T. S. Arthur

The Angel and the Demon: A Tale

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Published by Good Press, 2022

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EAN 4064066428396

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PREFACE

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We think few mothers can read this volume without being struck with the great importance of care in regard to the dispositions and moral qualities of those into whose hands they place their children. There are sad disorders in society at the present time, and influences of a baleful character at work: above all things, let tender, innocent children be kept wholly beyond their sphere. In but rare cases should there be a delegation of the mother’s duties: extreme ill health is, perhaps, the only excuse for such delegation; but when it is made, let the nurse or governess be of known pure life and firm integrity. There should be no guess-work here; no trusting of a stranger, unless under the amplest testimonials from known parties; for wrong done to childhood is, too often, wrong done for the whole life. But we can only hint here at what we have endeavored to illustrate in the present volume.

THE

ANGEL AND THE DEMON.

CHAPTER I.
THE YOUNG GOVERNESS.

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Mrs. Dainty’s health was poor, and her nerves delicate. It was no use, she said: the wear and tear of body and mind were more than she could stand. She must have a governess for the children. Mr. Dainty never opposed his wife in any thing, and so replied,—

“Very well, Madeline. Find your governess.”

But Uncle John—Uncle Johns, by-the-way, if they happen to be on the mother’s side, and old bachelors at that, are proverbially inclined to interfere with the home-management of their nieces—had, as usual, a word to say after he was alone with Mrs. Dainty.

“Don’t have any thing of the kind,” said he. “Be governess to your own children.”

“But I’m not equal to the task. It will kill me. See how thin and pale I am getting; and my nerves are in a terrible condition.”

“No wonder.”

“Why?”

“Dissipation will destroy any woman’s nerves.”

“Dissipation! Why, Uncle John!”

“How many nights were you out last week?”

“Only three.”

“Only three! and each time until long after midnight. Dancing, late hours, hot suppers, and confectionery! No wonder your nerves are shattered! Such a life would kill me up in half a year.”

“Well, in my case, it is all that keeps me going. These social recreations, coming at intervals upon the enervating cares of domestic life, give new vitality to the exhausted system.”

“Filigree and nonsense!” replied Uncle John, impatiently. “You know better than to talk after this fashion.”

And so, for the time, the debate closed between them.

Meeting with no opposition from her husband, Mrs. Dainty proceeded at once to the work of procuring a governess. Among her fashionable friends she first made inquiry, but in no direction could she hear of the right individual. The qualifications were set forth at large. She must speak French with the true Parisian accent, and be able to teach that language; her knowledge of music must be thorough; she must be perfect in drawing and painting; her manners must be ladylike, her tastes refined: in a word, she must possess all the high accomplishments necessary to educate the children of a fashionable mother who was “in society.” She would greatly prefer a Frenchwoman.

At last she heard of a “French lady,” the daughter of a French count of the old régime, who was desirous of procuring the situation of governess in a family of “good standing.” An interview with this lady was held in the presence of Uncle John, who took occasion to ask her some questions about Paris, where he had spent several years. The stately manner and superior air which she assumed at the commencement of the interview gradually gave way under these questions, until madame showed considerable embarrassment.

“Your face is very familiar to me,” said Uncle John, finally. “I am sure I must have met you in Paris.”

“Monsieur is undoubtedly mistaken,” said the lady, with returning dignity.

“Perhaps so,” replied Uncle John. Then, in a more serious voice, he added, “But one thing is certain: you do not possess the qualifications desired in the governess of my nieces.”

The “French lady” offered no remonstrance, and asked for no explanations, but, with a flushed face, arose and retired.

“Better keep clear of counts’ daughters,” said Uncle John, as the applicant withdrew. “If you will have a governess for the children, procure one born and bred so near at home that you can readily learn all about her.”

Mrs. Dainty, who was particularly attracted by the appearance of the French lady, was not altogether pleased with Uncle John’s summary mode of despatching her, though a little startled at the idea of getting an impostor in her house.

What next was to be done? “Suppose we advertise?” said Mrs. Dainty.

“And have your bell-wire broken before ten o’clock the next morning,” replied Uncle John. “Take my advice, and wait a few days.”

“What good will waiting do? Unless we take some steps in the direction we wish to go, we shall never arrive at the end of our journey.”

“Good steps have been taken,” said Uncle John, cheerfully. “You have already made known to quite a

number of your friends that you want a governess. The fact will not die; many will remember and speak of it, and somebody will happen to think of somebody who will just suit you."

So Mrs. Dainty concluded to wait a few days, and see what time would bring forth.

On the third morning after the interview with the French count's daughter, as Mr. and Mrs. Dainty and Uncle John sat talking together on the governess-question, the waiter opened the door, and said that a young woman wished to speak with Mrs. Dainty.

"Who is she, and what does she want?" inquired Mrs. Dainty, with an air of indifference, stroking the head of her King Charles spaniel, which, instead of her baby, occupied a comfortable position in her lap.

