

Rolf Boldrewood

*The Miner's
Right, A Tale
of the Australian
Goldfields*

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Chapter I

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I AM in Australia at last--actually in Botany Bay, as we called the colony of New South Wales when Joe Bulder and I first thought of leaving that dear quiet old Dibblestowe Leys in Mid-Kent. More than that, I am a real gold digger--very real, indeed--and the holder of a Miner's Right, a wonderful document, printed and written on parchment, precisely as follows. I ought to know it by heart, good reason have I therefor, I and mine. Here it is, life size, in full. Shall I ever take it out and look at it by stealth in happy days to come, I wonder?

Yes, I am here now, at Yatala, safe enough; as I said before, with my mates--Cyrus Yorke, Joe Bulder, and the Major. But I certainly thought I should never get away from England. One would have imagined that a younger son of a decayed family had never quitted Britain before to find fortune or be otherwise provided for. Also, that Australia was Central Africa, whence ingenuous youth had little more chance of returning than dear old Livingstone.

As for me, Hereward Pole, as I had but little occupation and less money, I was surely the precise kind of emigrant which the old land can so gracefully spare to the new. Gently nurtured, well intentioned, utterly useless, not but what I was fitting myself according to my lights for a colonial career--save the mark!--for I had been nearly a year on a farm in Mid-Kent, for which high privilege I paid, or rather my uncle did, £100 sterling.

So, I had learned to plough indifferently, and could be trusted to harrow, a few side strokes not mattering in that feat of agriculture. I could pronounce confidently on the various samples of seed wheat submitted to me, and I had completely learned the art of colouring a meerschaum by smoking daily and hourly what I then took to be the strongest tobacco manufactured.

It wasn't bad fun. Jane Mangold, the old farmer's daughter, who was coaching me, was a pretty girl, with rosy cheeks, a saucy nose, and no end of soft, fluffy, fair hair. We were capital friends, and she stood by me when I got into disgrace by over-driving the steam-engine one day, and nearly blowing up the flower of the village population of Dibblestowe Leys. Now and then I had a little shooting, and a by-day with the Tickham hounds. Life passed on so peacefully and pleasantly that I was half inclined to think of taking a farm near the Leys at the end of my term, and asking Jane to help with the dairy, poultry, cider, and housekeeping department. Then a little incident happened which changed the current of ideas generally, and my life in particular.

It was one of the fixtures of the Tickham hounds, which sometimes honoured our slowish neighbourhood. Old Mangold, being grumpy, had told me that I might go to Bishop's Cote, or indeed considerably further, for all the help I was to him. I had cheerfully accepted his somewhat ungracious permission, and mounted on a young horse I was schooling for Dick Cheriton, a farmer's son of sporting tastes, I made my way over, pleased with my mount,

satisfied with my boots, and altogether of opinion that I was better treated by fortune than usual.

I could ride, to do myself justice, and shoot. Second whip or under keeper were the only posts for which I was really qualified. I could make a fly and tie it: could somehow hit the piscatorial need of most days and most waters. Mine was rarely an empty basket. In fact, I was like a very large majority of the young Englishmen of the day, in that I could do a number of useless things, mostly relating to field sports and manual accomplishments. Tall and strong, with thickish dark-brown hair, I had my mother's features and dark grey eyes, that didn't usually look anywhere but in people's faces. For the rest I was wholly ignorant of every conceivable form and method of money-making, and could not have earned a crown to save my life.

Please to imagine me sitting sideways on my horse, thinking whether there might be time to have a smoke before the hounds threw off, then suddenly aroused by the rattle of carriage wheels, which denoted a stronger pace than was generally resorted to by county families assembling at a meet. Hastily looking round I saw a pair of grand looking brown horses, which had evidently bolted with a landau containing two ladies. The coachman was sitting still and doing his best, but he had only one rein; the other, broken short, was dangling from the near horse's head. I knew the horses, and, of course, the carriage. I had often remarked them at the village church; they belonged to the squire, who was my host's landlord. I knew, of course, the lady of the Manor by sight, having gazed at her afar off; but the girl, who was by her side in the carriage--pale and proud

yet despairing, with a piteous look of appeal in her large, dark eyes--I had never seen before.

