Books and Bookmen

ANDREW GOODFELLOW: A Tale of 1805. Helen H. Watson (Mrs. Herbert A. Watson). — Macmillan and Co., London.

The first essay of a new author will always be read with more or less critical interest and curiosity; as by criticism, eulogistic or adverse, its claim to popular favour must be assured. And this book of Mrs. Watson's should win popularity, not only for the subject matter of it, but for the delightfully fresh simple style in which it is written, and which was characteristic of the early part of the 18th century. The scene is laid in Plymouth, and the story opens at the time when all England, figuratively speaking, was up in arms, and determined, by help of "the man of the hour" (Lord Nelson), to teach Napoleon Bonaparte such a lesson that any further attempt to invade England would seem both impossible and undesirable. That England's success was more largely due to the wonderful mesmeric influence that Nelson had over everyone with whom he came in touch, personally or by deputy, than to the strength or efficiency of our navy, is a matter of history, and needs no recapitulation; but the author gives such a pleasing explanation of what was jocularly and affectionately termed in the navy the "Nelson touch," that its definition will not come amiss to the reader.

"And what," asked Dorothy, "is the exact meaning of the Nelson touch?"

The Captain laughed. "Who has been talking to you about the 'Nelson touch'? The phrase savours a little of the theatrical, but it expresses a good deal nevertheless. I take it that it stands for that spirit of enthusiasm which, under Lord Nelson's lead, inspires the whole service and makes it act as one man. It is like the torch which in the old Grecian races was handed on burning from one runner to another. In this manner the race never ended, the torch never burnt itself out. It is a spirit which seems to touch the younger men more than us elders. It makes them put duty, the love of country, the love of God before anything in the shape of self-advancement, greatly as they long for that too. Andrew Goodfellow—the little Lieutenant, as we call him—is, I take it, a good example of what the 'Nelson touch' can make of a man."

"So someone said; how did he acquire it?"

"He was one of that happy band of youngsters, most of them sons of old personal friends, whom Nelson received on the quarter-deck of the Agamemnon when he gave them the three pieces of advice that everybody has heard of—To implicitly obey orders; to consider every man an enemy that spoke ill of the king; to hate a Frenchman like the devil—obedience, patriotism, sound judgment."

The hero of the story, Andrew Goodfellow," was, in the month of May, 1805, on board his ship, Queen Charlotte, lying in Plymouth Dock, waiting for commands from naval headquarters to join the fleet that was to drive the French from the Channel, and decide for all time England's supremacy of the sea. That time hangs heavily on the hands of a seaman in port is proverbial, and Lieutenant Goodfellow, to relieve the tedium spent as much of his time as possible at the house of Miss Maria Drake (a descendant of that famous seamen, Captain Francis Drake), whose family had become so impoverished that she had ventured into trade, and was at this date flourishing exceedingly, not only supporting herself in affluence, but also her brother Jonathan, and her sister, Sallie Drake. Some years before this story opens, another sister (Susan) had contracted a secret marriage with a young naval officer named Lovel. Soon after their marriage they agreed to separate. She, unknown to him, imagining there was something irregular about their union, rendering it not strictly legal. Pride forbade her mentioning this to Lovel, as she thought the error was intended. So they separated, he making ample provision for her, and not afterwards troubling, also through wounded pride, as to what befel his quondam wife beyond the fact that she still lived. In due time a child was born, Dorothy Lovel, the heorine of the story. Of the birth of this child Lovel was unaware. "Mrs. Lovel," as she was called, brought up this child very carefully and tenderly, and at the time the story opens, Dorothy Lovel was of the type of which the poet wrote when he penned the lines: "As sweet as English air can make her," and not only sweet, but unusually intelligent, accomplished and high-bred. Mrs. Lovell had for some time been an invalid, and with some prescience of her approaching death, told her daughter a secret that she had long kept, namely, that she was Lady Dorothy Lovel, daughter of His Grace the "Duke of Middlesex." After her mother's death Dorothy went to live with her aunt, Maria Drake, and there met at a Shakespearian reading, given by her aunt, Andrew Goodfellow, and Austin King, a young journalist who had made a great reputation for himself in journalism, and as the author of several very clever novels, notably "The Westons." King, on seeing Dorothy, falls in love with her, to the great grief and indignation of Sallie Drake, with whom King has had some love passages. Ambition plays a very unworthy part in King's love, and he does not scruple to use underhand means to win and marry her. He discovers beyond doubt that Dorothy's mother was legally married, and has obtained from Corryton-Gifford church, where Dorothy's mother was married, documentary proof. And Dorothy commits the same error her mother committed, a secret marriage. The wedding over, they part at the church door, he going back to his office, she returning with "Constance King," King's sister, to his home at Corryton-Gifford. In the conversation that ensues, Dorothy discovers that it is Constance, and not Austin King, who has written the articles that have made King's reputation. In a flash Dorothy sees the utter unworthiness of King and realises the impossibility of ever living with him.

