R. D. Blackmore

# CRADOCK NOWELL

(Vol. 1-3)

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## A Tale of the New Forest

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# Volume 1

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# CHAPTER I.

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Within the New Forest, and not far from its western boundary, as defined by the second perambulation of the good King Edward the First, stands the old mansion of the Nowells, the Hall of Nowelhurst. Not content with mere exemption from all feudal service, their estate claims privileges, both by grant and custom. The benefit of Morefall trees in six walks of the forest, the right of digging marl, and turbary illimitable, common of pannage, and license of drawing akermast, pastime even of hawking over some parts of the Crown land,—all these will be catalogued as claims quite indefeasible, if the old estates come to the hammer, through the events that form my story. With many of these privileges the Royal Commissioners will deal in a spirit of scant courtesy, when the Nowell influence is lost in the neighbouring boroughs; but as yet these claims have not been treated like those of some poor commoners.

“Pooh, pooh, my man, don’t be preposterous: you know, as well as I do, these gipsy freedoms were only allowed to balance the harm the deer did”.

And if the rights of that ancient family are ever called in question, some there are which will require a special Act to abolish them. For Charles the Second, of merry memory (saddened somewhat of late years), espied among the maids of honour an uncommonly pretty girl, whose name was Frances Nowell. He suddenly remembered, what had hitherto quite escaped him, how old Sir Cradock Nowell—beautiful Fanny’s father—had saved him from a pike–thrust during Cromwell’s “crowning mercy”. In gratitude, of course,

for this, he began to pay most warm attentions to the Hampshire maiden. He propitiated that ancient knight with the only boon he craved—craved hitherto all in vain—a plenary grant of easements in the neighbourhood of his home. Soon as the charter had received the royal seal and signature, the old gentleman briskly thrust it away in the folds of his velvet mantle. Then taking the same view of gratitude which his liege and master took, home he went without delay to secure his privileges. When the king heard of his departure, without any kissing of hands, he was in no wise disconcerted; it was the very thing he had intended. But when he heard that lovely Fanny was gone in the same old rickety coach, even ere he began to whisper, and with no leave of the queen, His Majesty swore his utmost for nearly half an hour. Then having spent his fury, he laughed at the “sell”, as he would have called it if the slang had been invented, and turned his royal attention to another of his wife’s young maidens.

Nowelhurst Hall looks too respectable for any loose doings of any sort. It stands well away from the weeping of trees, like virtue shy of sentiment, and therefore has all the wealth of foliage shed, just where it pleases, around it. From a rising ground the house has sweet view of all the forest changes, and has seen three hundred springs wake in glory, and three hundred autumns waning. Spreading away from it wider, wider, slopes “the Chase”, as they call it, with great trees stretching paternal arms in the vain attempt to hold it. For two months of the twelve, when the heather is in blossom, all that chase is a glowing reach of amaranth and purple. Then it fades away to pale orange, dim olive, and a rusty brown when Christmas shudders over it; and so throughout young green and russet, till the July tint comes back again. Oftentimes in the fresh spring morning the

blackcocks—“heathpoults” as they call them—lift their necks in the livening heather, swell their ruffing breasts, and crow for their rivals to come and spar with them. Below the chase the whiskers of the curling wood converge into a giant beard, tufted here and there with hues of a varying richness; but for the main of it, swelling and waving, crisping, fronding, feathering, coying, and darkening here and there, until it reach the silver mirror of the spreading sea. And the seaman, looking upwards from the war–ship bound for India, looking back at his native land, for the last of all times it may be, over brushwood waves, and billows of trees, and the long heave of the gorseland: “Now, that’s the sort of place”, he says, as the distant gables glisten; “the right sort of berth for our jolly old admiral, and me for his butler, please God, when we’ve licked them Crappos as ought to be”.

South–west of the house, half a mile away, and scattered along the warren, the simple village of Nowelhurst digests its own ideas. In and out the houses stand, endwise, crossways, skewified, anyhow except upside down, and some even tending that way. It looks like a game of dominoes, when the leaves of the table have opened and gape betwixt the players. Nevertheless, it is all good English; for none are bitterly poor there; in any case of illness, they have the great house to help them, not proudly, but with feeling; and, more than this, they have a parson who leads instead of driving them. There are two little shops exceedingly anxious to under–sell each other, and one mild alehouse conducted strictly upon philosophic principles. Philosophy under pressure, a caviller would call it, for the publican knows, and so do his customers, that if poachers were encouraged there, or any uproarious doings permitted

(except in the week of the old and new year), down would come his license–board, like a flag hauled in at sunset.

