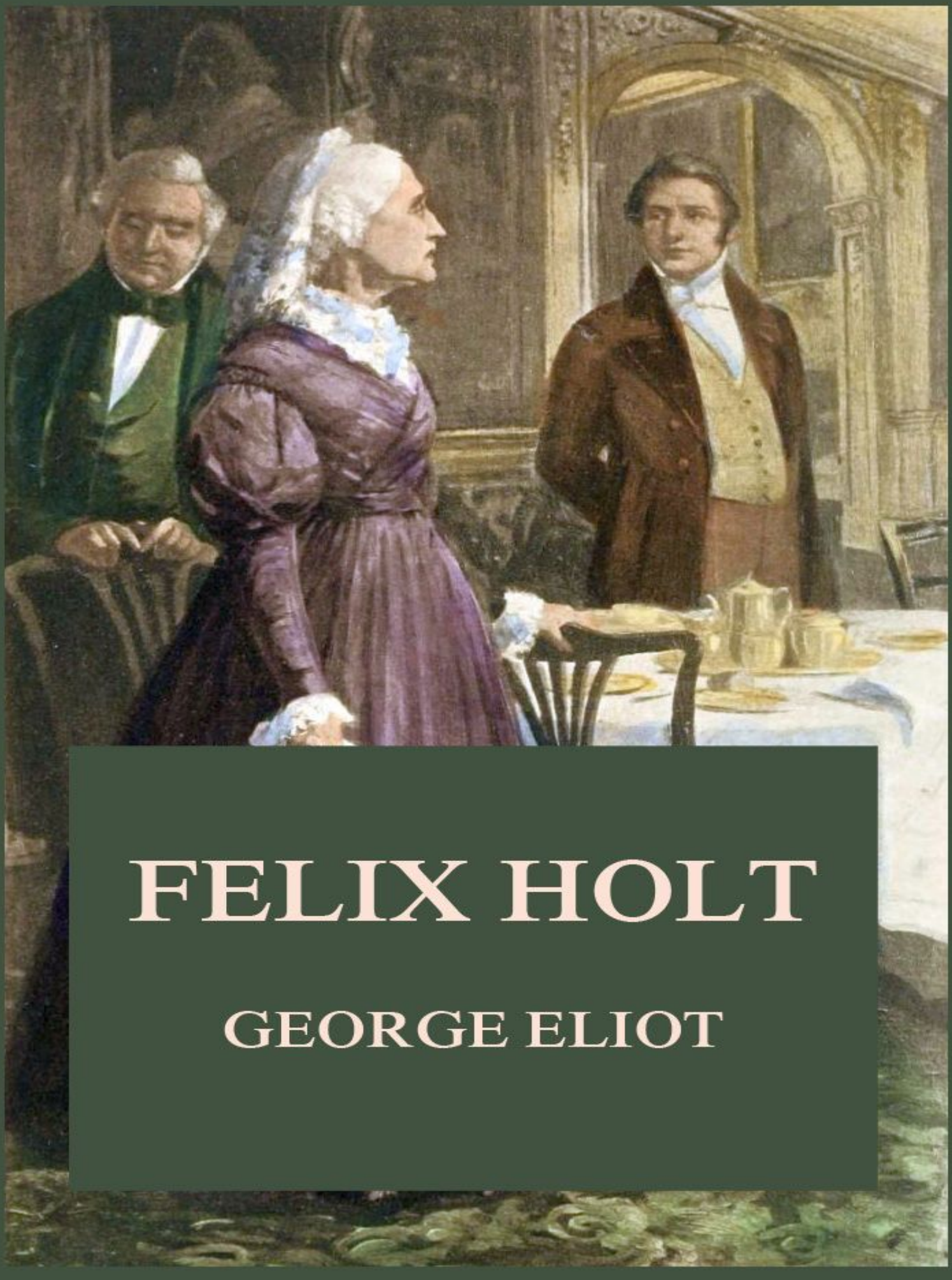

FELIX HOLT

GEORGE ELIOT

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Felix Holt, G. Eliot
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Deutschland

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www.jazzybee-verlag.de
admin@jazzybee-verlag.de

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INTRODUCTION.

Five-and-thirty years ago the glory had not yet departed from the old coach roads: the great roadside inns were still brilliant with well-polished tankards, the smiling glances of pretty barmaids, and the repartees of jocose hostlers; the mail still announced itself by the merry notes of the horn; the hedge-cutter or the rick-thatcher might still know the exact hour by the unfailing yet otherwise meteoric apparition of the pea-green Tally-ho or the yellow Independent; and elderly gentlemen in pony-chaises, quartering nervously to make way for the rolling, swinging swiftness, had not ceased to remark that times were finely changed since they used to see the pack-horses and hear the tinkling of their bells on this very highway.