In a moment, the scales had fallen from her eyes, disclosing the hideous falseness of the man she had promised to love, honour, and obey. His handsome face seemed to her now but a grinning skull from which she turned with horrified loathing; the hand which had pressed hers, which had placed the ring upon her finger, became a bony skeleton whose grip was death—moral if not physical death! Picture, if you can, this poor child, still as yet in her eighteenth year, brought up in the two great virtues of simplicity and sincerity, shielded throughout her life from all that could taint her soul or destroy her belief in the goodness of man, trained in habits of the most undeviating truth; suddenly confronted by this black demon of hypocrisy and falsehood, brought into such close contact with it that it was to become bone of her bone, flesh of her flesh! The first rough awakening in her life had been that half told confession (by her mother) of her father's desertion; then, through Sallie's unkindness, had come the further knowledge that to all women was not given that divine sympathy which she had been taught to regard as a feminine birthright—and now ——

"My God!" she cried, "save me from this living death! Have pity, Lord! and release me from this bondage of sin that has taken hold of me; save me from the consequences of my own folly!"

He had deceived her, lied to her, imposed upon her innocent credulity, mocked at her childlike trust, merely to trap her as a fowler traps the bird he means to destroy! He had lived a long life of deception, so deep that even his sister, poor girl, after many years of companionship had failed to fathom it.

Where did his falseness end? In what other ways had he deceived her? A man who could perjure his soul like that, who could live, for years, on a reputation that did not belong to him, reaping where he had not sowed, using, with contemptible meanness, his sister's talent in order to make for himself a name that he did not deserve, winning the affection of an innocent girl by a mean artifice, to what greater baseness might he not have stooped?

There were moral sins, deeper even than this, of whose existence she only vaguely knew, without fully comprehending; did his wickedness include these also? Sallie! What was his connection with Sallie! Why had he persuaded her into a secret marriage? To what base use might he not desire to put her, now that she was his, body and soul? Yes, not even her soul could escape; she felt it. She felt already the insidious strength of his will, enfolding her as in the coil of the serpent. She should never be able to escape the power of his masterful will; he would crush her into subjection. Slowly, bit by bit, she could see herself yielding to him, sharing in his deceptions, until hypocrisy became part and parcel of her own nature as well as of his.

At that moment she heard on the stairs the noise of Constance's descending footsteps. In another minute she would be there in the room, and her own future life of fraud and deceit would have begun. No, she would not; she could not shield him at the expense of her own honour! She had never loved him, blind little fool that she had been, and now she loathed and hated him!

The desire to be alone, to think the matter out to its desperate close, seized her. She stepped through the open window, crossed the lawn, gilded with the rays of the blessed September sun, harbinger of fruit time and harvest; she found herself close to the wicket gate that opened on to the road leading to the river.

The river! Ah, there at least could be found safety and peace for those who were sad of heart. No definite idea filled her mind, but only a half-formed, shadowy feeling that she must somehow escape from the bondage of dishonour that enthralled her.

The latch yielded to her impatient, trembling fingers; she passed out, closed the gate behind her and fled down the lane, anywhere, anywhere, so long as she might escape the contaminating touch that already seemed to choke her.

She went blindly forward in her stumbling, hasty flight, until she had nearly reached the foot of the lane; the placid breast of the silvery Tamar invited her, nay, even lured her forward.

She hastened her footsteps to meet it; one more curve of the road and she should be within sight of her haven of rest. She turned the corner and there, in the roadway, slowly footing his way up the hill, was Andrew Goodfellow, dear, kind Andrew Goodfellow!

The poor, forlorn, broken-hearted child stretched out her hands to him with a sharp, quick cry of distress.

"Tell me," she cried wildly, "tell me, Andrew, is there such a thing as faith and truth in man?"

He took both her hands in his very quietly and gently.

"What is it?" he asked. "Only tell me what is the matter, and what brings you here alone and unprotected?"

"My God!" she cried, bursting into tears, "save me if you can; I am married to a villain, and his name is Austin King!"

And save her Andrew Goodfellow did. Always impecunious, on account of his great generosity, he has not the wherewithal to send Dorothy to London to her father, whom he rightly thinks is her natural protector, and whom he thinks has only to see Dorothy to love her. On going to Miss Maria to obtain the necessary funds for Dorothy's journey, he finds that lady has departed with King, to seek the fugitive, and so all hope of aid from that quarter has vanished. In despair, and as a last resource, he sells a packet of letters that have been written to him, at different intervals of his life, by Lord Nelson; the Nelson and Goodfellow families being intimately acquainted, and which he values as he values his life and honour. The sale effected, Dorothy is safely escorted to London by "Proctor" (an old and trustworthy man-o'-wars-man) with instructions to put up at the fashionable hostelry of those days, the "White Horse Cellars," and there wait until Dorothy's aunt could arrive. Miss Drake arrives a day after Dorothy, accompanied by Andrew, and they immediately write to the Duke asking for an appointment on important business. After several repulses Andrew determines to waylay the Duke in the Park, but instead manages to get speech with the Duke of Clarence, to whom he tells his story, and successfully enlists his help in the matter, which is rendered all the more readily, as the Prince had been one of the witnesses of the wedding and had remembered the bride's beauty. Soon after this Dorothy in her room at the hotel was trying on sundry dainty wearing apparel, with which the room was strewed, and having attired herself in a dainty brown pelisse trimmed with sable, which emphasised the whiteness of her skin, and surmounting it with a creation of pink roses, and graceful plumes, she turned round to bespeak the admiration that she knew would be given by her aunt and Andrew, when the door was thrown open, and "His Grace the Duke, and Her Grace, the Duchess, of Middlesex," were announced.