Pleasant folk, who there do dwell, calling their existence “life”, and on the whole enjoying it more than many of us do; forasmuch as they know their neighbours far better than themselves, and perceive each cousin’s need of trial, and console him when he gets it. Not but what we ourselves partake the first and second advantages, only we miss the fruition of them, by turning our backs on the sufferer.

Nowelhurst village is not on the main road, but keeps a straggling companionship with a quiet parish highway which requires much encouragement. This little highway does its best to blink the many difficulties, or, if that may not be, to compromise them, and establish a pleasant footing upon its devious wandering course from the Lymington road to Ringwood. Here it goes zig to escape the frown of a heavy–browed crest of furzery, and then it comes zag when no soul expects it, because a little stream has babbled at it. It even seems to bob and dip, or jump, as the case may be, for fear of prying into an old oak’s storey or dusting a piece of grass land. The hard–hearted traveller who lives express, and is bound for the train at Ringwood, curses, too often, up hill and down dale, the quiet lane’s inconsistency. What right has any road to do anything but go straight on end to its purpose? What decent road stops for a gossip with flowers —flowers overhanging the steep ascent, or eavesdropping on the rabbit–holes? And as for the beauty of ferns—confound them, they shelter the horse–fly—that horrible forest–fly, whose tickling no civilized horse can endure. Even locusts he has heard of as abounding in the New Forest; and if a swarm of them comes this very hot weather, good–bye to him, horse and trap, newest patterns, sweet plaid, and chaste things.

And good–bye to thee, thou bustling “traveller”—whether technically so called or otherwise,—a very good fellow in thy way, but not of nature’s pattern. So counter–sunk, so turned in a lathe, so pressed and rolled by steam–power, and then condensed hydraulically, that the extract of flowers upon thy shirt is but as the oil of machinery. But we who carry no chronometer, neither puff locomotively—now he is round the corner—let us saunter down this lane beyond the mark–oak and the blacksmith’s, even to the sandy rise whence the Hall is seen. The rabbits are peeping forth again, for the dew is spreading quietude: the sun has just finished a good day’s work and is off for the western waters. Over the rounded heads and bosses, and then the darker dimples of the many–coloured foliage—many–coloured even now with summer’s glory fusing it—over heads and shoulders, and breasts of heaving green, floods the lucid amber, trembling at its own beauty—the first acknowledged leniency of the July sun. Now every moment has its difference. Having once acknowledged that he may have been too downright in his ride of triumph, the sun, like every generous nature, scatters broadcast his amends. Over holt, and knoll, and lea, and narrow dingle, scooped with shadow where the brook is wimpling, and through the breaks of grass and gravel, where the heather purples, scarcely yet in prime flush, and down the tall wood overhanging, mossed and lichened, green and grey, as the grove of Druids—over, through, and under all flows pervading sunset. Then the birds begin discoursing of the thoughts within them—thoughts that are all happiness, and thrill and swell in utterance. Through the voice of the thicket–birds—the mavis, the whinchats, and the warblers—comes the tap of the yaffingale, the sharp, short cry of the honey–buzzard above the squirrel’s cage, and the plaining of the turtle–dove.

But from birds and flowers, winding roads and woods, and waters where the trout are leaping, come we back to the only thing that interests a man much—the life, the doings, and the death of his fellow–men. From this piece of yellow road, where the tree–roots twist and wrestle, we can see the great old house, winking out of countless windows, deep with sloping shadows, mantling back from the clasp of the forest, in a stately, sad reserve. It looks like a house that can endure and not talk about affliction, that could disclose some tales of passion were it not undignified, that remembers many a generation, and is mildly sorry for them. Oh! house of the Nowells, grey with shadow, wrapped in lonely grandeur, cold with the dews of evening and the tone of sylvan nightfall, never through twenty generations hast thou known a darker fortune than is gathering now around thee, growing through the summer months, deepening ere the leaves drop! All men, we know, are born for trial, to work, to bear, to purify; but some there are whom God has marked for sorrow from their cradle. And strange as it appears to us, whose image is inverted, almost always these are they who *seem* to lack no probation. The gentle and the large of heart, the meek and unpretending, yet gifted with a rank of mind that needs no self–assertion, trebly vexed in this wayfaring, we doubt not they are blest tenfold in the everlasting equipoise.

Perhaps it was the July evening that made me dream and moralise; but now let us gaze from that hill again, under the fringe of autumn’s gold, in the ripeness of October. The rabbits are gone to bed much earlier—comparatively, I mean, with the sun’s retirement—because the dew is getting cold, and so has lost its flavour; and a nest of young weasels is coming abroad, “and really makes it unsafe, my dear”, says Mrs. Bunny to her third family, “to keep our

long–standing engagements”. “Send cards instead”, says the timid Miss Cony; “I can write them, mamma, on a polypod”.

