged a handful of papers on the table.

"Why did you not come before?" he asked at last, in a low, mechanical voice.

"It was better for a man than a boy to come."

"May I ask why?"

"A boy doesn't always see a situation--gives up too soon--throws away his rights. My father was a boy."

"He was twenty-five when he went away."

"I am fifty!"

Sir William looked up sharply, perplexed. "Fifty?"

"He only knew this life: I know the world."

"What world?"

"The great North, the South, the seas at four corners of the earth."

Sir William glanced at the top-boots, the peeping sash, the strong, bronzed face.

"Who was your mother?" he asked abruptly.

"A woman of France."

The baronet made a gesture of impatience, and looked searchingly at the young man.

All at once Gaston shot his bolt, to have it over. "She had Indian blood also."

He stretched himself to his full height, easily, broadly, with a touch of defiance, and leaned an arm against the mantel, awaiting Sir William's reply.

The old man shrank, then said coldly: "Have you the marriage-certificate?"

Gaston drew some papers from his pockets.

"Here, sir, with a letter from my father, and one from the Hudson's Bay Company."

His grandfather took them. With an effort he steadied himself, then opened and read them one by one, his son's brief letter last--it was merely a calm farewell, with a request that justice should be done his son.

At that moment Falby entered and said:

"Her ladyship's compliments, and all the guests have arrived, sir."

"My compliments to her ladyship, and ask her to give me five minutes yet, Falby."

Turning to his grandson, there seemed to be a moment's hesitation, then he reached out his hand.

"You have brought your luggage? Will you care to dine with us?"

Gaston took the cold outstretched fingers.

"Only my saddle-bag, and I have no evening-dress with me, else I should be glad."

There was another glance up and down the athletic figure, a half-apprehensive smile as the baronet thought of his wife, and then he said:

"We must see if anything can be done."

He pulled a bell-cord. A servant appeared.

"Ask the housekeeper to come for a moment, please." Neither spoke till the housekeeper appeared. "Hovey," he said to the grim woman, "give Mr. Gaston the room in the north tower. Then, from the press in the same room lay out the evening-dress which you will find there.... They were your father's," he added, turning to the young man. "It was my wife's wish to keep them. Have they been aired lately, Hovey?"

"Some days ago, sir."

"That will do." The housekeeper left, agitated. You will probably be in time for the fish," he added, as he bowed to Robert.

"If the clothes do not fit, sir?"

"Your father was about your height and nearly as large, and fashions have not changed much."

A few moments afterwards Gaston was in the room which his father had occupied twenty-seven years before. The taciturn housekeeper, eyeing him excitedly the while, put out the clothes. He did not say anything till she was about to go. Then:

"Hovey, were you here in my father's time?"

"I was under-parlourmaid, sir," she said.

"And you are housekeeper now--good!"

The face of the woman crimsoned, hiding her dour wrinkles. She turned away her head.

"I'd have given my right hand if he hadn't gone, sir."

Gaston whistled softly, then:

"So would he, I fancy, before he died. But I shall not go, so you will not need to risk a finger for me. I am going to stay, Hovey. Good-night. Look after Brillon, please."

He held out his hand. Her fingers twitched in his, then grasped them nervously.

"Yes, sir. Good-night, Sir. It's--it's like him comin' back, sir."

Then she suddenly turned and hurried from the room, a blunt figure to whom emotion was not graceful. "H'm!" said Gaston, as he shut the door.

"Parlourmaid then, eh? History at every turn! 'Voici le sabre de mon pere!'"

CHAPTER III

HE TELLS THE STORY OF HIS LIFE

Gaston Belward was not sentimental: that belongs to the middle-class Englishman's ideal of civilisation. But he had a civilisation akin to the highest; incongruous, therefore, to the general as the sympathy between the United States and Russia. The highest civilisation can be independent. The English aristocrat is at home in the lodge of a Sioux chief or the bamboo-hut of a Fijian, and makes brothers of "savages," when those other formal folk, who spend their lives in keeping their dignity, would be lofty and superior.

When Gaston looked at his father's clothes and turned them over, he had a twinge of honest emotion; but his mind was on the dinner and his heritage, and he only said, as he frowned at the tightness of the waistband:

"Never mind, we'll make 'em pay, shot and wadding, for what you lost, Robert Belward; and wherever you are, I hope you'll see it."

In twelve minutes from the time he entered the bedroom he was ready.

He pulled the bell-cord, and then passed out. A servant met him on the stairs, and in another minute he was inside the dining-room. Sir William's eyes flashed up. There was smouldering excitement in his face, but one could not have guessed at anything unusual. A seat had been placed for Gaston beside him. The situation was singular and trying. It would have been easier if he had merely come into the drawing-room after dinner. This was in Sir William's mind when he asked him to dine; but it was as it was. Gaston's alert glance found the empty seat. He was about to make towards it, but he caught Sir William's eye and saw it signal him to the end of the table near him. His brain was working with celerity and clearness. He now saw the woman whose portrait had so fascinated him in the library. As his eyes fastened on her here, he almost fancied he could see the boy's--his father's--face looking over her shoulder.

He instantly went to her, and said: "I am sorry to be late."

His first impulse had been to offer his hand, as, naturally, he would have done in "barbaric" lands, but the instinct of this other civilisation was at work in him. He might have been a polite casual guest, and not a grandson, bringing the remembrance, the culmination of twenty-seven years' tragedy into a home; she might have been a hostess with whom he wished to be on terms: that was all.

If the situation was trying for him, it was painful for her. She had had only a whispered announcement before Sir William led the way to dinner. Yet she was now all her husband had been, and more. Repression had been her practice for unnumbered years, and the only heralds of her feelings were the restless wells of her dark eyes: the physical and mental misery she had endured lay hid under the pale composure of her face. She was now brought suddenly before the composite image of her past. Yet she merely lifted a slender hand with long, fine fingers, which, as they clasped his, all at once trembled, and then pressed them hotly, nervously. To his surprise, it sent a twinge of colour to his cheek. "It was good of you to come down after such a journey," she said. Nothing more.

Then he passed on, and sat down to Sir William's courteous gesture. The situation had its difficulties for the guests--perfect guests as they were. Every one was aware of a dramatic incident, for which there had been no preparation save Sir William's remark that a grandson had arrived from the North Pole or thereabouts; and to continue conversation and appear casual put their resources to some test. But they stood it well, though. their eyes were busy, and the talk was cheerfully mechanical. So occupied were they with Gaston's entrance, that they did not know how near Lady Dargan came to fainting.

At the button-hole of the coat worn by Gaston hung a tiny piece of red ribbon which she had drawn from her sleeve on the terrace twenty-seven years ago, and tied there with the words:

"Do you think you will wear it till we meet again?" And the man had replied:

"You'll not see me without it, pretty girl--pretty girl."

A woman is not so unaccountable after all. She has more imagination than a man; she has not many resources to console her for disappointments, and she prizes to her last hour the swift moments when wonderful things seemed possible. That man is foolish who shows himself jealous of a woman's memories or tokens--those guarantees of her womanliness.

When Lady Dargan saw the ribbon, which Gaston in his hurry had not disturbed, tied exactly as she had tied it, a weird feeling came to her, and she felt choking. But her sister's eyes were on her, and Mrs. Gasgoyne's voice came across the table clearly:

"Sophie, what were Fred Bideford's colours at Sandown? You always remember that kind of thing." The warning was sufficient. Lady Dargan could make no effort of memory, but she replied without hesitation--or conscience:

"Yellow and brown."