We were both early. The hounds had not yet come up. Save the village apothecary in Antigropelos, and a stray horse-dealer or pad groom, there was hardly a soul near. My resolution was taken in an instant. I knew that the road they were speeding so fast along gradually commenced to descend. A longish hill, flint bestrewn, with a turn and bridge at the end of it, would soon account finally for all concerned.

I took my five-year-old by the head and raced for the hedge and ditch. He gave a highly theatrical jump into the road just by the side of the carriage. I saw both the ladies gaze with astonishment as I sent him up to the head of the reinless carriage horse. 'Help us, oh help us!' cried Mrs. Allerton, 'or we shall be dashed to pieces.' The younger lady did not speak, but looked at me with her pleading eyes in such a way that I felt I could have thrown myself under the wheels then and there to have been of the slightest service.

Nothing so sacrificial was required of me. Jamming my youngster, fortunately one of the bold temperate sort, against the near side carriage horse's shoulder, I got hold of the loose rein, and dragged at his mouth in a way that must have hurt his feelings, if he had any thereabouts. The coachman seconded me well and prudently. Between us we stopped the carriage within a quarter of a mile, and saved the impending smash. The rein was knotted, the bits altered to the lower bar, and peace was restored.

Both ladies were ridiculously grateful, though the younger, after impulsively placing her hand in mine, when

her mother--as I found her to be--had shaken mine several times warmly, rather looked than spoke her thanks.

'Haven't I seen you somewhere?' at length asked the elder lady. 'I am sure I know your face and voice.'

I mentioned something about Dibblestowe Leys and Mr. Mangold.

'Ah, of course, I was stupid not to remember you before. You will tell us what name I shall mention to the Squire, as that of the gentleman who so gallantly saved the lives of his wife and daughter.'

'Hereward Pole,' said I, bowing and blushing--one blushed in those days; 'very much at your service.'

'One of the Poles of Shute, surely not? Why, I remember the old place when I was a girl. And your dear mother, is she still alive? I shall hope to see her again. What a wonderful coincidence. And, now I think of it, you are like her, especially about the brow and eyes.'

'Mamma, perhaps Mr. Pole would like to have his run with the hounds, now that we are all safe. We needn't stay in the road all day. I see they have put the hounds into Hollingbourne Wood. Papa says it was near Durnbank; so if Mr. Pole cuts across these two fields with that clever horse of his he will be just in time.'

'My dearest Ruth, you are a matter-of-fact darling; but I daresay Mr. Pole will enjoy the run after all. You young people are so strong. My poor nerves will be agacé for days, I know. May we hope to see you on Sunday to dinner, my dear Mr. Pole? I suppose Mr. Mangold can spare you on that day.'

'Or even on a week-day, perhaps,' said the young lady maliciously. 'You had better get away; I see something like business over yonder.'

I bowed low, and plunging in a dazed way at the hedge, was mortified to find that my steed adopted the tactics of *multum in parvo*, and got through rather by force of character than activity. However, I flew the next two fences in very creditable style, and reached the outer edge of the covert as Reynard had stolen forth, a few moments in advance of old Countess and Columbine, the detectives of the pack, and was well away with the leading hounds before the carriage was out of sight in the direction of Torry Hill.

The run was a cracker. How well I remember it still. I sailed along in the first flight all through. Indeed, so well was I carried, that I never had a chance of riding the young horse again, as he was promptly snapped up at a large advance upon his previous selling price. A single day with its occurrence brightens or shades a life. Fate takes the dial, and turns the hands with strong slow fingers, and we think we can carve out our own path in life, can choose the good or shun the evil that lieth around us. Now, like children, are we hurried forward or frightened back on the track of doom!

When I returned to the Leys late that evening Jane was most anxious to hear everything about the day. Had there been a good run? Was I well up? Did Dick Cheriton's horse carry me well? She didn't see why I should go riding other people's young horses. My neck was more valuable than Dick's--a gambling, drinking, good-for-nothing fellow. Was the Squire's lady there, and her daughter Miss Ruth? The under-gardener had been down from the hall to see Deborah

the dairy-maid, and had told her that they were going to the meet because Lord Arthur Gordon was to be there. He was staying at the hall.