Now though the rabbits shirk their duty, we can see the congregation returning down the village from the church, which is over the bridge, towards Lymington, and seems set aside to meditate. In straggling groups, as gossip lumps them, or the afternoon sermon disposes, home they straggle, wondering whether the girl has kept the fire up. Kept the fire “blissy” is the bodily form of the house–thought. But all the experienced matrons of the village have got together; and two, who have served as monthly nurses, are ready to pull side–hair out. There is nothing like science for setting people hard by the ears and the throat–strings. But we who are up in the forest here can catch no buzz of voices, nor even gather the point of dispute, while they hurry on to recount their arguments, and triumph over the virile mind, which, of course, knows nothing about it.

The question is, when Lady Nowell will give an heir to the name, the house, the village, the estates, worth fifty thousand a year—an heir long time expected, hoped for in vain through six long years, now reasonably looked for. All the matrons have settled that it must be on a Sunday; everybody knows that Sunday is the day for all grand ceremonies. Even Nanny Gammon’s pigs—— But why pursue their arguments—the taste of the present age is so wonderfully nice and delicate. I can only say that the Gammers, who snubbed the Gaffers upon the subject, miscarried by a fortnight, though right enough hebdomadally. They all fixed it for that day fortnight, but it was done while they were predicting. And not even the monthly nurses anticipated, no one ever guessed at the contingency of—twins.

# CHAPTER II.

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“Whishtrew, whishtrew, every bit of me! Whativer will I do, God knows. The blue ribbon there forenint me, and the blessed infants one to aich side”!

The good nurse fell against a chest of drawers, as she uttered this loud lament; the colour ebbed from her cherry cheeks, and her sturdy form shook with terror. She had scarcely turned her back, she could swear, upon her precious charges; and now only look at the murder of it! Two little cots stood side by side, not more than four feet asunder; and on each cot fast asleep lay a fine baby, some three or four days old. Upon the floor between them was a small rosette of blue ribbon. The infants were slumbering happily; and breathing as calmly as could be. Each queer little dump of a face was nestled into its pillow; and a small red podge, which was meant for an arm, lay crosswise upon the flannel. Nothing could look more delicious to the eyes of a fine young woman.

Nevertheless, that fine young woman, Mrs. Biddy O’Gaghan, stood gazing from one cot to the other, in hopeless and helpless dismay. Her comely round face was drawn out with horror, her mouth wide open, and large tears stealing into her broad blue Irish eyes.

“And the illigant spots upon them, as like as two Blemishing spannels; nor the blissed saints in heaven, if so be they was tuk to glory, afore they do be made hairyticks, cudn’t know one from the ither, no more nor the winds from the brazes. And there go the doctor’s bell again! Oh whurra–strew, whurra, whurra”!

Now Biddy O’Gaghan would scarcely have been head–nurse at Nowelhurst Hall, before she was thirty years old, but for her quick self–reliance. She was not the woman therefore to wring her hands long, and look foolish. Her Irish wit soon suggested so many modes of solution, all so easy, and all so delightfully free from reason, that the only question was how to listen to all at once. First she went and bolted carefully both the doors of the nursery. Then, with a look of triumph, she rushed to her yellow workbox, snatched up a roll of narrow tape, some pins, and a pair of scissors, and knelt upon the floor very gingerly, where the blue ribbon lay. Then, having pinned one end of the tape to the centre of the rosette, and the rosette itself to the carpet, she let the roll run with one hand, and drew the tape tight with the other, until it arrived at the nose of the babe ensconced in the right–hand cot. There she cut it off sharply, with a snip that awoke the child, who looked at her contemplatively from a pair of large grey eyes. Leaving him to his meditations, she turned the tape on the pin, and drew it towards the nasal apology of the other infant. The measure would not reach; it was short by an inch and a half. What clearer proof could be given of the title to knot and pendency?

But alas for Biddy’s triumph! The infant last geometrised awoke at that very moment, and lifting his soft fat legs, in order to cry with more comfort, disclosed the awkward fact that his left knee was nearer by three inches to the all–important rosette, than was any part of his brother. Biddy shook anew, as she drew the tape to the dimples. What is the legal centre of a human being? Upon my word, I think I should have measured from the *ὀμφαλός*.

Ere further measurement could be essayed, all the premises were gone utterly; for the baby upon the right

contrived to turn in the flannels, as an unsettled silkworm pupa rolls in his cocoon. And he managed to revolve in the wrong direction; it was his fate through life. Instead of coming towards the rosette, as a selfish baby would have done, away he went, with his grey eyes blinking at the handle of the door. Then he put up his lips, like the ring of a limpet, and poked both his little fists into his mouth.