In those days there were pocket boroughs, a Birmingham unrepresented in Parliament and compelled to make strong representations out of it, unrepealed corn-laws, three-and-sixpenny letters, a brawny and many-breeding pauperism, and other departed evils; but there were some pleasant things, too, which have also departed.*Non omnia grandior ætas quæ fugiamus habet*, says the wise goddess: you have not the best of it in all things, O youngsters! the elderly man has his enviable memories, and not the least of them is the memory of a long journey in mid-spring or autumn on the outside of a stage coach. Posterity may be shot, like a bullet through a tube, by atmospheric pressure, from Winchester to Newcastle: that is a fine result to have among our hopes; but the slow, old fashioned way of getting from one end of our country to the other is the better thing to have in the memory. The tube-journey can never lend much to picture and narrative; it is as barren as an exclamatory O! Whereas, the happy outside passenger, seated on the box from the dawn to the gloaming, gathered enough stories of English life, enough of English labors in

town and country, enough aspects of earth and sky, to make episodes for a modern Odyssey. Suppose only that his journey took him through that central plain, watered at one extremity by the Avon, at the other by the Trent. As the morning silvered the meadows with their long lines of bushy willows marking the water-courses, or burnished the golden corn-ricks clustered near the long roofs of some midland homestead, he saw the full-uddered cows driven from their pasture to the early milking. Perhaps it was the shepherd, head-servant of the farm, who drove them, his sheep-dog following with a heedless, unofficial air, as of a beadle in undress. The shepherd, with a slow and slouching walk, timed by the walk of grazing beasts, moved aside, as if unwillingly, throwing out a monosyllabic hint to his cattle; his glance, accustomed to rest on things very near the earth, seemed to lift itself with difficulty to the coachman. Mail or stage coach for him belonged to the mysterious distant system of things called "Gover'ment," which, whatever it might be, was no business of his, any more than the most outlying nebula or the coal-sacks of the southern hemisphere: his solar system was the parish; the master's temper and the casualties of lambing-time were his region of storms. He cut his bread and bacon with his pocket-knife, and felt no bitterness except in the matter of pauper laborers and the bad-luck that sent contrarious seasons and the sheep-rot. He and his cows were soon left behind, and the homestead, too, with its pond overhung by elder-trees, its untidy kitchen-garden and cone-shaped yew-tree arbor. But everywhere the bushy hedgerows wasted the land with their straggling beauty, shrouded the grassy borders of the pastures with catkined hazels, and tossed their long blackberry branches on the corn-fields. Perhaps they were white with May, or starred with pale pink dog-roses; perhaps the urchins were already nutting among them, or gathering the plenteous crabs. It was worth the journey only to see those hedgerows, the liberal homes of unmarketable beauty—of the purple blossomed, ruby-

berried nightshade, of the wild convolvulus climbing and spreading in tendriled strength till it made a great curtain of pale-green hearts and white trumpets, of the many-tubed honey-suckle which, in its most delicate fragrance, hid a charm more subtle and penetrating than beauty. Even if it were winter, the hedgerows showed their coral, the scarlet haws, the deep-crimson hips, with lingering brown leaves to make a resting-place for the jewels of the hoar-frost. Such hedgerows were often as tall as the laborers' cottages dotted along the lanes, or clustered into a small hamlet, their little dingy windows telling, like thick-filmed eyes, of nothing but the darkness within. The passenger on the coach-box, bowled along above such a hamlet, saw chiefly the roofs of it: probably it turned its back on the road, and seemed to lie away from everything but its own patch of earth and sky, away from the parish church by long fields and green lanes, away from all intercourse except that of tramps. If its face could be seen, it was most likely dirty; but the dirt was Protestant dirt, and the big, bold, gin-breathing tramps were Protestant tramps. There was no sign of superstition near, no crucifix or image to indicate a misguided reverence: the inhabitants were probably so free from superstition that they were in much less awe of the parson than of the overseer. Yet they were saved from the excess of Protestantism by not knowing how to read, and by the absence of handlooms and mines to be the pioneers of Dissent: they were kept safely in the *via media* of indifference, and could have registered themselves in the census by a big black mark as members of the Church of England.

But there were trim cheerful villages too, with a neat or handsome parsonage and gray church set in the midst; there was the pleasant tinkle of the blacksmith's anvil, the patient cart horses waiting at his door; the basket-maker peeling his willow wands in the sunshine; the wheelwright putting his last touch to a blue cart with red wheels; here and there a cottage with bright transparent windows

showing pots full of blooming balsams or geraniums, and little gardens in front all double daisies or dark wallflowers; at the well, clean and comely women carrying yoked buckets, and toward the free school small Britons dawdling on, and handling their marbles in the pockets of unpatched corduroys adorned with brass buttons. The land around was rich and marly, great corn-stacks stood in the rick-yards—for the rick-burners had not found their way hither; the homesteads were those of rich farmers who paid no rent, or had the rare advantage of a lease, and could afford to keep the corn till prices had risen. The coach would be sure to overtake some of them on their way to their outlying fields or to the market-town, sitting heavily on their well-groomed horses, or weighing down one side of an olive-green gig. They probably thought of the coach with some contempt, as an accommodation for people who had not their own gigs, or who, wanting to travel to London and such distant places, belonged to the trading and less solid part of the nation. The passenger on the box could see that this was the district of protuberant optimists, sure that old England was the best of all possible countries, and that if there were any facts which had not fallen under their own observation, they were facts not worth observing: the district of clean little market-towns without manufactures, of fat livings, an aristocratic clergy, and low poor-rates. But as the day wore on the scene would change: the land would begin to be blackened with coal-pits, the rattle of handlooms to be heard in hamlets and villages. Here were powerful men walking queerly with knees bent outward from squatting in the mine, going home to throw themselves down in their blackened flannel and sleep through the daylight, then rise and spend much of their high wages at the ale-house with their fellows of the Benefit Club; here the pale eager faces of the handloom-weavers, men and women, haggard from sitting up late at night to finish the week's work, hardly begun till the Wednesday. Everywhere the cottages and the small

