

When they get the Word at length, it will be, at least, a version of the correct edition. But the report has certainly omitted the greatest Biblical event of the year, and consequently failed to edify us as much as it might otherwise have done. Still some edification we have decidedly obtained.

THE WICKED WOODS OF TOBEREEVIL.

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CHAPTER X.

MAY was now twenty years old, and she considered herself past her youth. She had known herself a tall young person since the age of fifteen; and five years make a long time to look back upon. She had now cast off the crazy imaginations of her earlier days, and settled down to serious middle age. She would have given a very bad account of her past life, if you could by any subtlety have entrapped her into talking about herself. She would have told you that she had been an idle, roving scapegrace, spending her time wandering over moors and haunting mountain caves, making acquaintance with rabbit-burrows and plovers' nests. She had cultivated the excitement of lurking in ambush for hours to watch the flight of an eagle, and the luxury of lying on her back in the long, warm broom, to enjoy with perfect ease the ecstasy of the lark, she had so lived among the animals and birds that she made sisters and brothers of them in her own wild way, and believed that they sympathized with her thoughts, while she had a scent and instinct equal to their own. To be sure, she had picked up a little learning by the way; but everything that was useful she had been apt to forget, whereas, everything that was visionary and romantic had clung to her without effort upon her part. If she had got poetry by heart, and carefully studied portions of Shakespeare and other masters, it was for the pleasure that it gave her, and not through studious desires. Part of her delight in it was the reciting of passages aloud to the winds and the birds, while perched upon a rock in some of her favorite wildernesses. If she had read tales and romances with breathless excitement, it was that she found an unutterable interest in making her way into a world of life and movement, thronged with varieties of people who were in every way different from herself and Aunt Martha. If she devoured the Bible and the lives of the saints, it was because they kindled a magnificent sense of awe within her, and made existence supernatural and heroic. She had composed psalms out of her own worshipping heart, and sung them up to the clouds as she tramped about the hills. She had gathered round her dogs, and tame rabbits, and jackdaws, and improvised long legends and romances for their benefit, in which figured crowds of motley characters, angels and devils, fairies and witches, heroes and villains, every beautiful embodiment of goodness and ugly incarnation of wickedness. She had learned reading from curiosity, spelling from reading, grammar by observation, history in brilliant patches and pictures, and French and Italian by instinct, ear and fancy. She picked up foreign languages as she picked up a tune. Geography, she would declare, had altogether slipped through her fingers; but she knew the names of most places, whether they were near or far away, and what kind of people were found living in them. She knew all about Australia, because Paul Finiston was there. In her roving and questionings, reading and speculations, one idea had been uppermost in her mind, life was a great mystery of joy. In order to penetrate it she climbed high rocks, battled with strong winds, consulted birds, beasts and books, basked in the sun, dreamed by the fireside, prayed, laughed, wept, talked, mused; and at last, when she had explored every outlet of her life to its extreme limits, and wrought her up to a very high pitch of nervous fancy, Aunt Martha, who had been quietly observing her, spoke. It was now quite time that she should give up her childish freedom, and settle down into a useful, well-conducted young woman. On that occasion May had burst into passionate tears. The humdrum life that she was dreading had overtaken her. Time would not spare her to her dear wild life. On receiving her lecture she had disappeared instantly, and for the day; but in the evening she presented herself in the parlor, tidy in person, serious and ashamed. She was going to do all, and be all, that was expected of her.

So, now, May being twenty years old, and having been for three years labouring earnestly to tame herself, and walk in quiet ways, may be fairly said to have sown her wild oats. She wore housewifely clothing and smooth hair. She had put aside romances and plays and poems, and set herself to graver studies. She took to making pastry, and spent a considerable time at her spinning-wheel. She relinquished her idea that an excessive joy was the one object of life, and prayed night and morning to be delivered from her dreams and fancies. She even thought of a likely spot for her grave, and wondered if it could be possible she should live to be as old as Aunt Martha, and then perhaps live longer still. In the meantime she was good to her poor neighbours, and as helpful as she was able; and she kept up her intercourse with the animals and birds. When she went out of a morning to the sunny side of the ruin, and, nestling in the ivy, stretched out a hand and made a cooing sound, they all came round her, rabbits and dogs and ducks and geese and chickens, the calf and the donkey, and the jackdaws from the belfry. Tame and wild, they clustered about her, and fed at her feet or out of her hand; but she petted them now as a superior being, not as formerly, when she was only their companion and playfellow. The enactment of this scene was the one folly of her day, all the rest of the time being spent in serious behavior and steady occupation. She was as staid and demure as any one could wish, or as any one could regret to see her. Miss Martha beheld the wholesome change in the girl, but thought all the time that the change was a little too extreme. Yet how was this to be avoided? What ought a young girl to be? Miss Martha

looked back into her own youth, and sought in vain for any experience which might apply to her niece. Miss Martha had never been imaginative. Where one young person lives entirely with elder people, in an atmosphere at once antiquated and still, romantic and wild, it is likely that the young spirit will be either too much oppressed or too much emancipated. Miss Martha did not quite see this; but she knew that a little change was sometimes wholesome for young people, and she wished May had a little change.