“Well, I never”, cried Bridget; “that settles it altogether. Plase the saints an’ he were a rogue, it’s this way he’d ha’ come over on his blessed little empty belly. My darlin’ dumplin’ dillikins, it’s you as it belongs to, and a fool I must be to doubt of it. Don’t I know the bend o’ your nose, and the way your purty lips dribbles, then? And to think I was near a robbing you! What with the sitting up o’ nights, and the worry of that carroty spalpeen, and the way as they sends my meals up, Paddy O’Gaghan, as is in glory, wud take me for another man’s wife”.

With great relief and strong conviction, Mrs. O’Gaghan began to stitch the truant rosette upon the cap of the last–mentioned baby, whence (or from that of the other) it had dropped through her own loose carelessness, before they were cuddled away. And with that ribbon she stitched upon him the heritage of the old family, the name of “Cradock Nowell”, borne by the eight last baronets, and the largest estates and foremost rank in all the fair county of Hants.

“Sure an’ it won’t come off again”, said Biddy to the baby, as she laid down her needle, for, like all genuine Irishwomen, she despised a thimble; “and it’s meself as is to blame, for not taking a nick on your ear, dear. A big fool I must be only to plait it in afore, and only for thinkin’ as it wud come crossways, when you wint to your blissed mammy, dear. And little more you be likely to get there, I’m afeared, me darlin’. An’ skeared anybody would be to hoort

so much as a hair o’ your skull, until such time as you has any, you little jule of jewels, and I kisses every bit on you, and knows what you be thinking on in the dead hoor of the night. Bless your ticksy–wicksies, and the ground as you shall step on, and the childer as you shall have”.

Unprepared as yet to contemplate the pleasures of paternity, Master Cradock Nowell elect opened great eyes and great mouth, in the untutored wrath of hunger; while from the other cot arose a lusty yell, as of one already visited by the injustice of the world. This bitter cry awoke the softness and the faint misgivings of the Irishwoman’s heart.

“And the pity of the world it is ye can’t both be the eldest. And bedad you should, if Biddy O’Gaghan had the making of the laws. There shan’t be any one iver can say as ye haven’t had justice, me honey”.

Leaving both the unconscious claimants snugly wrapped and smiling, she called to her assistants, now calmly at tea in an inner room. “Miss Penny, run down now just, without thinking, and give my compliments, Mrs. O’Gaghan’s kind compliments to the housekeeper’s room, and would Mrs. Toaster oblige me with her big square scales? No weights you needn’t bring, you know. Only the scales, and be quick with them”.

“And please, ma’am, what shall I say as you wants them for”?

“Never you mind, Jane Penny. Wait you till your betters asks of you. And mayn’t I weigh my grandfather’s silver, without ask you, Jane Penny? And likely you’d rather not, and good reason for that same, I dessay, after the way as I leaves it open”.

Overlooking this innuendo, as well as the slight difficulty of weighing, without weights, imaginary bullion, Miss Penny

hurried away; for the wrath of the nurse was rising, and it was not a thing to be tampered with. When Jane returned with the beam of justice, and lingered fondly in the doorway to watch its application, the head–nurse sidled her grandly into the little room, and turned the key upon her.

“Go and finish your tea, Miss Penny. No draughts in this room, if you please, miss. Save their little sowls, and divil a hair upon them. Now come here, my two chickabiddies”.

Adjusting the scales on the bed, where at night she lay with the infants warm upon her, she took the two red lumps of innocence in her well–rounded arms, and laid one in either scale. As she did so, they both looked up and smiled: it reminded them, I suppose, of being laid in their cradles. Blessing them both, and without any nervousness—for to her it could make no difference—she raised by the handle the balance. It was a very nice question—which baby rose first from the counterpane. So very slight was the difference, that the rosette itself might almost have turned the scale. But there was a perceptible difference, of perhaps about half an ounce, and that in favour of the sweet–tempered babe who now possessed the ribbon; and who, as the other rose slowly before him, drew up his own little toes, and tried prematurely to crow at him. Prematurely, my boy, in many ways.

No further mistrust was left in the mind of Mrs. O’Gaghan. Henceforth that rosetted infant is like to outweigh and outmeasure his brother, a hundredfold, a thousandfold, in every balance, by every standard, save those of self, and of true love, and perhaps of the kingdom of Heaven.

# CHAPTER III.

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The reason why Mrs. O'Gaghan, generally so prompt and careful, though never very lucid, had neglected better precautions in a matter so important, was simply and solely this—Lady Nowell, the delicate mother, was dying. It had been known, ever since the birth, that she had scarcely any chance of recovery. And Biddy loved her with all her warm heart, and so did every one in the house who owned a heart that could love. In the great anxiety, all things were upside down. None of the servants knew where to go for orders, and few could act without them; the housekeeper was all abroad; house–steward there was none; head–butler Hogstaff cried in his pantry, and wiped his eyes with the leathers; and, as for the master of them all, Sir Cradock Nowell himself, he rarely left the darkened room, and when he did he could not see well.