The servant went down to gain what information he could from the visitor touching her business with Mrs. Dainty, and returned with the information that she was an applicant for the situation of governess in the family, having been informed that the lady wanted a person in that capacity.

"Tell her to come up," said Mrs. Dainty. "I wonder who she can be?" was added, as the servant withdrew.

Uncle John sat with his chin resting on the head of his cane, apparently so much engaged with his own thoughts as to be unconscious of what was passing.

In a few minutes the door reopened, and a young woman in plain attire, and of modest, almost timid aspect, entered. Mr. Dainty was standing with his back to the fire; Mrs. Dainty sat in her morning wrapper, with the King Charles spaniel

still in comfortable quarters; and Uncle John remained in the same position, not stirring as the girl entered.

“Take a chair,” said Mrs. Dainty, with that supercilious indifference which imagined superiority often puts on toward imagined inferiors.

The girl flushed, trembled, and sat down, letting her eyes fall to the floor.

“What is your name?” asked Mrs. Dainty.

“Florence Harper,” replied the girl.

“Where do you live?”

“At No. — Elwood Street.”

“With whom?”

“My aunt.”

“Are your father and mother living?”

“No, ma’am.” Even Mrs. Dainty felt the sadness with which this reply was made.

“I am in want of a governess for my children,” said Mrs. Dainty, coldly; “but I hardly think you will suit.”

The young girl arose at once.

“Sit down.” Mrs. Dainty spoke with a slight impatience. The visitor resumed her chair, while Mr. Dainty kept his place before the fire, with his eyes fixed upon her curiously.

“Do you speak French?” inquired Mrs. Dainty.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“What French school did you attend?”

“I was with Mr. Picot for six years.”

“Indeed!” There was a new interest in Mrs. Dainty’s voice.

“How is it in regard to your musical qualifications?” she continued.

“I will satisfy you, madam,” said the applicant, in a quiet but firm and dignified manner, “in regard to my ability to teach the various branches of a polite education, by references, if you desire them.”

“Oh, certainly! I shall expect references, of course. You don’t imagine that I would take an entire stranger into my house without the most rigid inquiries touching her character?”

Miss Harper arose.

“Do you wish,” said she, “to make any inquiries about me? Or have you concluded that I will not suit you?”

“You can leave your references,” replied Mrs. Dainty.

The names of two ladies were given. Mrs. Dainty had no acquaintance with them, but she knew their standing.

“That will do,” she replied.

“Shall I call again, or will you send me word if you desire to see me,” said the young girl.

“You may call.” Mrs. Dainty spoke in a very indifferent manner.

The visitor retired.

“I don’t like her,” said Mrs. Dainty.

“Why not?” inquired Uncle John, lifting, for the first time, his chin from the head of his cane.

“Too plebeian,” said Mrs. Dainty.

“Nothing but a countess will do for your young hopefuls,” retorted Uncle John. “Plebeian! There is the air of a lady in every movement. Take my advice, and learn all you can about her; and I’m mistaken if you don’t at once secure her services.”

Mrs. Dainty’s heart was set on having a governess; and, as no better opportunity offered for procuring one, she made inquiries about Miss Harper, and received encouraging information. A family council, consisting of herself, husband, and Uncle John, decided in the affirmative on the question of engaging the young lady, who, as she did not return to know whether her services would be desired or not, was sent for. Terms, duties, and the like being discussed and settled, Miss Harper, with many misgivings and strong reluctance, assumed the difficult and responsible position of governess in the family of Mrs. Dainty.

Three children were placed under her care: Agnes, the eldest daughter, now in her fourteenth year; Madeline, the second, eleven years old; and George, in his sixth summer. Many unwise remarks had been made about the young girl in the presence of the children; and when she assumed, formally, the charge of them, she perceived at a glance that they held her in contempt, and were not in the least inclined to obey her authority.

The first day’s trials were severe enough. Mrs. Dainty, in whose mind there was a foregone conclusion adverse to the young governess, made it her business to be present with her for some hours while giving her introductory lessons to the children, or, rather, while making her first efforts to dive into their minds and see what had already been stored away. The mother did not act very wisely during the time; for she was not a very wise woman. Could she have seen the image of herself as it was pictured in the mind of Miss Harper, she would not have felt very much flattered. A small portion of light entered the region of perception once or

twice, the way being opened by a quiet answer to some remark that broadly displayed her ignorance. One result followed this rather meddlesome interference on the part of Mrs. Dainty. Her respect for the young governess was materially heightened.

On the second day, Miss Harper was left in the undisturbed charge of her young pupils, and she had a better opportunity for studying their natures. Agnes, the oldest, she found to be indolent, proud, and quite ready to imitate the example of her mother in disrespectful conduct toward herself. Madeline was of a gentler, more loving, and more obedient disposition; while George was a rude, well-spoiled specimen of a boy who showed no inclination whatever to come under even the mildest discipline.

“She’ll never do any thing with them,” said Mrs. Dainty, in a confident manner, as she sat alone with her husband and Uncle John, on the evening of the first day, and talked over the new arrangement.