children were dirty, for the languid mothers gave their strength to the loom; pious Dissenting women, perhaps, who took life patiently, and thought that salvation depended chiefly on predestination, and not at all on cleanliness. The gables of Dissenting chapels now made a visible sign of religion, and of a meeting-place to counterbalance the ale-house, even in the hamlets; but if a couple of old termagants were seen tearing each other's caps, it was a safe conclusion that, if they had not received the sacraments of the Church, they had not at least given in to schismatic rites, and were free from the errors of Voluntaryism. The breath of the manufacturing town, which made a cloudy day and a red gloom by night on the horizon, diffused itself over all the surrounding country, filling the air with eager unrest. Here was a population not convinced that old England was as good as possible; here were multitudinous men and women aware that their religion was not exactly the religion of their rulers, who might therefore be better than they were, and who, if better, might alter many things which now made the world perhaps more painful than it need be, and certainly more sinful. Yet there were the gray steeples too, and the churchyards, with their grassy mounds and venerable headstones, sleeping in the sunlight; there were broad fields and homesteads, and fine old woods covering a rising ground, or stretching far by the roadside, allowing only peeps at the park and mansion which they shut in from the working-day world. In these midland districts the traveller passed rapidly from one phase of English life to another: after looking down on a village dingy with coal-dust, noisy with the shaking of looms, he might skirt a parish all of fields, high hedges, and deep rutted lanes; after the coach had rattled over the pavement of a manufacturing town, the scenes of riots and trades-union meetings, it would take him in another ten minutes into a rural region, where the neighborhood of the town was only felt in the advantages of a near market for corn, cheese, and hay, and where men

with a considerable banking account were accustomed to say that "they never meddled with politics themselves." The busy scenes of the shuttle and the wheel, of the roaring furnace, of the shaft and the pulley, seemed to make but crowded nests in the midst of the large-spaced, slow-moving life of homesteads and far-away cottages and oak-sheltered parks. Looking at the dwellings scattered amongst the woody flats and the plowed uplands, under the low gray sky which overhung them with an unchanging stillness as if Time itself were pausing, it was easy for the traveller to conceive that town and country had no pulse in common, except where the handlooms made a far-reaching straggling fringe about the great centres of manufacture; that till the agitation about the Catholics in '29, rural Englishmen had hardly known more of Catholics than of the fossil mammals; and that their notion of Reform was a confused combination of rick-burners, trades-unions, Nottingham riots, and in general whatever required the calling out of the yeomanry. It was still easier to see that, for the most part, they resisted the rotation of crops and stood by their fallows: and the coachman would perhaps tell how in one parish an innovating farmer, who talked of Sir Humphrey Davy, had been fairly driven out by popular dislike, as if he had been a confounded Radical; and how, the parson having one Sunday preached from the words, "Break up your fallow-ground," the people thought he had made the text out of his own head, otherwise it would never have come "so pat" on a matter of business; but when they found it in the Bible at home, some said it was an argument for fallows (else why should the Bible mention fallows?), but a few of the weaker sort were shaken, and thought it was an argument that fallows should be done away with, else the Bible would have said, "Let your fallows lie"; and the next morning the parson had a stroke of apoplexy, which, as coincident with a dispute about fallows, so set the parish against the innovating farmer and the rotation of

crops, that he could stand his ground no longer, and transferred his lease.

The coachman was an excellent travelling companion and commentator on the landscape: he could tell the names of sites and persons, and explain the meaning of groups, as well as the shade of Virgil in a more memorable journey; he had as many stories about parishes, and the men and women in them, as the Wanderer in the "Excursion," only his style was different. His view of life had originally been genial, such as became a man who was well warmed within and without, and held a position of easy, undisputed authority; but the recent initiation of railways had embittered him: he now, as in a perpetual vision, saw the ruined country strewn with shattered limbs, and regarded Mr. Huskisson's death as a proof of God's anger against Stephenson. "Why, every inn on the road would be shut up!" and at that word the coachman looked before him with the blank gaze of one who had driven his coach to the outermost edge of the universe, and saw his leaders plunging into the abyss. Still he would soon relapse from the high prophetic strain to the familiar one of narrative. He knew whose the land was wherever he drove; what noblemen had half-ruined themselves by gambling; who made handsome returns of rent; and who was at daggers-drawn with his eldest son. He perhaps remembered the fathers of actual baronets, and knew stories of their extravagant or stingy housekeeping; whom they had married, whom they had horsewhipped, whether they were particular about preserving their game, and whether they had had much to do with canal companies. About any actual landed proprietor he could also tell whether he was a Reformer or an Anti-Reformer. That was a distinction which had "turned up" in latter times, and along with it the paradox, very puzzling to the coachman's mind, that there were men of old family and large estate who voted for the Bill. He did not grapple with the paradox; he let it pass, with all the discreetness of an experienced theologian or

learned scholiast, preferring to point his whip at some object which could raise no questions.

No such paradox troubled our coachman when, leaving the town of Treby Magna behind him, he drove between the hedges for a mile or so, crossed the queer long bridge over the river Lapp, and then put his horses to a swift gallop up the hill by the low-nestled village of Little Treby, till they were on the fine level road, skirted on one side by grand larches, oaks, and wych elms, which sometimes opened so far as to let the traveller see that there was a park behind them.