A sweet frail creature the young mother was, wedded too early, as happens here more often than we are aware of. Then disappointed, and grieving still more at her husband's disappointment, she had set her whole heart so long and so vainly upon prospective happiness, that now it was come she had not the strength to do anything more than smile at it. And smile she did, very sweetly, all the time she knew she was dying; she felt so proud of those two fine boys, and could not think how she had them. Ever so many times Sir Cradock, hanging fondly over her wan, sweet face, ordered the little wretches away, who would keep on coming to trouble her. But every time she looked up at him with such a feeble glory, and such a dash of humour—"You've got them

at last, and now you don’t care a bit about them; but oh! please do for my sake”; every time her fading eyes followed them to the door, so that the loving husband, cold with the shadow of the coming void, had to whisper, “Bring them back, put them here between us”.

Although he knew that she was dying, he could not feel it yet; the mind admitted that fearful truth, but the heart repulsed it. Further as she sunk, and further yet, from his pleading gaze, the closer to her side he crept, the more he clasped her shadowy hands, and raised her drooping neck; the fonder grew the entreating words, the whispers of the love–time, faint smiles that hoped to win her smile, although they moved in tears. And smile she did once more on earth, through the ashy hue—the shadow of the soul’s wings fluttering—when two fresh lives, bought by her death, were shown for the farewell to her.

“And if it’s wrong, then, she’ll make it right”, thought the conscientious Biddy. “I can take my oath on’t she knowed the differ from the very first; though nobody else couldn’t see it, barring the caps they was put in. Now, if only that gossoon will consent to her see them, once more, and it can’t hurt, the poor darlin’—and the blessing as comes from the death’s gaze—— ”

Mrs. O’Gaghan’s doubts were ended by the entrance of the doctor, a spare, short man, with a fiery face, red hair, and quick little eyes. He was not more than thirty years old, but knew his duties thoroughly; nevertheless, he would not have been there but for the sudden emergency. He was now come to fetch the nurse, having observed that the poor mother’s eyes were gleaming feebly, once and again, towards the door that led to the nursery; and at last she had tried to raise her hand, and point in that direction. So in came Biddy, sobbing hard, with a babe on either arm; and

she curtseyed cleverly to Sir Cradock without disturbing the equipoise. But the mother's glance was not judicial, as poor Biddy had expected—her heart and soul were far beyond rosettes, and even titles. In one long, yearning look, she lingered on her new–born babes, then turned those hazy eyes in fondness to her kneeling husband's, then tried to pray or bless the three, and shivered twice, and died.

For days and weeks Sir Cradock Nowell bore his life, but did not live. All his clear intellect and strong will, noble plans, and useful labours, all his sense of truth and greatness, lay benumbed and frozen in the cold track of death. He could not bear to see his children, he would not even hear of them; "they had robbed him of his loved one, and what good were they? Little red things; perhaps he would love them when they grew like their mother". Those were not his expressions, for he was proud and shy; but that was the form his thoughts would take, if they could take any. No wonder that he, for a time, was lost beyond the verge of reason; because that blow, which most of all stuns and defeats the upright man, had descended on him—the blow to the sense of justice. This a man of large mind feels often from his fellow–men, never from his Maker. But Sir Cradock was a man of intellect, rather than of mind. To me a large mind seems to be strong intellect quickened with warm heart. Sir Cradock Nowell had plenty of intellect, and plenty of heart as well, but he kept the two asunder. So much the better for getting on in the world; so much the worse for dealing with God. A man so constituted rarely wins, till overborne by trouble, that only knowledge which falls (like genius) where our Father listeth. So the bereaved man measured justice by the ells and inches of this world.

And it did seem very hard, that he who had lived for twenty years, from light youth up to the balance age of

forty, not only without harming any fellow–mortal, but, upon fair average, to do good in the world—it seemed, I say—it was, thought he—most unjust that such a man could not set his serious heart upon one little treasure without losing it the moment he had learned its value. Now, with pride to spur sad memory—bronze spurs to a marble horse—he remembered how his lovely Violet chose him from all others. Gallant suitors crowded round her, for she was rich as well as beautiful; but she quietly came from out them all for him, a man of twice her age. And he who had cared for none till then, and had begun to look on woman as a stubby–bearded man looks back at the romance of his first lather, he first admired her grace and beauty, then her warmth of heart and wit, then, scorning all analysis, her own sweet self; and loved her.