I must have been more curt than usual in my answers; perhaps I was tired or cross: men sometimes are, for no reason at all, like women. Anyhow, Jane was disappointed, and left off questioning me, saying that 'she supposed I would find my temper after a night's rest. Only she did think--' and here there must have been a few tears, as I found myself consoling her efficiently and protesting all kinds of palliatives, Mr. Mangold having as usual gone to smoke his pipe in the snug sanded kitchen, which he said was a hundred times more comfortable than Jane's smart parlour, which he never would call a drawing-room, much to her distress.

On the following Sunday I announced my intention of going to church, a practice to which I generally conformed on the ground of mixed motives, involving as it did a pleasant walk back through the lanes with Jane. To her wild astonishment and that of the parish generally, I was most cordially greeted by the lady of the Manor; hardly less so by Miss Allerton, and finally carried off in the sacred hall-carriage before the eyes of the dismayed villagers, who looked upon it as something hardly less than a translation to realms Elysian.

On arriving at Allerton Court, a grand old Elizabethan pile, we were met on the steps by the Squire himself, who most warmly acknowledged his indebtedness to me for the signal service which I had rendered his family. Delighted to find that I was the son of his old friend Dunston Pole, while I

was in the neighbourhood he hoped--indeed, he would take no denial--that I must look upon his house as my home. He was aware I was learning farming at the Leys with old Mangold. Very worthy old chap, and paid his rents with much more punctuality than many of the newer lights. Pretty daughter too, Miss Jane. Mind what you're about. Must not go about breaking hearts; though girls look out for themselves nowadays pretty well, he must say that, however. I must come over and shoot. They always thought there was some of the best cock-shooting in England at Allerton Court, and as for hunting, he would mount me to the end of the season. I needn't ride five-year-olds after to-day; though the one I steered to the Hollingbourne must have been a 'nailer,' if his informant spoke truly.

The Squire's address was fragmentary and conventional, but the tone of my whole reception was so truly sincere that I felt at once that my position as the friend of the family was assured. The lady of the Manor looked at me with a truly maternal warmth of affection, and from time to time recapitulated for the Squire's benefit every incident of our joint thrilling adventure.

'Never was so near being a widower, my dear,' he said. 'I wonder who there is in the county that would have suited me? Never thought of it before! One should always be prepared for those kind of things though; couldn't have replaced my ladybird here though so easily, eh, Ruth!' and a tear gathered in the old man's glistening eye.

'You are a wicked old papa,' said she, holding up a finger reprovingly; 'you would have thought very little about successors and such rubbish, you know, if poor mamma and

I had been dashed to pieces, which we should most certainly have been but for Mr. Pole's help and good riding.' And here I received a half-shy, half-grateful glance that made me consider myself a Paladin, and the lovely girl, the fairest of the fair, like her that was to reward le brave et beau Dunois, who of old returned from Palestine.

This was all very well, but one could not return from Palestine without having in the first instance gone there. It was no doubt mighty easy for such fellows as Dunois to go to foreign parts. Very little capital was required, and fighting, if a hazardous, is comparatively a cheap species of investment. Now, in these latter days, a man must either stay at home, leading an inglorious and unprofitable life, or be able to lay his hand upon a good round sum of money with which to be a backwoodsman in Canada, a squatter in Australia, a sugar grower in Natal, or an indigo planter in Nepaul. The days of cheap yet dignified adventure seemed, ah me, to be fled for ever.

Matters went on smoothly for me during the rest of my sojourn at the Leys. I learnt a decent amount of farming, and, indeed, gained a reasonable meed of praise from old Mangold. This advance in agricultural knowledge was due rather to increased attention on my part than to the time which I was enabled to devote to my duties; for, indeed, Miss Mangold told me with more acerbity than I had suspected her of possessing, I was always up at the Court, and, as she expressed it more familiarly than elegantly, in Miss Ruth's pocket.

I mildly repelled the accusation of living at the Court, excusing myself as to frequent visits by saying that one

wanted a little change, and treating with silent scorn the unauthorised allusion to any part of Miss Allerton's sacred costume.

'You didn't want so much change once,' she said, tossing her head, which still looked pretty enough with her fresh colour and soft abundant hair; 'but times are changed I can see.'