"There," said Mrs. Gasgoyne, "we are both wrong, Captain Maudsley. Sophie never makes a mistake." Maudsley assented politely, but, stealing a look at Lady Dargan, wondered what the little by-play meant. Gaston was between Sir William and Mrs. Gasgoyne. He declined soup and fish, which had just been served, because he wished for time to get his bearings. He glanced at the menu as if idly interested, conscious that he was under observation. He felt that he had, some how, the situation in his hands. Everything had gone well, and he knew that his part had been played with some aplomb--natural, instinctive. Unlike most large men, he had a mind always alert, not requiring the inspiration of unusual moments. What struck him most forcibly now was the tasteful courtesy which had made his entrance easy. He instinctively compared it to the courtesy in the lodge of an Indian chief, or of a Hudson's Bay factor who has not seen the outer world for half a century. It was so different, and yet it was much the same. He had seen a missionary, a layreader, come intoxicated into a council of chiefs. The chiefs did not show that they knew his condition till he forced them to do so. Then two of the young men rose, suddenly pinned him in their arms, carried him out, and tied him in a lodge. The next morning they sent him out of their country. Gaston was no philosopher, but he could place a thing when he saw it: which is a kind of genius.

Presently Sir William said quietly:

"Mrs. Gasgoyne, you knew Robert well; his son ought to know you."

Gaston turned to Mrs. Gasgoyne, and said in his father's manner as much as possible, for now his mind ran back to how his father talked and acted, forming a standard for him:

"My father once told me a tale of the Keithley Hunt--something 'away up,' as they say in the West--and a Mrs. Warren Gasgoyne was in it."

He made an instant friend of Mrs. Gasgoyne--made her so purposely. This was one of the few things from his father's talks upon his past life. He remembered the story because it was interesting, the name because it had a sound.

She flushed with pleasure. That story of the Hunt was one of her sweetest recollections. For her bravery then she had been voted by the field "a good fellow," and an admiral present declared that she had a head "as long as the maintop bow-line." She loved admiration, though she had no foolish sentiment; she called men silly creatures, and yet would go on her knees across country to do a deserving man-friend a service. She was fifty and over, yet she had the springing heart of a girl--mostly hid behind a brusque manner and a blunt, kindly tongue.

"Your father could always tell a good story," she said.

"He told me one of you: what about telling me one of him?"

Adaptable, he had at once fallen in with her direct speech; the more so because it was his natural way; any other ways were "games," as he himself said.

She flashed a glance at her sister, and smiled half-ironically.

"I could tell you plenty," she said softly. "He was a startling fellow, and went far sometimes; but you look as if you could go farther."

Gaston helped himself to an entree, wondering whether a knife was used with sweetbreads.

"How far could he go?" he asked.

"In the hunting-field with anybody, with women endlessly, with meanness like a snail, and when his blood was up, to the most nonsensical place you can think of."

Forks only for sweetbreads! Gaston picked one up. "He went there."

"Who told you?"

"I came from there."

"Where is it?"

"A few hundred miles from the Arctic circle."

"Oh, I didn't think it was that climate!"

"It never is till you arrive. You are always out in the cold there."

"That sounds American."

"Every man is a sinner one way or another."

"You are very clever--cleverer than your father ever was.

"I hope so."

"Why?"

"He went--there. I've come--from there."

"And you think you will stay--never go back?"

"He was out of it for twenty years, and died. If I am in it for that long, I shall have had enough."

Their eyes met. The woman looked at him steadily. "You won't be," she replied, this time seriously, and in a very low voice.

"No? Why?"

"Because you will tire of it all--though you've started very well."

She then answered a question of Captain Maudsley's and turned again to Gaston.

"What will make me tire of it?" he inquired. She sipped her champagne musingly.

"Why, what is in you deeper than all this; with the help of some woman probably."

She looked at him searchingly, then added:

"You seem strangely like and yet unlike your father to-night."

"I am wearing his clothes," he said.

She had plenty of nerve, but this startled her. She shrank a little: it seemed uncanny. Now she remembered that ribbon in the button-hole.

"Poor Sophie!" she thought. "And this one will make greater mischief here." Then, aloud to him: "Your father was a good fellow, but he did wild things."

"I do not see the connection," he answered. "I am not a good man, and I shall do wilder things--is that it?"

"You will do mad things," she replied hardly above a whisper, and talked once more with Captain Maudsley. Gaston now turned to his grandfather, who had heard a sentence here and there, and felt that the young man carried off the situation well enough. He then began to talk in a general way about Gaston's voyage, of the Hudson's Bay Company, and expeditions to the Arctic, drawing Lady Dargan into the conversation.

Whatever might be said of Sir William Belward he was an excellent host. He had a cool, unmalicious wit, but that man was unwise who offered himself to its severity. To-night he surpassed himself in suggestive talk, until, all at once, seeing Lady Dargan's eyes fixed on Gaston, he went silent, sitting back in his chair abstracted. Soon, however, a warning glance from his wife brought him back and saved Lady Dargan from collapse; for it seemed impossible to talk alone to this ghost of her past.

At this moment Gaston heard a voice near:

"As like as if he'd stepped out of the picture, if it weren't for the clothes. A Gaston too!"

The speaker was Lord Dargan. He was talking to Archdeacon Varcoe.

Gaston followed Lord Dargan's glance to the portrait of that Sir Gaston Belward whose effigy he had seen. He found himself in form, feature, expression; the bold vigilance of eye, the primitive activity of shoulder, the small firm foot, the nervous power of the hand. The eyes seemed looking at him. He answered to the look. There was in him the romantic strain, and something more! In the remote parts of his being there was the capacity for the phenomenal, the strange. Once again, as in the church, he saw the field of Naseby, King Charles, Ireton's men, Cromwell and his Ironsides, Prince Rupert and the swarming rush of cavalry, and the end of it all! Had it been a tale of his father's at camp-fire? Had he read it somewhere? He felt his blood thump in his veins. Another half-hour, wherein he was learning every minute, nothing escaping him, everything interesting him; his grandfather and Mrs. Gasgoyne especially, then the ladies retired slowly with their crippled hostess, who gave Gaston, as she rose, a look almost painfully intense. It haunted him.

Now Gaston had his chance. He had no fear of what he could do with men: he had measured himself a few times with English gentlemen as he travelled, and he knew where his power lay--not in making himself agreeable, but in imposing his personality.

The guests were not soon to forget the talk of that hour. It played into Gaston's hands. He pretended to nothing; he confessed ignorance here and there with great simplicity; but he had the gift of reducing things, as it were, to their original elements. He cut away to the core of a matter, and having simple, fixed ideas, he was able to focus the talk, which had begun with hunting stories, and ended with the morality of duelling. Gaston's hunting stories had made them breathless, his views upon duelling did not free their lungs.

There were sentimentalists present; others who, because it had become etiquette not to cross swords, thought it indecent. Archdeacon Varcoe would not be drawn into discussion, but sipped his wine, listened, and watched Gaston.

The young man measured his grandfather's mind, and he drove home his points mercilessly.

Captain Maudsley said something about "romantic murder."

"That's the trouble," Gaston said. "I don't know who killed duelling in England, but behind it must have been a woman or a shopkeeper: sentimentalism, timidity, dead romance. What is patriotism but romance? Ideals is what they call it somewhere. I've lived in a land full of hard work and dangers, but also full of romance. What is the result? Why, a people off there whom you pity, and who don't need pity. Romance? See: you only get square justice out of a wise autocrat, not out of your 'twelve true men'; and duelling is the last decent relic of autocracy. Suppose the wronged man does get killed; that is all right: it wasn't merely blood he was after, but the right to hit a man in the eye for a wrong done. What is all this hullabaloo--about saving human life? There's as much interest--and duty--in dying as living, if you go the way your conscience tells you."