How many times in the year, as the coach rolled past the neglected-looking lodges which interrupted the screen of trees, and showed the river winding through a finely-timbered park, had the coachman answered the same questions, or told the same things without being questioned! That?—oh, that was Transome Court, a place there had been a fine sight of lawsuits about. Generations back, the heir of the Transome name had somehow bargained away the estate, and it fell to the Durfeys, very distant connections, who only called themselves Transomes because they had got the estate. But the Durfeys' claim had been disputed over and over again; and the coachman, if he had been asked, would have said, though he might have to fall down dead the next minute, that property didn't always get into the right hands. However, the lawyers had found their luck in it; and people who inherited estates that were lawed about often lived in them as poorly as a mouse in a hollow cheese; and, by what he could make out, that had been the way with these present Durfeys, or Transomes, as they called themselves. As for Mr. Transome, he was as poor, half-witted a fellow as you'd wish to see; but *she* was master, had come of a high family, and had a spirit—you might see it in her eye and the way she sat her horse. Forty years ago, when she came into this country, they said she was a pictur'; but her family was poor, and so she took up with a hatchet-faced fellow like this Transome. And the

eldest son had been just such another as his father, only worse—a wild sort of half-natural, who got into bad company. They said his mother hated him and wished him dead; for she'd got another son, quite of a different cut, who had gone to foreign parts when he was a youngster, and she wanted her favorite to be heir. But heir or no heir, Lawyer Jermyn had had *his* picking out of the estate. Not a door in his big house but what was the finest polished oak, all got off the Transome estate. If anybody liked to believe he paid for it, they were welcome. However, Lawyer Jermyn had sat on that box-seat many and many a time. He had made the wills of most people thereabout. The coachman would not say that Lawyer Jermyn was not the man he would choose to make his own will some day. It was not so well for a lawyer to be over-honest, else he might not be up to other people's tricks. And as for the Transome business, there had been ins and outs in time gone by, so that you couldn't look into it straight backward. At this Mr. Sampson (everybody in North Loamshire knew Sampson's coach) would screw his features into a grimace expressive of entire neutrality, and appear to aim his whip at a particular spot on the horse's flank. If the passenger was curious for further knowledge concerning the Transome affairs, Sampson would shake his head and say there had been fine stories in his time; but he never condescended to state what the stories were. Some attributed this reticence to a wise incredulity, others to a want of memory, others to simple ignorance. But at least Sampson was right in saying that there had been fine stories—meaning, ironically, stories not altogether creditable to the parties concerned.

And such stories often come to be fine in a sense that is not ironical. For there is seldom any wrong-doing which does not carry along with it some downfall of blindly-climbing hopes, some hard entail of suffering, some quickly-satiated desire that survives, with the life in death of old paralytic vice, to see itself cursed by its woeful progeny—some tragic mark of kinship in the one brief life

to the far-stretching life that went before, and to the life that is to come after, such as has raised the pity and terror of men ever since they began to discern between will and destiny. But these things are often unknown to the world; for there is much pain that is quite noiseless; and vibrations that make human agonies are often a mere whisper in the roar of hurrying existence. There are glances of hatred that stab and raise no cry of murder; robberies that leave man or woman forever beggared of peace and joy, yet kept secret by the sufferer—committed to no sound except that of low moans in the night, seen in no writing except that made on the face by the slow months of suppressed anguish and early morning tears. Many an inherited sorrow that has marred a life has been breathed into no human ear.

The poets have told us of a dolorous enchanted forest in the under world. The thorn-bushes there, and the thick-barked stems, have human histories hidden in them; the power of unuttered cries dwells in the passionless-seeming branches, and the red warm blood is darkly feeding the quivering nerves of a sleepless memory that watches through all dreams. These things are a parable.

CHAPTER I.

He left me when the down upon his lip Lay like the shadow of a hovering kiss. "Beautiful mother, do not grieve," he said; "I will be great, and build our fortunes high. And you shall wear the longest train at court, And look so queenly, all the lords shall say, 'She is a royal changeling: there is some crown Lacks the right head, since hers wears naught but braids.'" O, he is coming now— but I am gray: And he——

On the first of September, in the memorable year 1832, some one was expected at Transome Court. As early as two o'clock in the afternoon the aged lodge-keeper had opened the heavy gate, green as the tree trunks were green with nature's powdery paint, deposited year after year. Already in the village of Little Treby, which lay on the side of a steep hill not far off the lodge-gates, the elder matrons sat in their best gowns at the few cottage doors bordering the road, that they might be ready to get up and make their courtesy when a travelling carriage should come in sight; and beyond the village several small boys were stationed on the look-out, intending to run a race to the barn-like old church, where the sexton waited in the belfry ready to set the one bell in joyful agitation just at the right moment.

The old lodge-keeper had opened the gate and left it in the charge of his lame wife, because he was wanted at the Court to sweep away the leaves, and perhaps to help in the stables. For though Transome Court was a large mansion, built in the fashion of Queen Anne's time, with a park and grounds as fine as any to be seen in Loamshire, there were very few servants about it. Especially, it seemed, there must be a lack of gardeners; for, except on the terrace

surrounded with a stone parapet in front of the house, where there was a parterre, kept with some neatness, grass had spread itself over the gravel walks, and over all the low mounds once carefully cut as black beds for the shrubs and larger plants. Many of the windows had the shutters closed, and under the grand Scotch fir that stooped toward one corner, the brown fir-needles of many years lay in a small stone balcony in front of two such darkened windows. All round, both near and far, there were grand trees, motionless in the still sunshine, and, like all large motionless things, seemed to add to the stillness. Here and there a leaf fluttered down; petals fell in a silent shower; a heavy moth fluttered by, and, when it settled, seemed to fall wearily; the tiny birds alighted on the walks, and hopped about in perfect tranquillity; even a stray rabbit sat nibbling a leaf that was to its liking, in the middle of a grassy space, with an air that seemed quite impudent in so timid a creature. No sound was to be heard louder than a sleepy hum, and the soft monotony of running water hurrying on to the river that divided the park. Standing on the south or east side of the house, you would never have guessed that an arrival was expected.