It was too late to retreat, too late to do anything. Andrew and Miss Maria shrank simultaneously and instinctively back into the shadowy corner of the room; and Dorothy Lovel stood confronting the father she had never met before. For a moment she said nothing.

The Duchess looked at her husband; her quick womanly instinct read, better than either of them could read for themselves, the feeling struggling in both their hearts: in the girl, resentment, loyalty to her mother, together with the desire to believe in him now, and to forgive the past; in the man, annoyance, pride, and the remembrance of a passion that had been the deepest thing life had ever held for him—while it lasted.

Two thoughts: "oh, he loved her once then!" the other, "the girl must be like her mother," cut like the swift, deep prick of a stiletto into her heart; and then a noble magnanimity closed and healed the wound as soon as it was made.

She stepped forward and held out two motherly arms, that had never till that moment learnt the trick of motherhood.

"My dear," she said, in her soft, beautiful voice, "your father and I have come to claim our daughter. Dorothy, his Dorothy, and mine too, if you will suffer me to be a mother to you."

She took her in her arms and kissed her, and then passed her on to the Duke.

It is difficult to say what the Duke's sensations would have been had he found himself confronted by a buxom country lass, claiming consanguinity, with a west country drawl; worse still had she been some town-bred miss, with an affectation of gentility served up with a mincing accent. But here was a daughter of whom any man might be proud, beautiful, unaffected, with that natural grace that comes with a fine instinct and high breeding, aristocratic enough to satisfy even his fastidious taste, a face in which sincerity, intelligence, cultivation and sorrow had traced their lines, soft, firm, indelible. He breathed the egotist's sigh of satisfaction over the fact, that, belonging as she did to him, she was "all right," a something to be proud of, nothing to disgrace.

"Love me a little, Dorothy, and forgive me if you can for not knowing you before," he said as he kissed her.

"Blood is thicker than water," and Dorothy forgave her father for the sake of her mother. Austin King made strenuous efforts to have the marriage acknowledged, but the Duke managed to convince him that it would be to his interest to give Dorothy her freedom, the more especially as the marriage had not been consummated, and when the suit instituted by King for restitution of conjugal rights came on it was lost, partly by reason of Dorothy being a minor, principally through the absence of the plaintiff. Hearts are won in the recoil, and King now that Dorothy is lost to him, manages to make his peace with Miss Sallie, who shortly after marries him, and, having a strong spice of the Tartan in her composition, Nemesis may be said to be speedily on his track. In the meantime the loves of Andrew and Dorothy had been advancing by leaps and bounds. The little lieutenant could not remember the time when he had not loved Dorothy. The Duke looked on complaisantly, satisfied that her happiness could only lie that way. The Duchess was as a mother to her. But fate had decreed that these true lovers should never know wedded happiness. Now that Dorothy was safely domiciled, Goodfellow was anxious to get back to his duty. Every day the English fleet was on the lookout for the appearance of the French, and the fate of the nation trembled in the balance. But one pleasure he (Andrew) meant to give himself was to witness Dorothy's debut into society, which was to take place on the occasion of the presentation of "Twelfth Night" at Drury Lane Theatre with Mrs. Jordan as Viola. The Drury Lane Theatre of that time was the theatre of that name built by Sheridan in 1794. It was on account of its vast size, laughingly dubbed by Mrs. Siddons the "Wilderness." And a wilderness it proved to be for poor Sheridan, since it was destroyed by fire in 1842, and with it went Sheridan's prosperity. It was a memorable night, this night of Dorothy's debut. Seated in the Royal box was the Prince of Wales, the "First Gentleman of Europe," exchanging brilliant small talk with the still beautiful Duchess of Devonshire, and Beau Brummel. In another box could be seen the "Man of the Hour," Lord Nelson. In the stalls sat Charles and Caroline Lamb, and in front of them Opie, the artist, and his wife, the novelist. Near them sat "Dear Barbara B." and Fanny Kelly, the girl actress, scarce sixteen, "with the divine plain face," and her friend Miss Burrell, "of the beautiful voice." Mrs. Siddons (now retired), too was present, and seated in Madam d'Arblay's box was Dr. Burney and his son, Charles. But the theatre for Andrew only contained two persons, Dorothy and his hero. The play over, final adieus were to be exchanged between the lovers before they went their separate ways, the one to follow the path of duty; the other to wait—which is hardest. The good-byes over, Andrew, turning away, felt himself touched on the shoulder, and behind him stood—Nelson—who tells him that he goes next week to take up the command of the Victory. "My Lord!" Already the lover was forgotten, not forgotten, only more