A couple of hours later, Gaston, after having seen to his horse, stood alone in the drawing-room with his grandfather and grandmother. As yet Lady Belward had spoken not half a dozen words to him. Sir William presently said to him:

"Are you too tired to join us in the library?"

"I'm as fresh as paint, sir," was the reply.

Lady Belward turned without a word, and slowly passed from the room. Gaston's eyes followed the crippled figure, which yet had a rare dignity. He had a sudden impulse. He stepped to her and said with an almost boyish simplicity:

"You are very tired; let me carry you--grandmother."

He could hear Sir William gasp a little as he laid a quick warm hand on hers that held the cane. She looked at him gravely, sadly, and then said:

"I will take your arm, if you please."

He took the cane, and she put a hand towards him. He ran his strong arm around her waist with a little humouring laugh, her hand rested on his shoulder, and he timed his step to hers. Sir William was in an eddy of wonder--a strong head was "mazed." He had looked for a different reception of this uncommon kinsman. How quickly had the new-comer conquered himself! And yet he had a slight strangeness of accent--not American, but something which seemed unusual. He did not reckon with a voice which, under cover of easy deliberation, had a convincing quality; with a manner of old-fashioned courtesy and stateliness. As Mrs. Gasgoyne had said to the rector, whose eyes had followed Gaston everywhere in the drawing-room:

"My dear archdeacon, where did he get it? Why, he has lived most of his life with savages!"

"Vandyke might have painted the man," Lord Dargan had added.

"Vandyke did paint him," had put in Delia Gasgoyne from behind her mother.

"How do you mean, Delia?" Mrs. Gasgoyne had added, looking curiously at her.

"His picture hangs in the dining-room."

Then the picture had been discussed, and the girl's eyes had followed Gaston--followed him until he had caught their glance. Without an introduction, he had come and dropped into conversation with her, till her mother cleverly interrupted.

Inside the library Lady Belward was comfortably placed, and looking up at Gaston, said:

"You have your father's ways: I hope that you will be wiser."

"If you will teach me!" he answered gently.

There came two little bright spots on her cheeks, and her hands clasped in her lap. They all sat down. Sir William spoke:

"It is much to ask that you should tell us of your life now, but it is better that we should start with some knowledge of each other."

At that moment Gaston's eyes caught the strange picture on the wall.

"I understand," he answered. "But I would be starting in the middle of a story."

"You mean that you wish to hear your father's history? Did he not tell you?"

"Trifles--that is all."

"Did he ever speak of me?" asked Lady Belward with low anxiety.

"Yes, when he was dying."

"What did he say?"

"He said: 'Tell my mother that Truth waits long, but whips hard. Tell her that I always loved her.'" She shrank in her chair as if from a blow, and then was white and motionless.

"Let us hear your story," Sir William said with a sort of hauteur.

"You know your own, much of your father's lies buried with him."

"Very well, sir."

Sir William drew a chair up beside his wife. Gaston sat back, and for a moment did not speak. He was looking into distance. Presently the blue of his eyes went all black, and with strange unwavering concentration he gazed straight before him. A light spread over his face, his hands felt for the chair-arms and held them firmly. He began:

"I first remember swinging in a blanket from a pine-tree at a buffalo-hunt while my mother cooked the dinner. There were scores of tents, horses, and many Indians and half-breeds, and a few white men. My father was in command. I can see my mother's face as she stood over the fire. It was not darker than mine; she always seemed more French than Indian, and she was thought comely."

Lady Belward shuddered a little, but Gaston did not notice.

"I can remember the great buffalo-hunt. You heard a heavy rumbling sound; you saw a cloud on the prairie. It heaved, a steam came from it, and sometimes you caught the flash of ten thousand eyes as the beasts tossed their heads and then bent them again to the ground and rolled on, five hundred men after them, our women shouting and laughing, and arrows and bullets flying. . . . I can remember a time also when a great Indian battle happened just outside the fort, and, with my mother crying after him, my father went out with a priest to stop it. My father was wounded, and then the priest frightened them, and they gathered their dead together and buried them. We lived in a fort for a long time, and my mother died there. She was a good woman, and she loved my father. I have seen her on her knees for hours praying when he was away.--I have her rosary now. They called her Ste. Heloise. Afterwards I was always with my father. He was a good man, but he was never happy; and only at the last would he listen to the priest, though they were always great friends. He was not a Catholic of course, but he said that didn't matter."

Sir William interrupted huskily. "Why did he never come back?"

"I do not know quite, but he said to me once, 'Gaston, you'll tell them of me some day, and it will be a soft pillow for their heads! You can mend a broken life, but the ring of it is gone.' I think he meant to come back when I was about fourteen; but things happened, and he stayed."

There was a pause. Gaston seemed brooding, and Lady Belward said:

"Go on, please."

"There isn't so very much to tell. The life was the only one I had known, and it was all right. But my father had told me of this life. He taught me himself--he and Father Decluse and a Moravian missionary for awhile. I knew some Latin and history, a bit of mathematics, a good deal of astronomy, some French poets, and Shakespere. Shakespere is wonderful. . . . My father wanted me to come here at once after he

died, but I knew better--I wanted to get sense first. So I took a place in the Company. It wasn't all fun.

"I had to keep my wits sharp. I was only a youngster, and I had to do with men as crafty and as silly as old Polonius. I was sent to Labrador. That was not a life for a Christian. Once a year a ship comes to the port, bringing the year's mail and news from the world. When you watch that ship go out again, and you turn round and see the filthy Esquimaux and Indians, and know that you've got to live for another year with them, sit in their dirty tepees, eat their raw frozen meat, with an occasional glut of pemmican, and the thermometer 70 degrees below zero, you get a lump in your throat.

"Then came one winter. I had one white man, two half-breeds, and an Indian with me. There was darkness day after day, and because the Esquimaux and Indians hadn't come up to the fort that winter, it was lonely as a tomb. One by one the men got melancholy and then went mad, and I had to tie them up, and care for them and feed them. The Indian was all right, but he got afraid, and wanted to start to a mission station three hundred miles on. It was a bad look-out for me, but I told him to go. I was left alone. I was only twenty-one, but I was steel to my toes--good for wear and tear. Well, I had one solid month all alone with my madmen. Their jabbering made me sea-sick some times. At last one day I felt I'd go staring mad myself if I didn't do something exciting to lift me, as it were. I got a revolver, sat at the opposite end of the room from the three lunatics, and practised shooting at them. I had got it into my head that they ought to die, but it was only fair, I thought, to give them a chance. I would try hard to shoot all round them--make a halo of bullets for the head of every one, draw them in silhouettes of solid lead on the wall.

"I talked to them first, and told them what I was going to do. They seemed to understand, and didn't object. I began with the silhouettes, of course. I had a box of bullets beside me. They never squealed. I sent the bullets round them as pretty as the pattern of a milliner. Then I began with their heads. I did two all right. They sat and never stirred. But when I came to the last something happened. It was Jock Lawson."

Sir William interposed:

"Jock Lawson--Jock Lawson from here?"

"Yes. His mother keeps 'The Whisk o' Barley.'"

"So, that is where Jock Lawson went? He followed your father?"

"Yes. Jock was mad enough when I began--clean gone. But, somehow, the game I was playing cured him. 'Steady, Jock!' I said. 'Steady!' for I saw him move. I levelled for the second bead of the halo. My finger was on the trigger. 'My God, don't shoot!' he called. It startled me, my hand shook, the thing went off, and Jock had a bullet through his brain.