But on the west side, where the carriage entrance was, the gates under the stone archway were thrown open; and so was the double door of the entrance-hall, letting in the warm light on the scagliola pillars, the marble statues, and the broad stone staircase, with its matting worn into large holes. And, stronger sign of expectation than all, from one of the doors that surrounded the entrance-hall, there came forth from time to time a lady, who walked lightly over the polished stone floor, and stood on the door-steps and watched and listened. She walked lightly, for her figure was slim and finely formed, though she was between fifty and sixty. She was a tall, proud-looking woman, with abundant gray hair, dark eyes and eyebrows, and a somewhat eagle-like yet not unfeminine face. Her tight-fitting black dress was much worn; the fine lace of her cuffs and collar, and of

the small veil that fell backward over her high comb, was visibly mended; but rare jewels flashed on her hands, which lay on her folded black-clad arms like finely-cut onyx cameos.

Meantime Mrs. Transome went to the door-steps, watching and listening in vain. Each time she returned to the same room; it was a moderate-sized comfortable room, with low ebony bookshelves round it, and it formed an ante-room to a large library, of which a glimpse could be seen through an open doorway, partly obstructed by a heavy tapestry curtain drawn on one side. There was a great deal of tarnished gilding and dinginess on the walls and furniture of this smaller room, but the pictures above the bookcases were all of a cheerful kind: portraits in pastel of pearly-skinned ladies with hair-powder, blue ribbons, and low bodices; a splendid portrait in oils of a Transome in the gorgeous dress of the Restoration; another of a Transome in his boyhood, with his hand on the neck of a small pony; and a large Flemish battle-piece, where war seemed only a picturesque blue-and-red accident in a vast sunny expanse of plain and sky. Probably such cheerful pictures had been chosen because this was Mrs. Transome's usual sitting-room: it was certainly for this reason that, near the chair in which she seated herself each time she re-entered, there hung a picture of a youthful face which bore a strong resemblance to her own: a beardless but masculine face, with rich brown hair hanging low on the forehead, and undulating beside each cheek down to the loose white cravat. Near this same chair were her writing table, with vellum-covered account-books on it, the cabinet in which she kept her neatly-arranged drugs, her basket for her embroidery, a folio volume of architectural engravings from which she took her embroidery-patterns, a number of the "North Loamshire Herald," and the cushion for her fat Blenheim, which was too old and sleepy to notice its mistress's restlessness. For, just now, Mrs. Transome could not abridge the sunny tedium of the day by the feeble

interest of her usual indoor occupations. Her consciousness was absorbed by memories and prospects, and except that she walked to the entrance-door to look out, she sat motionless with folded arms, involuntarily from time to time turning toward the portrait close by her, and as often, when its young brown eyes met hers, turning away again with self-checking resolution.

At last, prompted by some sudden thought or by some sound, she rose and went hastily beyond the tapestry curtain into the library. She paused near the door without speaking: apparently she only wished to see that no harm was being done. A man nearer seventy than sixty was in the act of ranging on a large library-table a series of shallow drawers, some of them containing dried insects, others mineralogical specimens. His pale mild eyes, receding lower jaw, and slight frame, could never have expressed much vigor, either bodily or mental; but he had now the unevenness of gait and feebleness of gesture which tell of a past paralytic seizure. His threadbare clothes were thoroughly brushed: his soft white hair was carefully parted and arranged: he was not a neglected-looking old man; and at his side a fine black retriever, also old, sat on its haunches, and watched him as he went to and fro. But when Mrs. Transome appeared within the doorway, her husband paused in his work and shrank like a timid animal looked at in a cage where flight was impossible. He was conscious of a troublesome intention, for which he had been rebuked before—that of disturbing all his specimens with a view to a new arrangement.

After an interval, in which his wife stood perfectly still, observing him, he began to put back the drawers in their places in the row of cabinets which extended under the bookshelves at one end of the library. When they were all put back and closed, Mrs. Transome turned away, and the frightened old man seated himself with Nimrod the retriever on an ottoman. Peeping at him again, a few minutes after, she saw that he had his arm round Nimrod's

neck, and was uttering his thoughts to the dog in a loud whisper, as little children do to any object near them when they believe themselves unwatched.

At last the sound of the church-bell reached Mrs. Transome's ear, and she knew that before long the sound of wheels must be within hearing; but she did not at once start up and walk to the entrance-door. She sat still, quivering and listening; her lips became pale, her hands were cold and trembling. Was her son really coming? She was far beyond fifty; and since her early gladness in this best-loved boy, the harvest of her life had been scanty. Could it be that now—when her hair was gray, when sight had become one of the day's fatigues, when her young accomplishments seemed almost ludicrous, like the tone of her first harpsichord and the words of the song long browned with age—she was going to reap an assured joy? to feel that the doubtful deeds of her life were justified by the result, since a kind Providence had sanctioned them?—to be no longer tacitly pitied by her neighbors for her lack of money, her imbecile husband, her graceless eldest-born, and the loneliness of her life; but to have at her side a rich, clever, possibly a tender, son? Yes; but there were the fifteen years of separation, and all that had happened in that long time to throw her into the background of her son's memory and affection. And yet—did not men sometimes become more filial in their feeling when experience had mellowed them, and they had themselves become fathers? Still, if Mrs. Transome had expected only her son, she would have trembled less; she expected a little grandson also: and there were reasons why she had not been enraptured when her son had written to her only when he was on the eve of returning that he already had an heir born to him.