'I shall have to go away next month,' said I, evading the latter part of her remark. 'You and I mustn't part bad friends, Jane.'

'I'm not bad friends,' she said, 'though some people are so fickle that they run after every new face they see just because people are high up in the world. I shall be sorry when you go, for it will be fearfully dull--worse than ever. But what will you do after you go away--take a farm about here? It will want money to do that, with the stock and rotation of crop you're bound to, and all the other fads for making farmers spend money instead of landlords nowadays.'

'I don't know what I shall do, Jane,' I answered somewhat reflectively. 'It appears to me that I have not much chance of doing anything in England.'

'But you wouldn't go out of England, Hereward--that is Mr. Pole,' said the girl hastily, while the colour left her cheek. 'You wouldn't go to America or India or any of those places, surely?'

'Why not?' said I bitterly. 'What earthly use is a fellow like me crawling about in England? I have no profession. I have no money. And the only thing I can try for is the post of a farm bailiff, a gamekeeper, or a second whip. Even these

need recommendations. No; I'm a useless gentleman, and they might as well have drowned me like a blind puppy as bring me up to such a fate.'

'Oh, don't you talk like that!' cried the good-natured Jane, much moved by my unwonted bitterness and the tragic view of my position. 'Surely your friends will do something for you. Set you up in a farm, or get you a place under Government. You might be happy enough that way, if you would only be contented.' Here she sighed softly. Poor Jane!

'I could never be contented,' said I, 'with anything short of a decent position in the world. I hate the sameness of an everyday pokey life. I must travel, or get away from England and try my luck somehow.'

'Why don't you ask the Squire to make you gamekeeper at the Court?' she said mischievously; and then, marking my sudden change of countenance, said: 'Oh, don't be angry, Mr. Pole! But I hear father coming--'

Some days after this conversation I received a letter from my uncle, in which he drew my attention to the fact that the year during which he had consented to pay for my training at Dibblestowe Leys had well nigh expired. After that time he should be unable to do anything further for me, unless I chose to take a junior clerkship in the Treasury or a situation as farm bailiff; either appointment he doubted not that he could procure for me.

I was much minded to answer hastily, telling him that he need not trouble himself about such means of maintenance. Then I bethought myself that I ought seriously to think the matter over. Careless and reckless as I had been up to this

time, a change had taken place in my position which swayed the whole current of my thoughts.

I had become sensible that my early admiration for Ruth Allerton had gradually ripened, from the opportunities which had been, perhaps unwisely, afforded us of knowing one another fully and unreservedly, into a deep, altogether uncontrollable passion. Gradually had our hearts become attracted, then inextricably intertwined in that mysterious bond of soul and sense--that complete instinctive union of every thought and feeling, which perhaps rarely occurs so indissolubly as in early youth.

We had spoken no word on the subject to each other. Yet had we discovered methods of divining each other's inmost thoughts. And as soon as I commenced to think about leaving the neighbourhood and ending the pleasant life of that most idyllic year, ah, me! the whole truth flashed upon me with lightning-like revelation.

Curiously enough, I had scarcely realised it before. Utterly contented with the friendly liberty which I had enjoyed, I had, with the utter carelessness of youth, rested satisfied with the present. I was by no means so new to the world that I did not gauge the utter impossibility of my gaining the consent of Ruth's parents to an engagement--even were she favourable. County families don't usually arrange the marriages of their daughters on such terms as I had to offer. Granted that she was weak enough to assent to any mad proposition of mine, what possible hope could I entertain of carrying out an engagement? I firmly believe, looking back to that time, that I had no other intention than loyally to abstain from compromising or entangling her. I

would take my leave calmly of the old hall court and its loved inmates, and afterwards I would leave England. I was fixed in that opinion; nothing would persuade me to remain pottering in this crowded old country, eating away my heart with a sense of poverty, inferiority, and misfortune. England was no place for a younger son. Without money, more than one of my ancestors had left it to seek his fortune. So would I.