". . . Then I waked up. Perhaps I had been mad myself--I don't know. But my brain never seemed clearer than when I was playing that game. It was like a magnifying glass: and my eyes were so clear and strong that I could see the pores on their skin, and the drops of sweat breaking out on Jock's forehead when he yelled."

A low moan came from Lady Belward. Her face was drawn and pale, but her eyes were on Gaston with a deep fascination. Sir William whispered to her.

"No," she said, "I will stay."

Gaston saw the impression he had made.

"Well, I had to bury poor Jock all alone. I don't think I should have minded it so much, if it hadn't been for the faces of those other two crazy men. One of them sat still as death, his eyes following me with one long stare, and the other kept praying all the time--he'd been a lay preacher once before he backslided, and it came back on him now naturally. Now it would be from Revelation, now out of the Psalms, and again a swingeing exhortation for the Spirit to come down and convict me of sin. There was a lot of sanity in it too, for he kept saying at last: 'O shut not up my soul with the sinners: nor my life with the bloodthirsty.' I couldn't stand it, with Jock dead there before me, so I gave him a heavy dose of paregoric out of the Company's stores. Before he took it he raised his finger and said to me, with a beastly stare: 'Thou art the man!' But the paregoric put him to sleep. . . .

"Then I gave the other something to eat, and dragged Jock out to bury him. I remembered then that he couldn't be buried, for the ground was too hard and the ice too thick; so I got ropes, and, when he stiffened, slung him up into a big cedar tree, and then went up myself and arranged the branches about him comfortably. It seemed to me that Jock was a baby and I was his father. You couldn't see any blood, and I fixed his hair so that it covered the hole in the forehead. I remember I kissed him on the cheek, and then said a prayer--one that I'd got out of my father's prayer-book: 'That it may please Thee to preserve all that travel by land or by water, all women labouring of child, all sick persons and young children; and to show Thy pity upon all prisoners and captives.' Somehow I had got it into my head that Jock was going on a long journey, and that I was a prisoner and a captive."

Gaston broke off, and added presently:

"Perhaps this is all too awful to hear, but it gives you an idea of what kind of things went to make me." Lady Belward answered for both:

"Tell us all--everything."

"It is late," said Sir William, nervously.

"What does it matter? It is once in a lifetime," she answered sadly.

Gaston took up the thread:

"Now I come to what will shock you even more, perhaps. So, be prepared. I don't know how many days went, but at last I had three visitors--in time I should think: a Moravian missionary, and an Esquimaux and his daughter. I didn't tell the missionary about Jock--there was no use, it could do no good. They stayed four weeks, and during that time one of the crazy men died. The other got better, but had to be watched. I could do anything with him, if I got my eye on him. Somehow, I must tell you, I've got a lot of power that way. I don't know where it comes from. Well, the missionary had to go. The old Esquimaux thought that he and his daughter would stay on if I'd let them. I was only too glad. But it wasn't wise for the missionary to take the journey alone--it was a bad business in any case. I urged the man that had been crazy to go, for I thought activity would do him good. He agreed, and the two left and got to the Mission Station all right, after wicked trouble. I was alone with the Esquimaux and his daughter. You never know why certain things happen, and I can't tell why that winter was so weird; why the old Esquimaux should take sick one morning, and in the evening should call me and his daughter Lucy--she'd been given a Christian name, of course--and say that he was going to die, and he wanted me to marry her" (Lady Belward exclaimed, Sir William's hands fingered the chair-arm nervously) "there and then, so that he'd know she would be cared for. He was a heathen, but he had been primed by the missionaries about his daughter. She was a fine, clever girl, and well educated--the best product of their mission. So he called for a Bible. There wasn't one in the place, but I had my mother's Book of the Mass. I went to get it, but when I set my eyes on it, I couldn't--no, I couldn't do it, for I hadn't the least idea but what I should bid my lady good-bye when it suited, and I didn't want any swearing at all--not a bit. I didn't do any. But what happened had to be with or without any ring or book and 'Forasmuch as.' There had been so much funeral and sudden death that a marriage would be a godsend anyhow. So the old Esquimaux got our two hands in his, babbled away in half-English, half-Esquimaux, with the girl's eyes shining like a she-moose over a dying buck, and about the time we kissed each other, his head dropped back--and that is all there was about that."

Gaston now kept his eyes on his listeners. He was aware that his story must sound to them as brutal as might be, but it was a phase of his life, and, so far as he could, he wanted to start with a clean sheet; not out of love of confidence, for he was self-contained, but he would have enough to do to shepherd his future without shepherding his past. He saw that Lady Belward had a sickly fear in her face, while Sir William had gone stern and hard.

He went on:

"It saved the situation, did that marriage; though it was no marriage you will say. Neither was it one way, and I didn't intend at the start to stand by it an hour longer than I wished. But she was more than I looked for, and it seems to me that she saved my life that winter, or my reason anyhow. There had been so much tragedy that I used to wonder every day what would happen before night; and that's not a good thing for the brain

of a chap of twenty-one or two. The funny part of it is that she wasn't a pagan--not a bit. She could read and speak English in a sweet old-fashioned way, and she used to sing to me--such a funny, sorry little voice she had--hymns the Moravians had taught her, and one or two English songs. I taught her one or two besides, 'Where the Hawthorn Tree is Blooming,' and 'Allan Water'--the first my father had taught me, the other an old Scotch trader. It's different with a woman and a man in a place like that. Two men will go mad together, but there's a saving something in the contact of a man's brain with a woman's. I got fond of her, any man would have, for she had something that I never saw in any heathen, certainly in no Indian; you'll see it in women from Iceland. I determined to marry her in regular style when spring and a missionary came. You can't understand, maybe, how one can settle to a life where you've got companionship, and let the world go by. About that time, I thought that I'd let Ridley Court and the rest of it go as a boy's dreams go. I didn't seem to know that I was only satisfied in one set of my instincts. Spring came, so did a missionary, and for better or worse it was."

Sir William came to his feet. "Great Heaven!" he broke out.

His wife tried to rise, but could not.

"This makes everything impossible," added the baronet shortly.

"No, no, it makes nothing impossible--if you will listen."

Gaston was cool. He had begun playing for the stakes from one standpoint, and he would not turn back.

He continued:

"I lived with her happily: I never expect to have happiness like that again,--never,--and after two years at another post in Labrador, came word from the Company that I might go to Quebec, there to be given my choice of posts. I went. By this time I had again vague ideas that sometime I should come here, but how or why I couldn't tell; I was drifting, and for her sake willing to drift. I was glad to take her to Quebec, for I guessed she would get ideas, and it didn't strike me that she would be out of place. So we went. But she was out of place in many ways. It did not suit at all. We were asked to good houses, for I believe I have always had enough of the Belward in me to keep my end up anywhere. The thing went on pretty well, but at last she used to beg me to go without her to excursions and parties. There were always one or two quiet women whom she liked to sit with, and because she seemed happier for me to go, I did. I was popular, and got along with women well; but I tell you honestly I loved my wife all the time; so that when a Christian busy-body poured into her ears some self-made scandal, it was a brutal, awful lie--brutal and awful, for she had never known jealousy; it did not belong to her old social creed. But it was in the core of her somewhere, and an aboriginal passion at work naked is a thing to be remembered. I had to face it one night. . . .