But the facts must be accepted as they stood, and, after all, the chief thing was to have her son back again. Such pride, such affection, such hopes as she cherished in this fifty-sixth year of her life, must find their gratification in

him—or nowhere. Once more she glanced at the portrait. The young brown eyes seemed to dwell on her pleasantly; but, turning from it with a sort of impatience, and saying aloud, "Of course he will be altered!" she rose almost with difficulty, and walked more slowly than before across the hall to the entrance-door.

Already the sound of wheels was loud upon the gravel. The momentary surprise of seeing that it was only a post-chaise, without a servant or much luggage, that was passing under the stone archway and then wheeling round against the flight of stone steps, was at once merged in the sense that there was a dark face under a red travelling-cap looking at her from the window. She saw nothing else; she was not even conscious that the small group of her own servants had mustered, or that old Hickes the butler had come forward to open the chaise door. She heard herself called "Mother!" and felt a light kiss on each cheek; but stronger than all that sensation was the consciousness which no previous thought could prepare her for, that this son who had come back to her was a stranger. Three minutes before, she had fancied that, in spite of all changes wrought by fifteen years of separation, she should clasp her son again as she had done at their parting; but in the moment when their eyes met, the sense of strangeness came upon her like a terror. It was not hard to understand that she was agitated, and the son led her across the hall to the sitting-room, closing the door behind them. Then he turned toward her and said, smiling—

"You would not have known me, eh, mother?"

It was perhaps the truth. If she had seen him in a crowd, she might have looked at him without recognition—not, however, without startled wonder; for though the likeness to herself was no longer striking, the years had overlaid it with another likeness which would have arrested her. Before she answered him, his eyes, with a keen restlessness, as unlike as possible to the lingering gaze of

the portrait, had travelled quickly over the room, alighting on her as she said—

"Everything is changed, Harold. I am an old woman, you see."

"But straighter and more upright than some of the young ones!" said Harold; inwardly, however, feeling that age had made his mother's face very anxious and eager. "The old women at Smyrna are like sacks. You've not got clumsy and shapeless. How is it I have the trick of getting fat?" (Here Harold lifted his arm and spread out his plump hand.) "I remember my father was as thin as a herring. How is my father? Where is he?"

Mrs. Transome just pointed to the curtained doorway, and let her son pass through it alone. She was not given to tears: but now, under the pressure of emotion that could find no other vent, they burst forth. She took care that they should be silent tears, and before Harold came out of the library again they were dried. Mrs. Transome had not the feminine tendency to seek influence through pathos; she had been used to rule in virtue of acknowledged superiority. The consciousness that she had to make her son's acquaintance, and that her knowledge of the youth of nineteen might help her little in interpreting the man of thirty-four, had fallen like lead on her soul; but in this new acquaintance of theirs she cared especially that her son, who had seen a strange world, should feel that he was come home to a mother who was to be consulted on all things, and who could supply his lack of the local experience necessary to an English landholder. Her part in life had been that of the clever sinner, and she was equipped with the views, the reasons, and the habits which belonged to that character; life would have little meaning for her if she were to be gently thrust aside as a harmless elderly woman. And besides, there were secrets which her son must never know. So, by the time Harold came from the library again, the traces of tears were not discernible, except to a very careful observer. And he did not observe

his mother carefully; his eyes only glanced at her on their way to the *North Loamshire Herald*, lying on the table near her, which he took up with his left hand, as he said—

"Gad! what a wreck poor father is! Paralysis, eh? Terribly shrunk and shaken—crawls about among his books and beetles as usual, though. Well, it's a slow and easy death. But he's not much over sixty-five, is he?"

"Sixty-seven, counting by birthdays; but your father was born old, I think," said Mrs. Transome, a little flushed with the determination not to show any unasked for feeling. Her son did not notice her. All the time he had been speaking his eyes had been running down the columns of the newspaper.

"But your little boy, Harold—where is he? How is it he has not come with you?"

"Oh, I left him behind, in town," said Harold, still looking at the paper. "My man Dominic will bring him, with the rest of the luggage. Ah, I see it is young Debarry, and not my old friend Sir Maximus, who is offering himself as candidate for North Loamshire."

"Yes. You did not answer me when I wrote to you to London about your standing. There is no other Tory candidate spoken of, and you would have all the Debarry interest."

"I hardly think that," said Harold, significantly.

"Why? Jermyn says a Tory candidate can never be got in without it."

"But I shall not be a Tory candidate."

Mrs. Transome felt something like an electric shock.

"What then?" she said, almost sharply. "You will not call yourself a Whig?"

"God forbid! I'm a Radical."