I prepared then for quitting Dibblestowe Leys with something like method. I wrote to my uncle stating that I had no inclination to remain in England and commence a painful ascent to a competence by beginning at the bottom rung of the ladder. That my mind was made up to go to America, north or south, I hardly cared which. That possibly I should make for California, then in its second year as a gold-producing country. That he might help me to emigrate if he would. But that if he did not, I should go before the mast and work my passage in the first ship that would take me. His answer was that he thought I was mad, but that if I was determined to go, he would pay my passage, and find me a trifle by way of outfit.

I did not mention this notable determination to Ruth, reserving it to the last; perhaps constitutionally unwilling to make a painful statement until it was absolutely necessary. Meanwhile, I commenced to use my practical opportunity effectively; to that end I worked every day for a short time in the blacksmith's shop attached to the farm, for which fascinating work I had always had a boyish taste.

One bright morning I was relieving the striker for a short time, when he pulled a grimy newspaper from his pocket.

He was a broad-shouldered, muscular young fellow of twenty, who had always been a kind of humble friend and ally of mine. Passionately fond of shooting and fishing, I had taken pains to get him a day's rabbiting occasionally, and had let him carry my basket now and then when we had an afternoon's holiday and set off for the trout stream. 'Would ye look at this, Mr. Pole?' said he. 'I ha' gotten it from a brother of mine in Australia, who went there in a big ship called the Red Jacket last year. Quartermaster, Jack was; and seems loike he's runned away, and gotten hissen up the country to a place they call Ballyrat, where they're a rootin' out the gold like spuds.'

'That must be all nonsense,' said I, unable to take in so much of the unusual at one gulp.

'Nay, but it is na,' he replied. 'He sent me the letter and two newspapers as I've got at the kitchen as ye'd like to see 'em. Here's the letter. Happen ye'd like to read it. It's Jack's fist sure enough. He wants me to go to him, and I'd go fast enou if I had any neighbour folk as'ud go with me. But I can't think to face so far by mysen.'

'Ha! Joe,' said I, raising the heavy hammer and bringing down stroke after stroke with a strangely excited feeling, which made the heavy tool tremble in my grasp like a tack hammer. 'Wants you to go, does he? Well, maybe you might have a mate after all.'

I finished my hour's striking, shod a horse, and pointed some farm tools, thinking the while that I might find such skill valuable in rude lands. My task done, I ventured to the Grange, and, locking myself in my bedroom, opened the epistle of Mr. Jack Bulder. Thus it ran:--

'BALLARAT, October 10, 1851.

'DERE BROTHER--This comes from the land, and not from the good ship Redjacket, as I expected to write home from wen I left the Leys, in consekens of my having run away from the old ship, wich I never thout to have done, only every crew in Melbourne harbour has done the same, and your brother Jack isn't worse than other people. We all cut it, dere brother, because of the goold, which they told us was tremenjus, and too much to resist, and so we found it. Since I have cum here I have made three hundred pound besides two nuggets which i kep in a wosh lether bagg. There is plenty more ware that cum from. Dere brother, if I was you I would cum here at once, and don't let nothin' stop you, I send forty pound; it ain't much, but it will pay your passidge. Dere brother, let nothing kepe you from cummin' hear. This is a very nice country and we all xpeck to make our pile, that is fortun, in too yeares, at farthist. Dere brother, put yourself aboard a ship at once is the advice of yours truly.

JOHN BULDER.

'P.S.--My mait has just found a lump of goold worth fourty pound. When you go to Melbourne, go to the Oriental Bank and ask for John Bulder; they will know my address. I send the Star and the Herild, as will let you know what is happening every day here, quite comman.'

I carefully read the newspapers after perusing this characteristic but conclusive epistle. They were well printed and respectably conducted. I marked the following paragraph with an instinctive feeling of relief and approbation, as follows:--

'We are glad to be enabled to chronicle the good fortune of our old friends Billy Watson and party. They struck good gold on the Monkey lead last month, and have washed up 200 loads to-day for 300 oz., worth at present price £1100, no bad result for six weeks' work for four men.

'The Blue Danube Reef has, we hear, come again on the lode at the 300 ft. level, and the specimens are excessively rich. Shares immediately went up, and it's reported that Mr. Smarter, by timely sales, cleared £2700 profit upon his original investment. We wish him every success.