"I was quiet, and did what I could. After that I insisted on her going with me wherever I went, but she had changed, and I saw that, in spite of herself, the thing grew. One day we went on an excursion down the St. Lawrence. We were merry, and I was telling yarns. We were just nearing a landing-stage, when a pretty girl, with more gush than sense, caught me by the arm and begged some ridiculous thing of me--an autograph, or what not. A minute afterwards I saw my wife spring from the bulwarks down on the landing-stage, and rush up the shore into the woods. . . . We were two days finding her. That settled it. I was sick enough at heart, and I determined to go back to Labrador. We did so. Every thing had gone on the rocks. My wife was not, never would be, the same again. She taunted me and worried me, and because I would not quarrel, seemed to have a greater grievance--jealousy is a kind of madness. One night she was most galling, and I sat still and said nothing. My life seemed gone of a heap: I was sick--sick to the teeth; hopeless, looking forward to nothing. I imagine my hard quietness roused her. She said something hateful--something about having married her, and not a woman from Quebec. I smiled--I couldn't help it; then I laughed, a bit wild, I suppose. I saw the flash of steel. . . . I believe I laughed in her face as I fell. When I came to she was lying with her head on my breast--dead--stone dead."

Lady Belward sat with closed eyes, her fingers clasping and unclasping on the top of her cane; but Sir William wore a look half-satisfied, half-excited.

He now hurried his story.

"I got well, and after that stayed in the North for a year. Then I passed down the continent to Mexico and South America. There I got a commission to go to New Zealand and Australia to sell a lot of horses. I did so, and spent some time in the South Sea Islands. Again I drifted back to the Rockies and over into the plains; found Jacques Brillon, my servant, had a couple of years' work and play, gathered together some money, as good a horse and outfit as the North could give, and started with Brillon and his broncho--having got both sense and experience, I hope--for Ridley Court. And here I am. There's a lot of my life that I haven't told you of, but it doesn't matter, because it's adventure mostly, and it can be told at any time; but these are essential facts, and it is better that you should hear them. And that is all, grandfather and grandmother."

After a minute Lady Belward rose, leaned on her crutch, and looked at him wistfully. Sir William said: "Are you sure that you will suit this life, or it you?"

"It is the only idea I have at present; and, anyhow, it is my rightful home, sir."

"I was not thinking of your rights, but of the happiness of us all."

Lady Belward limped to him, and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"You have had one great tragedy, so have we: neither could bear another. Try to be worthy--of your home."

Then she solemnly kissed him on the cheek. Soon afterwards they went to their rooms.

CHAPTER IV

AN HOUR WITH HIS FATHER'S PAST

In his bedroom Gaston made a discovery. He chanced to place his hand in the tail-pocket of the coat he had worn. He drew forth a letter. The ink was faded, and the lines were scrawled. It ran:

It's no good. Mr. Ian's been! It's face the musik now. If you want me, say so. I'm for kicks or ha'pence--no diffrence.

Yours, J.

He knew the writing very well--Jock Lawson's. There had been some trouble, and Mr. Ian had "been," bringing peril. What was it? His father and Jock had kept the secret from him.

He put his hand in the pocket again. There was another note--this time in a woman's handwriting:

Oh, come to me, if you would save us both! Do not fail. God help us! Oh, Robert!

It was signed "Agnes."

Well, here was something of mystery; but he did not trouble himself about that. He was not at Ridley Court to solve mysteries, to probe into the past, to set his father's wrongs right; but to serve himself, to reap for all those years wherein his father had not reaped. He enjoyed life, and he would search this one to the full of his desires. Before he retired he studied the room, handling things that lay where his father placed them so many years before. He was not without emotions in this, but he held himself firm.

As he stood ready to get into bed, his eyes chanced upon a portrait of his uncle Ian.

"There's where the tug comes!" he said, nodding at it. "Shake hands, and ten paces, Uncle Ian?"

Then he blew out the candle, and in five minutes was sound asleep.

He was out at six o'clock. He made for the stables, and found Jacques pacing the yard. He smiled at Jacques's dazed look.

"What about the horse, Brillon?" he said, nodding as he came up.

"Saracen's had a slice of the stable-boy's shoulder--sir."

Amusement loitered in Gaston's eyes. The "sir" had stuck in Jacques's throat.

"Saracen has established himself, then? Good! And the broncho?"

"Bien, a trifle only. They laugh much in the kitchen--"

"The hall, Brillon."

"--in the hall last night. That hired man over there--"

"That groom, Brillon."

"--that groom, he was a fool, and fat. He was the worst. This morning he laugh at my broncho. He say a horse like that is nothing: no pace, no travel. I say the broncho was not so ver' bad, and I tell him try the paces. I whisper soft, and the broncho stand like a lamb. He mount, and sneer, and grin at the high pommel, and start. For a minute it was pretty; and then I give a little soft call, and in a minute there was the broncho bucking--doubling like a hoop, and dropping same as lead. Once that--groom--come down on the pommel, then over on the ground like a ball, all muck and blood."

The half-breed paused, looking innocently before him. Gaston's mouth quirked.

"A solid success, Brillon. Teach them all the tricks you can. At ten o'clock come to my room. The campaign begins then."

Jacques ran a hand through his long black hair, and fingered his sash. Gaston understood.

"The hair and ear-rings may remain, Brillon; but the beard and clothes must go--except for occasions. Come along."

For the next two hours Gaston explored the stables and the grounds. Nothing escaped him. He gathered every incident of the surroundings, and talked to the servants freely, softly, and easily, yet with a superiority, which suddenly was imposed in the case of the huntsman at the kennels--for the Whipshire hounds were here. Gaston had never ridden to hounds. It was not, however, his cue to pretend knowledge. He was strong enough to admit ignorance. He stood leaning against the door of the kennels, arms folded, eyes half-closed, with the sense of a painter, before the turning bunch of brown and white, getting the charm of distance and soft tones. His blood beat hard, for suddenly he felt as if he had been behind just such a pack one day, one clear desirable day of spring. He saw people gathering at the kennels; saw men drink beer and eat sandwiches at the door of the huntsman's house,--a long, low dwelling, with crumbling arched doorways like those of a monastery,

watched them get away from the top of the moor, he among them; heard the horn, the whips; and saw the fox break cover.

Then came a rare run for five sweet miles--down a long valley--over quick-set hedges, with stiffish streams--another hill--a great combe--a lovely valley stretching out--a swerve to the right--over a gate--and the brush got at a farmhouse door.

Surely, he had seen it all; but what kink of the brain was it that the men wore flowing wigs and immense boot-legs, and sported lace in the hunting-field? And why did he see within that picture another of two ladies and a gentleman hawking?

He was roused from his dream by hearing the huntsman say in a quizzical voice:

"How do you like the dogs, sir?"

To his last day Lugley, the huntsman, remembered the slow look of cold surprise, of masterful malice, scathing him from head to foot. The words that followed the look, simple as they were, drove home the naked reproof:

"What is your name, my man?"

"Lugley, sir."

"Lugley! Lugley! H'm! Well, Lugley, I like the hounds better than I like you. Who is Master of the Hounds, Lugley?"

"Captain Maudsley, sir."

"Just so. You are satisfied with your place, Lugley?"

"Yes, sir," said the man in a humble voice, now cowed.

The news of the arrival of the strangers had come to him late at night, and, with Whipshire stupidity, he had thought that any one coming from the wilds of British America must be but a savage after all.

"Very well; I wouldn't throw myself out of a place, if I were you."

"Oh, no, sir! Beg pardon, sir, I--"

"Attend to your hounds there, Lugley."

So saying, Gaston nodded Jacques away with him, leaving the huntsman sick with apprehension.

"You see how it is to be done, Brillon?" said Gaston. Jacques's brown eyes twinkled.

"You have the grand trick, sir."