Mrs. Transome's limbs tottered; she sank into a chair. Here was a distinct confirmation of the vague but strong feeling that her son was a stranger to her. Here was a revelation to which it seemed almost as impossible to adjust her hopes and notions of a dignified life as if her son

had said that he had been converted to Mahometanism at Smyrna, and had four wives, instead of one son, shortly to arrive under the care of Dominic. For the moment she had a sickening feeling that it was of no use that the long-delayed good fortune had come at last—all of no use though the unloved Durfey was dead and buried, and though Harold had come home with plenty of money. There were rich Radicals, she was aware, as there were rich Jews and Dissenters, but she had never thought of them as county people. Sir Francis Burdett had been generally regarded as a madman. It was better to ask no questions, but silently to prepare herself for anything else there might be to come.

"Will you go to your rooms, Harold, and see if there is anything you would like to have altered?"

"Yes, let us go," said Harold, throwing down the newspaper, in which he had been rapidly reading almost every advertisement while his mother had been going through her sharp inward struggle. "Uncle Lingon is on the bench still, I see," he went on, as he followed her across the hall; "is he at home—will he be here this evening?"

"He says you must go to the rectory when you want to see him. You must remember you have come back to a family with old-fashioned notions. Your uncle thought I ought to have you to myself in the first hour or two. He remembered that I had not seen my son for fifteen years."

"Ah, by Jove! fifteen years—so it is!" said Harold, taking his mother's hand and drawing it under his arm; for he had perceived that her words were charged with an intention. "And you are as straight as an arrow still; you will carry the shawls I have brought you as well as ever."

They walked up the broad stone steps together in silence. Under the shock of discovering her son's Radicalism, Mrs. Transome had no impulse to say one thing rather than another; as in a man who had just been branded on the forehead all wonted motives would be uprooted. Harold, on his side, had no wish opposed to filial kindness, but his busy thoughts were determined by habits which had no

reference to any woman's feelings; and even if he could have conceived what his mother's feeling was, his mind, after that momentary arrest, would have darted forward on its usual course.

"I have given you the south rooms, Harold," said Mrs. Transome, as they passed along a corridor lit from above and lined with old family pictures. "I thought they would suit you best, as they all open into each other, and this middle one will make a pleasant sitting-room for you."

"Gad! the furniture is in a bad state," said Harold, glancing around at the middle room which they had just entered; "the moths seem to have got into the carpets and hangings."

"I had no choice except moths or tenants who would pay rent," said Mrs. Transome. "We have been too poor to keep servants for uninhabited rooms."

"What! you've been rather pinched, eh?"

"You find us living as we have been living these twelve years."

"Ah, you've had Durfey's debts as well as the lawsuits—confound them! It will make a hole in sixty thousand pounds to pay off the mortgages. However, he's gone now, poor fellow; and I suppose I should have spent more in buying an English estate some time or other. I always meant to be an Englishman, and thrash a lord or two who thrashed me at Eton."

"I hardly thought you could have meant that, Harold, when I found you had married a foreign wife."

"Would you have had me wait for a consumptive lackadaisical Englishwoman, who would have hung all her relations around my neck? I hate English wives; they want to give their opinion about everything. They interfere with a man's life. I shall not marry again."

Mrs. Transome bit her lip, and turned away to draw up a blind. She would not reply to words which showed how completely any conception of herself and her feelings was excluded from her son's inward world.

As she turned round again she said, "I suppose you have been used to great luxury; these rooms look miserable to you, but you can soon make any alterations you like."

"Oh, I must have a private sitting-room fitted up for myself down-stairs. And the rest are bedrooms, I suppose," he went on, opening a side-door. "Ah, I can sleep here a night or two. But there's a bedroom down-stairs, with an ante-room, I remember, that would do for my man Dominic and the little boy. I should like to have that."

"Your father has slept there for years. He will be like a distracted insect, and never know where to go, if you alter the track he has to walk in."

"That's a pity. I hate going up-stairs."

"There is the steward's room: it is not used, and might be turned into a bedroom. I can't offer you my room, for I sleep up-stairs." (Mrs. Transome's tongue could be a whip upon occasion, but the lash had not fallen on a sensitive spot.)

"No; I'm determined not to sleep up-stairs. We'll see about the steward's room to-morrow, and I dare say I shall find a closet of some sort for Dominic. It's a nuisance he had to stay behind, for I shall have nobody to cook for me. Ah, there's the old river I used to fish in. I often thought, when I was at Smyrna, that I would buy a park with a river through it as much like the Lapp as possible. Gad, what fine oaks those are opposite! Some of them must come down, though."

"I've held every tree sacred on the demesne, as I told you, Harold. I trusted to your getting the estate some time, and releasing it; and I determined to keep it worth releasing. A park without fine timber is no better than a beauty without teeth and hair."

"Bravo, mother!" said Harold, putting his hand on her shoulder. "Ah, you've had to worry yourself about things that don't properly belong to a woman—my father being

weakly. We'll set all that right. You shall have nothing to do now but to be grandmamma on satin cushions."

"You must excuse me from the satin cushions. That is a part of the old woman's duty I am not prepared for. I am used to be chief bailiff, and to sit in the saddle two or three hours every day. There are two farms on our hands besides the Home Farm."

"Phew-ew! Jermyn manages the estate badly, then. That will not last under *my* reign," said Harold, turning on his heel and feeling in his pockets for the keys of his portmanteaus, which had been brought up.

"Perhaps when you've been in England a little longer," said Mrs. Transome, coloring as if she had been a girl, "you will understand better the difficulty there is in letting farms these times."

"I understand the difficulty perfectly, mother. To let farms, a man must have the sense to see what will make them inviting to farmers, and to get sense supplied on demand is just the most difficult transaction I know of. I suppose if I ring there's some fellow who can act as valet and learn to attend to my hookah?"