'A bazaar was opened yesterday for the benefit of the local hospital, which we are glad to see was extensively patronised. Too much praise cannot be bestowed upon those ladies who have taken so much pains and bestowed such unremitting personal labour on this exceedingly attractive exhibition. More than £400, we hear, were collected and subscribed. When we think of the great uncertainty of life and limb existing in mining communities, it is obvious that such an institution, efficiently worked, is almost inestimable. We trust that the miners will rally round this unsectarian charity at another time. Meanwhile, may the Green Gully Hospital flourish and its founders meet with all manner of success.'

Here, in my circumstances, was a manifest revelation. It was plainly indicative of the country to which to go, and the reason for which to go. In other lands long toilsome years must be spent before there was even the chance of a fortune being made. In this wonderful country a single month might place one in that blessed condition of

independence, that no amount of self-denial and labour in England could secure in half a lifetime.

I read and re-read the newspaper--the Star--from end to end. The more I read was I convinced of the bona-fides of the information, and the general advantages of the locality. I saw by the section of 'Police News' that offences were unsparingly punished in accordance with British law. Deeds of mercy and charity were by no means omitted from the daily life of the toilers for gold. It was not all couleur de rose as the record of casualties and accidents proved. Still the fact remained incontestible that fortunes were being made weekly, daily, in that favoured spot. The gold deposit was not likely to be worked out very soon. Other finds were referred to. It was the modern Eldorado. A two month's voyage would land one there. My mind was made up. I would try the gold region, and either win fortune, with whom fame is generally on speaking terms, or pay the usual penalty.

I informed Joe Bulder of my decision. Somewhat to my surprise he at once proposed to accompany me. 'I'm nowt but a plain lad, Mister Pole,' said he, 'but you might loike to see a Dibb'stowe face in foreign parts; and I'll stand by thee hand and foot, I reckon. I'm tired of working here for farmer Mangold. Doesn't thee see blacksmiths be a gettin' a pound a day oot there?--shoeing horses a pound a set. Why, thou'st made a pound thysen this marnin', besides sharpening they picks at a shillin' each. Danged if I don't keep t' forge while thee goes a seekin' for gowd, and we can share and share loike.'

Joe little thought that he was advocating the great Australian mining custom of 'dividing mates,' by which most generously equitable portion of the unwritten law, fortunes have been made and shared on every goldfield in Australia. 'I shall be only too glad to have such a good fellow with me, Joe,' said L 'It's a bargain. The next thing is to find a ship.'

Chapter II

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My intercourse with Allerton Court and its inmates had continued as usual. A half-regretful tone had certainly characterised our latter interviews, since I had allowed it to be known that I should not remain at Dibblestowe Leys. May it have been that in each heart was still some unacknowledged feeling that I might not finally quit the neighbourhood, or, at any rate, go no farther away than the county in which my uncle resided. A few questions had been put by the Squire and Mrs. Allerton as to my future projects. To these I had answered without strictly defining my intentions. I had, in return, received good advice from the Squire, on the subject of making up my mind and taking a path in life. They little dreamed of the one I had chosen.

At length, however, the day before my departure arrived, and I rode over to the Court to pay my farewell visit. The Squire was away at a neighbouring farm, and Mrs. Allerton had accompanied him for a morning drive. I found Ruth in the old-fashioned garden, near the fish-pond, a place where a stone balustered terrace had been built, nigh which was a seat which commanded an unrivalled view in our eyes. There were Hollingbourne Woods and Torry Hill--the marshes by the sea, with the isle of Sheppy like a cloud in the hazy distance.

It was called the Lady's Seat, and was popularly supposed to have been placed there and much affected by an ancestress who had lost her lover in the battle of Long Marston Moor. It was the favourite resort of Ruth, who was

of a contemplative and studious disposition. Here she was accustomed to take her sketch-book or a volume, and spend many a glad spring morning or still summer afternoon under the shade of the ancestral oaks. Half instinctively I wended my steps thither, when I heard that the Squire and Mrs. Allerton had driven over to Ollendean.

'You find me here all alone,' said she, 'and I am not sorry. I have been reading the *Bride of Lammermoor* over again, and making myself low--spirited over the woes of that most unlucky Lucy Ashton. Yet, I cannot but think, if she had acted with more firmness, and been true to her better nature, the tragedy need never have taken place. She was a victim of indecision.'