"I enjoy the game; and so shall you, if you will. You've begun well. I don't know much of this life yet; but it seems to me that they are all part of a machine, not the idea behind the machine. They have no invention. Their machine is easy to learn. Do not pretend; but for every bit you learn show something better, something to make them dizzy now and then."

He paused on a knoll and looked down. The castle, the stables, the cottages of labourers and villagers lay before them. In a certain highly-cultivated field, men were working. It was cut off in squares and patches. It had an air which struck Gaston as unusual; why, he could not tell. But he had a strange divining instinct, or whatever it may be called. He made for the field and questioned the workmen.

The field was cut up into allotment gardens. Here, at a nominal rent, the cottager could grow his vegetables; a little spot of the great acre of England, which gave the labourer a tiny sense of ownership, of manhood. Gaston was interested. More, he was determined to carry that experiment further, if he ever got the chance. There was no socialism in him. The true barbarian is like the true aristocrat: more a giver of gifts than a lover of co-operation; conserving ownership by right of power and superior independence, hereditary or otherwise. Gaston was both barbarian and aristocrat.

"Brillon," he said, as they walked on, "do you think they would be happier on the prairies with a hundred acres of land, horses, cows, and a pen of pigs?"

"Can I be happy here all at once, sir?"

"That's just it. It's too late for them. They couldn't grasp it unless they went when they were youngsters. They'd long for 'Home and Old England' and this grub-and-grind life. Gracious heaven, look at them--crumpled-up creatures! And I'll stake my life, they were as pretty children as you'd care to see. They are out of place in the landscape, Brillon; for it is all luxury and lush, and they are crumples--crumples! But yet there isn't any use being sorry for them, for they don't grasp anything outside the life they are living. Can't you guess how they live? Look at the doors of the houses shut, and the windows sealed; yet they've been up these three hours! And they'll suck in bad air, and bad food; and they'll get cancer, and all that; and they'll die and be trotted away to the graveyard for 'passun' to hurry them into their little dark cots, in the blessed hope of everlasting life! I'm going to know this thing, Brillon, from tooth to ham-string; and, however it goes, we'll have lived up and down the whole scale; and that's something."

He suddenly stopped, and then added:

"I'm likely to go pretty far in this. I can't tell how or why, but it's so. Now, once more, as yesterday afternoon, for good or for bad, for long or for short, for the gods or for the devil, are you with me? There's time to turn back even yet, and I'll say no word to your going."

"But no, no! a vow is a vow. When I cannot run I will walk, when I cannot walk I will crawl after you--comme ça!"

Lady Belward did not appear at breakfast. Sir William and Gaston breakfasted alone at half past nine o'clock. The talk was of the stables and the estate generally.

The breakfast-room looked out on a soft lawn, stretching away into a broad park, through which a stream ran; and beyond was a green hillside. The quiet, the perfect order and discipline, gave a pleasant tingle to Gaston's veins. It was all so easy, and yet so admirable--elegance without weight. He felt at home. He was not certain of some trifles of etiquette; but he and Sir William were alone, and he followed his instincts. Once he frankly asked his grandfather of a matter of form, of which he was uncertain the evening before. The thing was done so naturally that the conventional mind of the baronet was not disturbed. The Belwards were notable for their brains, and Sir William saw that the young man had an unusual share. He also felt that this startling individuality might make a hazardous future; but he liked the fellow, and he had a debt to pay to the son of his own dead son. Of course, if their wills came into conflict, there could be but one thing--the young man must yield; or, if he played the fool, there must be an end. Still, he hoped the best. When breakfast was finished, he proposed going to the library.

There Sir William talked of the future, asked what Gaston's ideas were, and questioned him as to his present affairs. Gaston frankly said that he wanted to live as his father would have done, and that he had no property, and no money beyond a hundred pounds, which would last him a couple of years on the prairies, but would be fleeting here.

Sir William at once said that he would give him a liberal allowance, with, of course, the run of his own stables and their house in town: and when he married acceptably, his allowance would be doubled.

"And I wish to say, Gaston," he added, "that your uncle Ian, though heir to the title, does not necessarily get the property, which is not entailed. Upon that point I need hardly say more. He has disappointed us.

"Through him Robert left us. Of his character I need not speak. Of his ability the world speaks variably: he is an artist. Of his morals I need only say that they are scarcely those of an English gentleman, though whether that is because he is an artist, I cannot say--I really cannot say. I remember meeting a painter at Lord Dunfolly's,--Dunfolly is a singular fellow--and he struck me chiefly as harmless, distinctly harmless. I could not understand why he was at Dunfolly's, he seemed of so little use, though Lady Malfire, who writes or something, mooned with him a good deal. I believe there was some scandal or something afterwards. I really do not know. But you are not a painter, and I believe you have character--I fancy so."

"If you mean that I don't play fast and loose, sir, you are right. What I do, I do as straight as a needle." The old man sighed carefully.

"You are very like Robert, and yet there is something else. I don't know, I really don't know what!"

"I ought to have more in me than the rest of the family, sir."

This was somewhat startling. Sir William's fingers stroked his beardless cheek uncertainly. "Possibly--possibly."

"I've lived a broader life, I've got wider standards, and there are three races at work in me."

"Quite so, quite so;" and Sir William fumbled among his papers nervously.

"Sir," said Gaston suddenly, "I told you last night the honest story of my life. I want to start fair and square. I want the honest story of my father's life here; how and why he left, and what these letters mean."

He took from his pocket the notes he had found the night before, and handed them. Sir William read them with a disturbed look, and turned them over and over. Gaston told where he had found them.

Sir William spoke at last.

"The main story is simple enough. Robert was extravagant, and Ian was vicious and extravagant also. Both got into trouble. I was younger then, and severe. Robert hid nothing, Ian all he could. One day things came to a climax. In his wild way, Robert--with Jock Lawson--determined to rescue a young man from the officers of justice, and to get him out of the country. There were reasons. He was the son of a gentleman; and, as we discovered afterwards, Robert had been too intimate with the wife--his one sin of the kind, I believe. Ian came to know, and prevented the rescue. Meanwhile, Robert was liable to the law for the attempt. There was a bitter scene here, and I fear that my wife and I said hard things to Robert."

Gaston's eyes were on Lady Belward's portrait. "What did my grandmother say?"

There was a pause, then:

"That she would never call him son again, I believe; that the shadow of his life would be hateful to her always. I tell you this because I see you look at that portrait. What I said, I think, was no less. So, Robert, after a wild burst of anger, flung away from us out of the house. His mother, suddenly repenting, ran to follow him, but fell on the stone steps at the door, and became a cripple for life. At first she remained bitter against Robert, and at that time Ian painted that portrait. It is clever, as you may see, and weird. But there came a time when she kept it as a reproach to herself, not Robert. She is a good woman--a very good woman. I know none better, really no one."

"What became of the arrested man?" Gaston asked quietly, with the oblique suggestiveness of a counsel.

"He died of a broken blood-vessel on the night of the intended rescue, and the matter was hushed up."

"What became of the wife?"

"She died also within a year."

"Were there any children?"

"One--a girl."

"Whose was the child?"

"You mean--?"

"The husband's or the lover's?" There was a pause.

"I cannot tell you."

"Where is the girl?"

"My son, do not ask that. It can do no good--really no good."

"Is it not my due?"

"Do not impose your due. Believe me, I know best. If ever there is need to tell you, you shall be told. Trust me. Has not the girl her due also?"

Gaston's eyes held Sir William's a moment. "You are right, sir," he said, "quite right. I shall not try to know. But if--" He paused.

Sir William spoke:

"There is but one person in the world who knows the child's father; and I could not ask him, though I have known him long and well--indeed, no."