A few days after the funeral he was walking sadly up and down in his lonely library, caring no whit for his once–loved books, for the news of the day, or his business, and listless to look at anything, even the autumn sunset; when the door was opened quietly, and shyly through the shadows stole his schoolfellow of yore, his truest friend, John Rosedew. With this gentleman I take a very serious liberty; but he never yet was known to resent a liberty taken honestly. That, however, does not justify me. “John Rosedew” I intend to call him, because he likes it best; and so he would though ten times a Bachelor of Divinity, a late Vice–Principal of his college, and the present Rector of Nowelhurst. Formerly I did my best, loving well the character, to describe that simple–minded, tender–hearted yeoman, John Huxtable, of Tossil’s Barton, in the county of Devon. Like his, as like any two of Nature’s ever–varied works, were the native grain and staple of the Rev. John Rosedew. Beside those little inborn and indying variations which Nature still insists on, that she

may know her sons apart, those two genial Britons differed both in mental and bodily endowments, and through education. In spite of that, they were, and are, as like to one another as any two men can be who have no smallness in them. Small men run pretty much of a muchness; as the calibre increases, so the divergence multiplies.

Farmer Huxtable was no fool; but having once learned to sign his name, he had attained his maximum of literary development; John Rosedew, on the other hand, although a strong and well–built man, who had pulled a good oar in his day, was not, in bulk and stature, a match for Hercules or Milo. Unpretending, gentle, a lover of the truth, easily content with others, but never with himself, even now, at the age of forty, he had not overcome the bashfulness and diffidence of a fine and sensitive nature. And, first–rate scholar as he was, he would have lost his class at Oxford solely through that shyness, unless a kind examiner, who saw his blushing agony, had turned from some commonplace of Sophocles to a glorious passage of Pindar. Then, carried away by the noble poet, John Rosedew forgot the schools, the audience, even the row of examiners, and gave grand thoughts their grand expression, breathing free as the winds of heaven. Nor till his voice began to falter from the high emotion, and his heart beat fast, though not from shame, and the tears of genius touched by genius were difficult to check, not till then knew he, or guessed, that every eye was fixed upon him, that every heart was thrilling, that even the stiff examiners bent forward like eager children, and the young men in the gallery could scarcely keep from cheering. Then suddenly, in the full sweep of magnificence, he stopped, like an eagle shot.

Now the parson, ruddy cheeked, with a lock of light brown hair astray upon his forehead, and his pale, blue eyes

looking much as if he had just awoke and rubbed them, came shyly and with deep embarrassment into the darkening room. For days and days he had thought and thought, but could not at all determine whether, and when, and how, he ought to visit his ancient friend. His own heart first suggested that he ought to go at once, if only to show the bereaved one that still there were some to love him. To this right impulse—and the impulse of a heart like this could seldom be a wrong one—rose counter–checks of worldly knowledge, such little as he had. And it seemed to many people strange and unaccountable, that if Mr. Rosedew piqued himself upon anything whatever, it was not on his learning, his purity, or benevolence, it was not on his gentle bearing, or the chivalry of his soul, but on a fine acquirement, whereof in all opinions (except, indeed, his own) he possessed no jot or tittle—a strictly–disciplined and astute experience of the world. Now this supposed experience told him that it might seem coarse and forward to offer the hard grasp of friendship ere the soft clasp of love was cold; that he, as the clergyman of the parish, would appear to presume upon his office; that no proud man could ever bear to have his anguish pryed into. These, and many other misgivings and objections, met his eager longings to help his dear old friend.

Suddenly and to his great relief—for he knew not how to begin, though he felt how and mistrusted it—the old friend turned upon him from his lonely pacing, and held out both his hands. Not a word was said by either; what they meant required no telling, or was told by silence. Long time they sat in the western window, John Rosedew keeping his eyes from sunset, which did not suit them then. At last he said, in a low voice, which it cost him much to find—

“What name, dear Cradock, for the younger babe? Your own, of course, for the elder”.

“No name, John, but his sweet mother’s; unless you like to add his uncle’s”.

John Rosedew was puzzled lamentably. He could not bear to worry his friend any more upon the subject; and yet it seemed to him sad, false concord, to christen a boy as “Violet”. But he argued that, in botanical fact, a violet is male as well as female, and at such a time he could not think of thwarting a widower’s yearnings. In spite of all his worldly knowledge, it never occurred to his simple mind that poor Sir Cradock meant the lady’s maiden surname, which I believe was “Incledon”. And yet he had suggestive precedent brought even then before him, for Sir Cradock Nowell’s brother bore the name of “Clayton”; which name John Rosedew added now, and found relief in doing so.