'What, in spite of her mother, that terribly despotic matron?' said I, 'and the prophecy?--

'"When the last Laird of Ravenswood to Ravenswood shall ride.
And woo a dead maiden to be his bride.
He shall stable his steed in the Kelpie's flow.
And his name shall be lost for evermoe!"

What girl could stand against such a rhythmical doom, even leaving out the inexorable parent?'

'Some girls would--most of them, I hope,' she said, looking dreamily across the far wide landscape, over the greater part of which her ancestors had once held lordship. 'It might have rent her heart well nigh to resist her parents, but there was no other course to pursue.'

'Do you think you would have had strength of mind and constancy enough to have kept faith with the ruined, ill-fated Ravenswood?' asked I, with a sudden impulse; 'think of the superior claims of a smooth, safe marriage with the prosperous Laird of Bucklaw.'

Her cheek flushed for a moment, but her eye met mine with an artless candour, which showed how little she realised the analogy.

'It's hard to go at once from romance to reality,' she said, 'and I can hardly imagine the situation occurring to any one in these modern days; but, surely, if she had ever loved him, she must have clung to him more for his poverty and his banishment. As for agreeing to her mother's hateful project, she must have been mad, poor thing, as she afterwards proved to be, when she permitted them to speak of it to her. But suppose we leave Sir Walter here,' putting the book on the seat, 'and walk down the beech avenue this lovely morning. Have you had any sport lately? I don't think you have been over for a week.'

For a while, as we walked along the well-known avenue which followed the brow of the eminence, through the opening of which the hills, the valleys, with their woods of hazel and Spanish chestnut contrasted strangely with the dreary marshes, a momentary forgetfulness of my plans and purpose possessed me. We talked as usual upon the hundred and one subjects which were common ground between us. The state of the county politics, the new clergyman in a neighbouring parish credited with advanced views, the box of new books from Mudie's, the grand run from Staplehurst, in which the Squire had been well up with the hounds, a great dinner party which was to take place next week and to which I was to come and practise a part in a charade. A string of half-sisterly confidences which had always, since our first meeting, been open to me, and of which neither of us had ever thought, except as trifles,

which might pass between ordinary friends or relatives of similar ages. My heart had only now undeceived itself. Hers was as yet strong and unfaltering, with the unsuspecting confidence of innocent girlhood.

I have often thought since that Ruth Allerton was a very uncommon type of womanhood, singularly unversed in the lore of the affections, in which knowledge girls of her age so often discover a premature shrewdness. Unlike most of her contemporaries, she was indisposed to the amusements befitting her age. The Squire abhorred London, and rarely went except when he could not avoid it. To Mrs. Allerton there was no happiness where her husband was not. And so it came to pass that Ruth had lived a life practically isolated from the gay world, fully absorbed in her own pursuits and resources.

When I recall the subjects upon which our long talks chiefly turned--such unusual ones, for instance, as what was the happiest state of life, whether to live for oneself or for others? This we decided very strongly in favour of the unselfish line, as who at our ages would not? A great and often resolved scheme for hers was, how to do the greatest good to the poor in this or any other neighbourhood, without destroying their independence and self-respect. How many plots against capitalists did we hatch in this behalf--as lawyers say.

What was the exact proportion of mental and bodily labour most fitted to produce true health of sense and spirit. Whether voluntary or involuntary labour was most beneficial.

Since then, how many different women of every creed and clime, rank and degree, have I known, only to confirm my fixed opinion, that she was a choice floweret of the rarest type of womanhood. For, old or young, rich or poor, wise or vain, homely or fair, I have never met with any woman like her.

Surely, there never was one more unconscious of her personal attractions. They were sufficiently visible to the ordinary gaze, yet she rarely troubled herself to heighten them in the slightest degree, never alluded to her form or face, hardly to those of others, and never but as illustrations of a fact. Plainness of apparel, except on occasions when she could not escape adornment, invariably characterised her, though she, perhaps, was a little exigeante as to material. I used laughingly to tell her that she would make an excellent Quakeress, but that her muslin would always be wonderfully fine, and cost more than any one else's.

Now, all this pleasant companionship must perforce come to an end. No more arguments when, with the pure light of truth shining from her earnest eyes, she would combat my utilitarian views, often adopted to arouse opposition, and to evoke the enthusiasm in which I delighted.