"I do not ask to understand more," Gaston replied. "I almost wish I had known nothing. And yet I will ask one thing: is the girl in comfort and good surroundings?"

"The best--ah, yes, the very best."

There was a pause, in which both sat thinking; then Sir William wrote out a cheque and offered it, with a hint of emotion. He was recalling how he had done the same with this boy's father.

Gaston understood. He got up, and said: "Honestly, sir, I don't know how I shall turn out here; for, if I didn't like it, it couldn't hold me, or,

if it did, I should probably make things uncomfortable. But I think I shall like it, and I will do my best to make things go well. Good-morning, sir."

With courteous attention Sir William let his grandson out of the room.

And thus did a young man begin his career as Gaston Belward, gentleman.

CHAPTER V.

WHEREIN HE FINDS HIS ENEMY

How that career was continued there are many histories: Jock Lawson's mother tells of it in her way, Mrs. Gasgoyne in hers, Hovey in hers, Captain Maudsley in his; and so on. Each looks at it from an individual stand-point. But all agree on two matters: that he did things hitherto unknown in the countryside; and that he was free and affable, but could pull one up smartly if necessary.

He would sit by the hour and talk with Bimley, the cottager; with Rosher, the hotel-keeper, who when young had travelled far; with a sailorman, home for a holiday, who said he could spin a tidy yarn; and with Pogan, the groom, who had at last won Saracen's heart. But one day when the meagre village chemist saw him cracking jokes with Beard, the carpenter, and sidled in with a silly air of equality, which was merely insolence, Gaston softly dismissed him, with his ears tingling. The carpenter proved his right to be a friend of Gaston's by not changing countenance and by never speaking of the thing afterwards.

His career was interesting during the eighteen months wherein society papers chatted of him amiably and romantically. He had entered into the joys of hunting with enthusiasm and success, and had made a fast and admiring friend of Captain Maudsley; while Saracen held his own grandly. He had dined with country people, and had dined them; had entered upon the fag-end of the London season with keen, amused enjoyment; and had engrafted every little use of the convention. The art was learned, but the man was always apart from it; using it as a toy, yet not despising it; for, as he said, it had its points, it was necessary. There was yachting in the summer; but he was keener to know the life of England and his heritage than to roam afar, and most of the year was spent on the estate and thereabouts: with the steward, with the justices of the peace, in the fields, in the kennels, among the accounts.

To-day he was in London, haunting Tattersall's, the East End, the docks, his club, the London Library--he had a taste for English history, especially for that of the seventeenth century; he saturated himself with it: to-morrow he would present to his grandfather a scheme for improving the estate and benefiting the cottagers. Or he would suddenly enter the village school, and daze and charm the children by asking them strange yet simple questions, which sent a shiver of interest to their faces.

One day at the close of his second hunting-season there was to be a ball at the Court, the first public declaration of acceptance by his people; for, at his wish, they did not entertain for him in town the previous season--Lady Belward had not lived in town for years. But all had gone so well, if not with absolute smoothness, and with some strangeness,--that Gaston had become an integral part of their life, and they had ceased to look for anything sensational.

This ball was to be the seal of their approval. It had been mentioned in 'Truth' with that freshness and point all its own. What character than Gaston's could more appeal to his naive imagination? It said in a piquant note that he did not wear a dagger and sombrero.

Everything was ready. Decorations were up, the cook and the butler had done their parts. At eleven in the morning Gaston had time on his hands. Walking out, he saw two or three children peeping in at the gateway.

He would visit the village school. He found the junior curate troubling the youthful mind with what their godfathers and godmothers did for them, and begging them to do their duty "in that state of life," etc. He listened, wondering at the pious opacity, and presently asked the children to sing. With inimitable melancholy they sang: "Oh, the Roast Beef of Old England!"

Gaston sat back and laughed softly till the curate felt uneasy, till the children, waking to his humour, gurgled a little in the song. With his thumbs caught lightly in his waistcoat pockets, he presently began to talk with the children in an easy, quiet voice. He asked them little out-of-the-way questions, he lifted the school-room from their minds, and then he told them a story, showing them on the map where the place was, giving them distances, the kind of climate, and a dozen other matters of information, without the nature of a lesson. Then he taught them the chorus--the Board forbade it afterwards--of a negro song, which told how those who behaved themselves well in this world should ultimately:

"Blow on, blow on, blow on dat silver horn!"

It was on this day that, as he left the school, he saw Ian Belward driving past. He had not met his uncle since his arrival,--the artist had been in Morocco,--nor had he heard of him save through a note in a newspaper which said that he was giving no powerful work to the world, nor, indeed, had done so for several years; and that he preferred the purlieu of Montparnasse to Holland Park.

They recognised each other. Ian looked his nephew up and down with a cool kind of insolence as he passed, but did not make any salutation. Gaston went straight to the castle. He asked for his uncle, and was told that he had gone to Lady Belward. He wandered to the library: it was empty. He lit a cigar, took down a copy of Matthew Arnold's poems, opening at "Sohrab and Rustum," read it with a quick-beating heart, and then came to "Tristram and Iseult." He knew little of "that Arthur" and his knights of the Round Table, and Iseult of Brittany was a new figure

of romance to him. In Tennyson, he had got no further than "Locksley Hall," which, he said, had a right tune and wrong words; and "Maud," which "was big in pathos." The story and the metre of "Tristram and Iseult" beat in his veins. He got to his feet, and, standing before the window, repeated a verse aloud:

"Cheer, cheer thy dogs into the brake,
O hunter! and without a fear
Thy golden-tassell'd bugle blow,
And through the glades thy pasture take
For thou wilt rouse no sleepers here!
For these thou seest are unmoved;
Cold, cold as those who lived and loved
A thousand years ago."

He was so engrossed that he did not hear the door open. He again repeated the lines with the affectionate modulation of a musician. He knew that they were right. They were hot with life--a life that was no more a part of this peaceful landscape than a palm-tree would be. He felt that he ought to read the poem in a desert, out by the Polar Sea, down on the Amazon, yonder at Nukualofa; that it would fit in with bearding the Spaniards two hundred years ago. Bearding the Spaniards--what did he mean by that? He shut his eyes and saw a picture: A Moorish castle, men firing from the battlements under a blazing sun, a multitude of troops before a tall splendid-looking man, in armour chased with gold and silver, and fine ribbons flying. A woman was lifted upon the battlements. He saw the gold of her necklace shake on her flesh like sunlight on little waves. He heard a cry:

At that moment some one said behind him: "You have your father's romantic manner."

He quietly put down the book, and met the other's eyes with a steady directness.

"Your memory is good, sir."

"Less than thirty years--h'm, not so very long!"

"Looking back--no. You are my father's brother, Ian Belward?"

"Your uncle Ian."

There was a kind of quizzical loftiness in Ian Belward's manner.

"Well, Uncle Ian, my father asked me to say that he hoped you would get as much out of life as he had, and that you would leave it as honest."

"Thank you. That is very like Robert. He loved making little speeches. It is a pity we did not pull together; but I was hasty, and he was rash. He had a foolish career, and you are the result. My mother has told me the story--his and yours."

He sat down, ran his fingers through his grey-brown hair, and looking into a mirror, adjusted the bow of his tie, and flipped the flying ends. The kind of man was new to Gaston: self-indulgent, intelligent, heavily nourished, nonchalant, with a coarse kind of handsomeness. He felt that here was a man of the world, equipped mentally cap-a-pie, as keen as cruel. Reading that in the light of the past, he was ready.

"And yet his rashness will hurt you longer than your haste hurt him."