Thus she had not given an absolute denial when Sir John had expressed a wish to see May at Camlough. She had conveyed the idea to the gentleman that, if the ladies of the family exerted themselves properly, she would not insist that the thing could not be done. May, on hearing of the matter, had looked a little frightened, and had said very gravely: "I think I would rather not go." Yet a certain controlled excitement of expectation had evidently hung about her since.

On the day when Katherine came from Camlough to seek her, May, as it happened, was busy in the kitchen. Bridget was out for a holiday; and Miss Martha had stepped down to the meadow with old Nanny to hold counsel over a sickly cow. The sun was hot and strong, the yellow blind in the kitchen was down, and the window open; there was a pot of lavender and sweet-marjoram on the window sill, and the fire winked under the saucers; the walls were glittering with tin implements; and, in the middle of the red-tiled floor, sat May, shelling peas into an earthen dish. She was smooth and neat, and looked suitable to the time and place in her apron and green gingham gown.

From fifteen to twenty May had gained in beauty. She was not of more than middle height, her figure full, yet slender, and replete with all womanly curves and fair lines. Her features were hardly so much regular as harmonious, large enough for dignity, yet small enough for feminine grace. Her eyes had still that brown-purple hue which Paul Finiston had thought so lovely, still those circling tinges of shadow which had charmed the old monk. Her hair was black, with a tinge of brown in it, her complexion of a creamy fairness, which made the darkness of her eyes very deep and striking, and a blush upon her face very perceptible and beautiful. Her mouth was, perhaps, the jewel of her face. Most lips can express joy in smiles and trouble in heaviness. It is a rare thing to see a mouth which shows involuntarily all the subtle shades of feeling that hover between pleasure and pain, all the flickerings of fancy, perhaps the nervousness and steadfastness of a difficult courage. When you knew May awhile, you forgot about the redness of her lips and the loveliness of their curves; you thought more about their thousand unuttered revelations.

"What an odd, ridiculous place!" cried Katherine, as she and her cavalier rode up to the gate of Monasterlea. And there was more here to discern of grandness and quaintness than Miss Archbold could take note of in a week. An artist would have seen it at a glance; but Katherine was not an artist, and saw something very unfinished in the majestic ruin, with the homely cottage in its arms; the picturesque confusion of crosses and rose gardens, blooming hedge and black archways; the acres of mounded graveyard upon one side, and upon the other, and farther away, the corn-fields and the sweet farm-lands. It is true she had seen the place long ago; but she had not then thought it so exceedingly inelegant.

"It is fine!" cried Christopher, with a touch of that enthusiasm which Katherine had never felt, but immediately relapsed into a strain which pleased her better. "You beautified the whole place when you visited it years ago," he said.

The door of Miss Martha's dwelling stood open, and the blinds were all down to keep out the heat. There was no one about, and it suited Miss Archbold's humour at the moment rather to walk in without ceremony, than to stand knocking at the door. Meeting no one, she proceeded to explore the house, looking into rooms, left and right, perfectly unconcerned as to how the dwellers in the cottage might approve of her intrusion. A mocking laugh from the passage came floating over the pea-pods and dishes to May, who looked up with notice of something unusual in the house; and there stood Katherine and her lover in the doorway.

As May arose, with quickened eye and colour, in a pretty confusion to meet her, it must be confessed that Katherine received a shock. She had not counted on finding anything so lovely here; did not want anything so lovely at Camlough. But a moment passed, and the whisper of vanity had soothed and appeased her. She was more beautiful by far even than this; so much so, that there never could be rivalry between herself and this mountain-reared maiden. And in some sense the whisper spoke truth. As a mere piece of flesh and blood, as a statue of perfection to be measured and criticised, she was a handsomer creature than May.

"You have not forgotten me?" she said, smiling, and holding out both her hands, while the folds of her riding-habit fell away from them, making graceful drapery all around her on the floor.

"No, indeed," said May, stepping forward to take the hands.

"This is not my first visit to Monasterlea," said Katherine, tenderly, "and I have very good reason to remember the first."

"She is changed," thought May triumphantly. "And how beautiful she is! Now I should like to go to Camlough."

"Your aunt has promised you to us," said Katherine, "and I have come to know when we may expect you." And all the while Miss Archbold was wondering how May would look if she were not dressed like a housemaid.

(To be continued.)

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