"There is Hickes the butler, and there is Jabez the footman; those are all the men in the house. They were here when you left."

"Oh, I remember Jabez—he was a dolt. I'll have old Hickes. He was a neat little machine of a butler; his words used to come like the clicks of an engine. He must be an old machine now, though."

"You seem to remember some things about home wonderfully well, Harold."

"Never forget places and people—how they look and what can be done with them. All the country round here lies like a map in my brain. A deuced pretty country too; but the people were a stupid set of old Whigs and Tories. I suppose they are much as they were."

"I am, at least, Harold. You are the first of your family that ever talked of being a Radical. I did not think I was

taking care of our old oaks for that. I always thought Radicals' houses stood staring above poor sticks of young trees and iron hurdles."

"Yes, but the Radical sticks are growing, mother, and half the Tory oaks are rotting," said Harold, with gay carelessness. "You've arranged for Jermyn to be early to-morrow?"

"He will be here to breakfast at nine. But I leave you to Hickes now; we dine in an hour."

Mrs. Transome went away and shut herself in her own dressing-room. It had come to pass now—this meeting with the son who had been the object of so much longing; whom she had longed for before he was born, for whom she had sinned, from whom she had wrenched herself with pain at their parting, and whose coming again had been the one great hope of her years. The moment was gone by; there had been no ecstasy, no gladness even; hardly half an hour had passed, and few words had been spoken, yet with that quickness in weaving new futures which belongs to women whose actions have kept them in habitual fear of consequences, Mrs. Transome thought she saw with all the clearness of demonstration that her son's return had not been a good for her in the sense of making her any happier.

She stood before a tall mirror, going close to it and looking at her face with hard scrutiny, as if it were unrelated to herself. No elderly face can be handsome, looked at in that way; every little detail is startlingly prominent, and the effect of the whole is lost. She saw the dried-up complexion, and the deep lines of bitter discontent about the mouth.

"I am a hag!" she said to herself (she was accustomed to give her thoughts a very sharp outline), "an ugly old woman who happens to be his mother. That is what he sees in me, as I see a stranger in him. I shall count for nothing. I was foolish to expect anything else."

She turned away from the mirror and walked up and down her room.

"What a likeness!" she said, in a loud whisper; "yet, perhaps, no one will see it besides me."

She threw herself into a chair, and sat with a fixed look, seeing nothing that was actually present, but inwardly seeing with painful vividness what had been present with her a little more than thirty years ago—the little round-limbed creature that had been leaning against her knees, and stamping tiny feet, and looking up at her with gurgling laughter. She had thought that the possession of this child would give unity to her life, and make some gladness through the changing years that would grow as fruit out of these early maternal caresses. But nothing had come just as she had wished. The mother's early raptures had lasted but a short time, and even while they lasted there had grown up in the midst of them a hungry desire, like a black poisonous plant feeding in the sunlight,—the desire that her first, rickety, ugly, imbecile child should die, and leave room for her darling, of whom she could be proud. Such desires make life a hideous lottery, where everyday may turn up a blank; where men and women who have the softest beds and the most delicate eating, who have a very large share of that sky and earth which some are born to have no more of than the fraction to be got in a crowded entry, yet grow haggard, fevered, and restless, like those who watch in other lotteries. Day after day, year after year, had yielded blanks; new cares had come, bringing other desires for results quite beyond her grasp, which must also be watched for in the lottery; and all the while the round-limbed pet had been growing into a strong youth, who liked many things better than his mother's caresses, and who had a much keener consciousness of his independent existence than of his relation to her: the lizard's egg, that white rounded passive prettiness, had become a brown, darting, determined lizard. The mother's love is at first an absorbing delight, blunting all other sensibilities; it is an expansion of the animal existence; it enlarges the imagined range for self to move in: but in after years it can only

continue to be joy on the same terms as other long-lived love—that is, by much suppression of self, and power of living in the experience of another. Mrs. Transome had darkly felt the pressure of that unchangeable fact. Yet she had clung to the belief that somehow the possession of this son was the best thing she lived for; to believe otherwise would have made her memory too ghastly a companion. Some time or other, by some means, the estate she was struggling to save from the grasp of the law would be Harold's. Somehow the hated Durfey, the imbecile eldest, who seemed to have become tenacious of a despicable squandering life, would be got rid of; vice might kill him. Meanwhile the estate was burdened: there was no good prospect for any heir. Harold must go and make a career for himself and this was what he was bent on, with a precocious clearness of perception as to the conditions on which he could hope for any advantages in life. Like most energetic natures, he had a strong faith in his luck; he had been gay at their parting, and had promised to make his fortune; and in spite of past disappointments, Harold's possible fortune still made some ground for his mother to plant her hopes in. His luck had not failed him; yet nothing had turned out according to her expectations. Her life had been like a spoiled shabby pleasure-day, in which the music and the processions are all missed, and nothing is left at evening but the weariness of striving after what has been failed of. Harold had gone with the Embassy to Constantinople, under the patronage of a high relative, his mother's cousin; he was to be diplomatist, and work his way upward in public life. But his luck had taken another shape: he had saved the life of an Armenian banker, who in gratitude had offered him a prospect which his practical mind had preferred to the problematic promises of diplomacy and high-born cousinship. Harold had become a merchant and banker at Smyrna; and let the years pass without caring to find the possibility of visiting his early home, and had shown no eagerness to make his life at all