The artist took the hint bravely.

"That you will have the estate, and I the title, eh? Well, that looks likely just now; but I doubt it all the same. You'll mess the thing one way or another."

He turned from the contemplation of himself, and eyed Gaston lazily. Suddenly he started.

"Begad," he said, "where did you get it?" He rose.

Gaston understood that he saw the resemblance to Sir Gaston Belward.

"Before you were, I am. I am nearer the real stuff."

The other measured his words insolently:

"But the Pocahontas soils the stream--that's plain."

A moment after Gaston was beside the prostrate body of his uncle, feeling his heart.

"Good God," he said, "I didn't think I hit so hard!" He felt the pulse, looked at the livid face, then caught open the waistcoat and put his ear to the chest. He did it all coolly, though swiftly--he was' born for action and incident. And during that moment of suspense he thought of a hundred things, chiefly that, for the sake of the family--the family! --he must not go to trial. There were easier ways.

But presently he found that the heart beat.

"Good! good!" he said, undid the collar, got some water, and rang a bell. Falby came. Gaston ordered some brandy, and asked for Sir William. After the brandy had been given, consciousness returned. Gaston lifted him up.

He presently swallowed more brandy, and while yet his head was at Gaston's shoulder, said:

"You are a hard hitter. But you've certainly lost the game now."

Here he made an effort, and with Gaston's assistance got to his feet. At that moment Falby entered to say that Sir William was not in the house. With a wave of the hand Gaston dismissed him. Deathly pale,

his uncle lifted his eyebrows at the graceful gesture.

"You do it fairly, nephew," he said ironically yet faintly,--"fairly in such little things; but a gentleman, your uncle, your elder, with fists--that smacks of low company!"

Gaston made a frank reply as he smothered his pride

"I am sorry for the blow, sir; but was the fault all mine?"

"The fault? Is that the question? Faults and manners are not the same. At bottom you lack in manners; and that will ruin you at last."

"You slighted my mother!"

"Oh, no! and if I had, you should not have seen it."

"I am not used to swallow insults. It is your way, sir. I know your dealings with my father."

"A little more brandy, please. But your father had manners, after all. You are as rash as he; and in essential matters clownish--which he was not."

Gaston was well in hand now, cooler even than his uncle.

"Perhaps you will sum up your criticism now, sir, to save future explanation; and then accept my apology."

"To apologise for what no gentleman pardons or does, or acknowledges openly when done--H'm! Were it not well to pause in time, and go back to your wild North? Why so difficult a saddle--Tartarin after Napoleon? Think--Tartarin's end!"

Gaston deprecated with a gesture: "Can I do anything for you, sir?"

His uncle now stood up, but swayed a little, and winced from sudden pain. A wave of malice crossed his face.

"It's a pity we are relatives, with France so near," he said, "for I see you love fighting." After an instant he added, with a carelessness as much assumed as natural: "You may ring the bell, and tell Falby to come to my room. And because I am to appear at the flare-up to-night--all in honour of the prodigal's son--this matter is between us, and we meet as loving relatives. You understand my motives, Gaston Robert Belward?"

"Thoroughly."

Gaston rang the bell, and went to open the door for his uncle to pass out. Ian Belward buttoned his close-fitting coat, cast a glance in the mirror, and then eyed Gaston's fine figure and well-cut clothes. In the presence of his nephew, there grew the envy of a man who knew that youth was passing while every hot instinct and passion remained. For his age

he was impossibly young. Well past fifty he looked thirty-five, no more. His luxurious soul loathed the approach of age. Unlike many men of indulgent natures, he loved youth for the sake of his art, and he had sacrificed upon that altar more than most men-sacrificed others. His cruelty was not as that of the roughs of Seven Dials or Belleville, but it was pitiless. He admitted to those who asked him why and wherefore when his selfishness became brutality, that everything had to give way for his work. His painting of Ariadne represented the misery of two women's lives. And of such was his kingdom of Art.

As he now looked at Gaston he was again struck with the resemblance to the portrait in the dining-room, with his foreign out-of-the-way air: something that should be seen beneath the flowing wigs of the Stuart period. He had long wanted to do a statue of the ill-fated Monmouth, and another greater than that. Here was the very man: with a proud, daring, homeless look, a splendid body, and a kind of cavalier conceit. It was significant of him, of his attitude towards himself where his work was concerned, that he suddenly turned and shut the door again, telling Falby, who appeared, to go to his room; and then said:

"You are my debtor, Cadet--I shall call you that: you shall have a chance of paying."

"How?"

In a few concise words he explained, scanning the other's face eagerly.

Gaston showed nothing. He had passed the apogee of irritation.

"A model?" he questioned drily.

"Well, if you put it that way. 'Portrait' sounds better. It shall be Gaston Belward, gentleman; but we will call it in public, 'Monmouth the Trespasser.'"

Gaston did not wince. He had taken all the revenge he needed. The idea rather pleased him than other wise. He had instincts about art, and he liked pictures; statuary, poetry, romance; but he had no standards. He was keen also to see the life of the artist, to touch that aristocracy more distinguished by mind than manners.

"If that gives 'clearance,' yes. And your debt to me?"

"I owe you nothing. You find your own meaning in my words. I was railing, you were serious. Do not be serious. Assume it sometimes, if you will; be amusing mostly. So, you will let me paint you--on your own horse, eh?"

"That is asking much. Where?"

"Well, a sketch here this afternoon, while the thing is hot--if this damned headache stops! Then at my studio in London in the spring, or"--here he laughed--"in Paris. I am modest, you see."

"As you will."

Gaston had had a desire for Paris, and this seemed to give a cue for going. He had tested London nearly all round. He had yet to be presented at St. James's, and elected a member of the Trafalgar Club. Certainly he had not visited the Tower, Windsor Castle, and the Zoo; but that would only disqualify him in the eyes of a colonial.

His uncle's face flushed slightly. He had not expected such good fortune. He felt that he could do anything with this romantic figure. He would do two pictures: Monmouth, and an ancient subject--that legend of the ancient city of Ys, on the coast of Brittany. He had had it in his mind for years. He came back and sat down, keen, eager.

"I've a big subject brewing," he said; "better than the Monmouth, though it is good enough as I shall handle it. It shall be royal, melancholy, devilish: a splendid bastard with creation against him; the best, most fascinating subject in English history. The son dead on against the father--and the uncle!"

He ceased for a minute, fashioning the picture in his mind; his face pale, but alive with interest, which his enthusiasm made into dignity. Then he went on:

"But the other: when the king takes up the woman--his mistress--and rides into the sea with her on his horse, to save the town! By Heaven, with you to sit, it's my chance! You've got it all there in you--the immense manner. You, a nineteenth century gentleman, to do this game of Ridley Court, and paddle round the Row? Not you! You're clever, and you're crafty, and you've a way with you. But you'll come a cropper at this as sure as I shall paint two big pictures--if you'll stand to your word."

"We need not discuss my position here. I am in my proper place--in my father's home. But for the paintings and Paris, as you please."

"That is sensible--Paris is sensible; for you ought to see it right, and I'll show you what half the world never see, and wouldn't appreciate if they did. You've got that old, barbaric taste, romance, and you'll find your metier in Paris."

Gaston now knew the most interesting side of his uncle's character--which few people ever saw, and they mostly women who came to wish they had never felt the force of that occasional enthusiasm. He had been in the National Gallery several times, and over and over again he had visited the picture places in Bond Street as he passed; but he wanted to get behind art life, to dig out the heart of it.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

He was strong enough to admit ignorance
Not to show surprise at anything
Truth waits long, but whips hard

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