Thus it came to pass, that the babe without rosette was baptized as “Violet Clayton”, while the owner of the bauble received the name of “Cradock”—Cradock Nowell, now the ninth in lineal succession. The father was still too broken down to care about being present; godfathers and godmothers made all their vows by proxy. Mrs. O’Gaghan held the infants, and one of them cried, and the other laughed. The rosette was there in all its glory, and received a tidy sprinkle; and the wearer of it was, as usual, the one who took things easily. As the common children said, who came to see the great ones “loustering”, the whole affair was rather like a white burying than a baptism. Nevertheless, the tenants and labourers moistened their semi–regenerate clay with many a fontful of good ale, to ensure the success of the ceremony.

# CHAPTER IV.

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It is not pleasant to recur, to have a relapse of chronology, neither does it show good management on the part of a writer. Nevertheless, being free of time among these forest by–ways, I mean to let the pig now by the ear unfold his tail, or curl it up, as the weather suits him. And now he runs back for a month or two, trailing the rope from his left hind–leg.

Poor Lady Nowell had become a mother, as indeed we learned from the village gossip, nearly a fortnight before the expected time. Dr. Jellicorse Buller, a very skilful man, in whom the Hall had long confided, was suddenly called to London, the day before that on which we last climbed the hill towards Ringwood. With Sir Cradock’s full consent, he obeyed the tempting summons. So in the hurry and flutter of that October Sunday, it seemed a most lucky thing to obtain, in a thinly–peopled district, the prompt attendance of any medical man. And but that a gallant regiment then happened to be on the march from Dorchester to Southampton, there to embark for India, no masculine aid would have been forthcoming till after the event. But the regimental surgeon, whose name was Rufus Hutton, did all that human skill could do, and saved the lives of both the infants, but could not save the young mother. Having earned Sir Cradock’s lasting gratitude, and Biddy O’Gaghan’s strong execrations, he was compelled to rejoin his regiment, then actually embarking.

The twins grew fast, and throve amain, under Mrs. O’Gaghan’s motherly care, and shook the deep–rooted

country faith, that children brought up by hand are sure to be puny weaklings. Nor was it long till nature reasserted her authority, and claimed her rights of compensation. The father began to think more and more, first of his duty towards the dead mother, and then of his duty towards his children; and ere long affection set to work, and drove duty away till called for, which happened as we shall see presently. By the time those two pretty babies were “busy about their teeth”, Cradock Nowell the elder was so deep in odontology, that Biddy herself could not answer him, and was afraid to ask any questions. He watched each little white cropper, as a girl peers day by day into a starting hyacinth. Then, when they could walk, they followed daddy everywhere, and he never was happy without them. It was a pretty thing to see them toddling down the long passages, stopping by the walls to prattle, crawling at the slippery parts, where the newly–invented tiles shone. And the father would dance away backwards from them, forgetting all about the grand servants, clapping his hands to encourage them, and holding an orange as prize for a crawling–race—then whisk away round a corner, and lay his cheek flat to the wainscot, to peep at his sons, and learn which of them was the braver. And in those days, I think, he was proud to find that Cradock Nowell, the heir of the house, was by far the more gallant baby. Which of the two was the prettier, not even sharp Biddy could say; so strongly alike they were, that the palm of beauty belonged to the one who had taken least medicine lately.

Then, as they turned two years and a half, and could jump with both feet at once, without the spectator growing sad on the subject of biped deficiencies, their father would lie down on the carpet, and make them roll and jump over him. He would watch their little spotted legs with intense

appreciation; and if he got an oral sprinkle from childhood's wild sense of humour, instead of depressing him, I declare it quite set him up for the day, sir. And he never bothered himself or them by attempts to forecast their destinies. There they were enjoying themselves, uproariously happy, as proud as Punch of their exploits, and the father a great deal prouder. All three as blest for the moment, as full of life and rapture, as God meant His creatures to be, so often as they are wise enough; and, in the name of God, let them be so!

But then there came a time of spoiling, a time of doing just what they liked, even after their eyes were opening to the light and shadow of right and wrong. If they smiled, or pouted, or even cried—though in that they were very moderate—in a fashion which descended to them from their darling mother, thereupon great right and law, and even toughest prejudice, fell flat as rolled dough before them. So they toddled about most gloriously, with a strong sense of owning the universe.

Next ensued a time of mighty retribution. Astræa, with her feelings hurt, came down for a slashing moment. Fond as he was, and far more weak than he ever had been before, Sir Cradock Nowell was not a fool. He saw it was time to check the license, ere mischief grew irretrievable. Something flagrant occurred one day; both the children were in for it; they knew as well as possible that they were jolly rogues together, and together in their childish counsel they resolved to stand it out. The rumour was that they had stolen into Mrs. Toaster's choicest cupboard, and hardly left enough to smell at in a two–pound pot of green–gage jam. Anyhow, there they stood, scarlet in face and bright of eye, back to back, with their broad white shoulders, their sturdy legs set wide apart, and their little heels stamping defiantly.