I did not, excited as I was with the idea, realise within myself the completeness of disruption which would be caused from all my old ties and life moorings.

'Ruth,' said I, 'do you know that a sense of mournful foreboding is creeping over me, lovely as is the day and perfect the scene. I have bad news which I must tell you. I

am about to leave Dibblestowe Leys, and, and, indeed, England, perhaps for some years.'

'Leave England,' she said, with such a sudden, sharp intonation, almost a cry of pain, that I looked up amazed. 'Oh, you are not speaking in earnest, Hereward; tell me you are not.'

'I must go away from this place, happy as I have been here,' I said. 'And as I have no fortune, nor the slightest hope of making money here, I must go to some part of the world where I may, if I have luck, make it quickly.'

She had looked at me for one moment with a wild, piteous gaze of incredulity. Then she sank down on a rustic seat bench, and, turning away her head, sobbed unrestrainedly.

'Ruth,' said I, 'dearest, darling Ruth! do not grieve so. I may, after all, only be a short time absent. Besides, most men have to leave their homes in youth. Why should I expect a better fate? If I had dreamed that you would feel it thus, I might have--'

She interrupted me with a wave of her hand, as if forbidding me to continue my explanation. I sat down beside her and permitted her to give free course to her grief.

After awhile she turned her face towards me,--that sweet face I so often see in my dreams. It was calm and still, but with the strange unnatural look which comes when all hope has passed away.

'Why did you tell me so suddenly, Hereward?' she said, softly. 'You see you have made me confess to caring so very much for your departure. If I had had more warning, I might have behaved like a young lady of the period, and hid my

heart behind a cheerful farewell. Are you not sorry for your hastiness?'

'I am more glad than I ever was at anything in the world since I was born,' I said, throwing myself on my knees before her, and kissing her cold hands, until they seemed to burn with the wild fever of my own blood. 'But I feel as if I had treated the Squire and your mother dishonourably, in winning their daughter's heart, under what they will consider false pretences.'

'We have both been to blame,' she said, sorrowfully, 'if people are to be blamed for loving each other fondly, without a thought of evil or deceit. But we could not help it, I suppose. And I can certainly declare, that I did not think I cared more for you than for a dear friend whose tastes and feelings seemed much to harmonise with and elevate my own. And now you are going away--for ever, perhaps; must you go away? Does love always begin by making people utterly wretched?'

'I must go away,' I said, 'unless I am to ask the Squire to please to support me for the love of his child, or unless I am to content myself with a position of sordid penury, as hateful to myself as it would be dishonouring to you. No, dearest; there is but one path to me now--that of honour and adventure. The die is cast. But what are we to say for ourselves at the Court?'

'We must tell the truth, of course,' she said, proudly. 'There need be no concealment. I am not ashamed of my choice, my own Hereward--are you? Then let us go boldly to my dearest mother. I will tell her, as I have always told her,

everything from a little girl. You are to dine here to-night, so you will have to tell my dear old father.'

'And what will he say, Ruth, do you think, when I mention my very handsome expectations?'

'He may be angry or grieved at first, but you must not mind that. The worst will soon be over. And he is so generous and just in all his thoughts--he will consider my happiness before everything. Tell him what you hope to do in--in--this far country; and that in a few years you will come to claim me. There is no more to be said. It is the truth, and the truth, he is fond of saying, always prevails.'

All this was very well, and as my darling looked into my face with her tender, honest eyes, I felt it to be in a way reassuring; but the truth was, in the present case, that I was most horribly frightened, and having a clearer view than my unworldly love, of the extremely inadequate grounds upon which I had sought her affection, dreaded the dinner referred to, as if it had been a feast to precede dissolution.

Having made up our minds to dare the dreadful alternative of facing the Squire, Ruth and I, with the happy rashness of youth, commenced to look upon our joint future as a thing assured, in some form or other, and to make plans with the cheerful confidence of birds in a premature spring.

After dinner, during which Ruth had been very quiet, even distraite,--but as she was often so, less notice was taken of her mood than would have been the case with a girl whose spirits were ordinarily lighter,--I opened the trenches.