

YOUNG MUSGRAVE.

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"No man can redeem his brother."—Ps. XLIX. 7.

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YOUNG MUSGRAVE.

CHAPTER I.

An Early Meeting.

GEOFF left the cottage when the sun had just risen. He was half-giddy, half-stunned by the strange new light, unexpected up to the last moment, which had been thrown upon the whole question which he had undertaken to solve. He was giddy too with fatigue, the night's watch, the long walk, the want of sleep. Besides all these confusing influences there is something in the atmosphere of the very early morning, the active stillness, the absence of human life, the pre-occupation of Nature with a hundred small (as it were) domestic cares, such as she never exhibits to the eye of man, that moves the mind of an unaccustomed observer to a kind of rapture, bewildering in its solemn influence. To come out from the lonely little house folded among the hills, with all its miseries past and present, its sad story, its secret, the atmosphere of human suffering in it, to all the still glory of the summer morning, was of itself a bewilderment. The same world, and only a step between them: but one all pain and darkness, mortal anguish, and confusion—the other all so clear, so sweet, so still, solemn with the serious beginning of the new day, and in-

instinct with that great, still pressure of something more than what is seen, some soul of earth and sky which goes deeper than all belief, and which no sceptic of the higher kind, but only the gross and earthly, can disbelieve in. Young Geoff disbelieving nothing, his heart full of the faith and conviction of youth, came out into this wide purity and calm with an expansion of all his being. It was all he could do not to burst into sudden tears when he felt the sudden relief—the dew crept to his eyelids though it did not fall, his bosom contracted and expanded as with a sob. To this world of mountain and cloud—of rising sunshine and soft breathing air, and serene delicious silence, pervaded by the soft indistinguishable hum of unseen water and rustling grasses, and minute living creatures unseen too beneath the mountain herbage—what is the noblest palace built with hands but a visible limitation and contraction of the world, an appropriation of a petty corner out of which human conceit makes its centre of the earth? Bampfylde, who had come out with him, and to whom the story Geoff had just heard was not new, felt the relief more simply. He drew a long breath of refreshment and ease, expanding his breast and stretching out his arms; and then this rough vagrant fellow, unconscious of literature, did what Virgil in the *Purgatorio* did in such a morning for his poet companion; he spread both his hands upon the fragrant grass, all heavy with the early dew, and bathed his face and weary eyes.

“That’s life,” said the man of woods and hills; the freshness of nature was all the help he had, all the support as well as all the poetry his maimed existence could possess.

Bampfylde went with his young companion round the shoulder of the hill to show him the way. It was a nearer and shorter road to the level country than that by which they had come, for Geoff was anxious to get home early. Bampfylde pointed out to him the line of road which twisted about and about like a ribbon, crossing now one slope, now another, till it disappeared upon the shadowed side of the green hill which presided over Penninghame, and beyond which the lake gleamed blue, not yet reached by the sunshine.

"It's like the story," he said; "it's like a parable; ye come by Stanton, my young lord, and ye go by Penninghame. It's your nearest way; and there, if you ask at John Armstrong's in the village, ye'll get a trap to take you home."

Geoff was not sufficiently free in mind to be able to give any attention to the parable. Those fantastic symbolisms of accident or circumstance which so often would seem to be arranged like shadows of more important matters by some elfish secondary providence, need a spirit at rest to enter into them. He was glad to be alone, to realize all that he had heard, to compose the wonderful tangle of new information and new thoughts into something coherent, without troubling himself about the fact that he was now bending his steps direct, the representative of Walter Stanton who had been killed, towards the house from which John Musgrave had been wrongfully driven for having killed him. He did not even yet know all the particulars of the story, and as he endeavoured to disentangle them in his mind Geoff felt in his bewilderment that absolute want of control over his own intelligence and