Mrs. Toaster had not the heart to do anything but kiss them, with a number of “O fies”! and they accepted her kisses indignantly, and wiped their lips with their pinafores. They knew that they were in the wrong, but they had not tried to conceal it, and they meant to brazen it out. They looked such a fine pair of lords of the earth, and vindicated their felony with so grand an air; such high contempt of all justice, that Cookey and Hogstaff, empannelled as jury, said, “Drat the little darlings, let ’em have the other pot, mem”! But as their good star would have it, Mrs. O’Gaghan came after them. Upsetting the mere *nisi prius* verdict, she marched them off, one in either hand, to the great judge sitting *in banco*, Sir Cradock himself, in the library. With the sense of heavy wrong upon them, the little hearts began to fail, as they climbed with tugs instead of jumps, and no arithmetic of the steps, the narrow flight of stone stairs that led from regions culinary. But they would not shed a tear, not they, nor even say they were sorry, otherwise Biddy (who herself was crying) would have let them go with the tap of a battledore.

Poor little souls, they got their deserts with very scanty ceremony. When Biddy began to relate their crime, one glance at their father’s face was enough; they hung behind, and dropped their eyes, and flushed all under their curling hair. Yet little did they guess the indignity impending. Hogstaff had followed all the way, and so had Mrs. Toaster, to plead for them. Sir Cradock sent them both away, and told Biddy to wait outside. Then he led his children to an inner room, and calmly explained his intentions. These were of such a nature that the young offenders gazed at each other in dumb amazement and horror, which very soon grew eloquent as the sentence was being executed. But the brave

little fellows cried more, even then, at the indignity than the pain of it.

Then the stern father ordered them out of his sight for the day, and forbade every one to speak to them until the following morning; and away the twins went, hand in hand, down the cold cruel passage, their long flaxen hair all flowing together, and shaking to the sound of their contrite sobs and heart–pangs. At the corner, by the steward's room, they turned with one accord, and looked back wistfully at their father. Sir Cradock had been saying to himself, as he rubbed his hands after the exercise—"A capital day's work: what a deal of good it will do them; the self–willed little rascals"! but the look cast back upon him was so like their mother's when he had done anything to vex her, that away he rushed to his bedroom, and had to wash his face afterwards.

But, of course, he held to his stern resolve to see them no more that evening, otherwise the lesson would be utterly thrown away. Holding to it as he did, the effect surpassed all calculation. It was the turning–point in their lives.

"My boy, you know it hurts me a great deal more than you", says the hypocritical usher, who rather enjoys the cane–swing. The boy knows it is hypocrisy, and is morally hurt more than physically. But wholly different is the result when the patient knows and feels the deep love of the agent, and cannot help believing that justice has flogged the judge. And hitherto their flesh had been intemerate and inviolable; the strictest orders had been issued that none should dare to slap them, and all were only too prone to coax and pet the beautiful angels. Little angels: treated so, they would soon have been little devils. As for the warning given last week, they thought it a bit of facetiousness: so

now was the time, of all times, to strike temperately, but heavily.

That night they went to bed before dark, without having cared for tea or toast, and Biddy’s soft heart ached by the pillow, as they lay in each other’s arms, hugged one another, having now none else in the world to love, and sobbed their little troubles off into moaning slumber.

On the following morning, without any concert or debate, and scarcely asking why, the little things went hand in hand, united more than ever by the recent visitation, as far as the door of their father’s bedroom. There they slank behind a curtain; and when he came out, the rings above fluttered with fear and love and hope. Much as the father’s heart was craving, he made believe to walk onward, till Craddy ran out, neck or nothing, and sprang into his arms.

After this great event, their lives flowed on very happily into boyhood, youth, and manhood. They heartily loved and respected their father; they could never be enough with John Rosedew; and although they quarrelled and fought sometimes, they languished and drooped immediately when parted from one another. As for Biddy O’Gaghan, now a high woman in the household, her only difficulty was that she never could tell of her two boys which to quote as the more astounding.

“If you plase, ma’am”, she always concluded, “there’ll not be so much as the lean of a priest for anybody iver to choose atwane the bootiful two on them. No more than there was on the day when my blissed self—murder now!—any more, I manes, nor the differ a peg can find ’twane a murphy and a purratie. And a Murphy I must be, to tark, so free as I does, of the things as is above me. Says Patrick O’Geoghegan to meself one day—glory be to his sowl, and a gintleman every bit of him, lave out where he had the