“Why do you think so?” asked Uncle John.

“She’s too young and inexperienced. She hasn’t character enough. Agnes is almost as much of a woman as she is.”

“Don’t be too sure of that,” said Uncle John.

“Agnes will have to live very fast if she ever overtakes Miss Harper.”

“She’s rather an indifferent-looking personage,” remarked Mr. Dainty, in a careless way, “and hasn’t stuff enough in her for the management of three such spirited children as ours.”

Uncle John smiled.

“You are quite taken with her,” said his niece.

“I haven’t had much time for observation,” replied Uncle John; “but the little I have seen impresses me favorably. Beneath that modest, quiet, almost timid exterior, there lies, if I am not mistaken, far more reserved power than you imagine. Give her a fair chance, second her efforts in every attempt she makes to bring the children into order and subordination, and particularly refrain from the slightest word in their presence that will lower her in their respectful regard.”

Mrs. Dainty saw, from the last remark, that she had erred in a very thoughtless way; and her cheeks burned a little when Uncle John added,—

“I have heard something of Miss Harper’s history from a lady friend, who represents her as a very superior girl, and says that she was raised in a circle of refined and highly-intelligent people.”

“Oh, well, we can give her a trial. Perhaps she will do,” replied Mrs. Dainty, in a languid manner. “I’m glad she has been raised among refined people. My greatest fear was that she would impart vulgar manners to the children.”

“I don’t think she can do them any harm.” Uncle John spoke a little ironically.

“I hope not,” said Mrs. Dainty, seriously; and the subject, not taking a turn that was agreeable to her, dropped of its own weight.

We shall see, in another chapter, some of the results of this new arrangement in the home of the fashionable mother.

CHAPTER II.
GAINING INFLUENCE.

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Having procured a governess for the children,—even if she were not all that was expected in the individual who was to fill so important a place,—our fashionable mother felt a weight of care removed from her shoulders. She could now go out when she pleased, and stay as long as she pleased, and not suffer from the troublesome consciousness that she was neglecting her children,—a species of dereliction that never escaped the watchful eyes of Uncle John, who had no hesitation about speaking plainly.

Miss Harper's experiences with the children on the first and second days were not very encouraging; and this was particularly so in the case of Agnes, whose conduct toward her was exceedingly offensive.

On the third morning, this young lady positively refused to give her French recitation at the time required by Miss Harper, declaring that it was her wish to take a music-lesson. She had overheard her mother and Uncle John conversing on the subject of Miss Harper's authority over the children, on which occasion Mrs. Dainty had said,—

"I will have no iron rule with Agnes. Miss Harper must treat her with that respectful consideration to which a young lady in her position is entitled. There must be no petty domineering; no ordering with upstart authority; no laying down of law."

"Do you expect to be always present with Miss Harper in the school-room?" Uncle John asked quietly, as if he was

really in earnest.

“Of course not! What a preposterous idea!” replied Mrs. Dainty.

“Then Miss Harper must have authority in your absence.” Uncle John spoke very decidedly.

“Agnes will never submit to any authority from her.”

“Why not from *her*, pray?”

“Because Agnes has reached an age when she can comprehend the wide difference between their respective stations. She is almost a young lady.”

“You are a weak woman, Madeline,” said Uncle John,—“a very weak woman, and I am almost out of patience with you. Now, do you wish to know, plainly, how I regard this matter?”

“Not particularly.” Mrs. Dainty gaped as she spoke.

“You shall know, for all your well-bred indifference,” said Uncle John, a little sharply. “In my opinion, Miss Harper is in every way the superior to Agnes, and, if I am not vastly mistaken, will in a few years be recognised, in society, as superior.”

“Society!” Mrs. Dainty curled her lip. “What do you mean by society?”

“Something more perhaps than you mean,” was answered. “Men and women recognised by common consent as superior to the mass.”

“Well, you can talk as you please, and think as you please, Uncle John; but I’m not going to have Agnes domineered over by this plebeian girl, and if she attempt any thing of the kind, she will get her immediate dismissal.”

All of this was heard by Agnes, who very naturally made up her mind to be the director of her own studies in the absence of her mother.

“I wish to take my music-lesson now,” she said, when the governess asked for her French recitation.

“From twelve to one is the hour for music,” replied Miss Harper, mildly, yet firmly, fixing her eye steadily upon the eye of Agnes. There was something in the expression of that eye which the young lady had never seen before, and which held her by a kind of fascination. It was not anger, nor rebuke, nor sternness, but the quiet power of a superior mind over that of an inferior. Agnes tried to withdraw her gaze, but it seemed impossible to do so. A strange feeling of respect, almost awe came stealing into her heart and repressing her dominant selfhood. When Miss Harper withdrew her steady gaze, Agnes almost caught her breath, so marked was the sense of relief that followed.

“Madeline dear,” said Miss Harper, in a cheerful, pleasant voice, speaking to the younger sister, “shall I hear you read now?”

Madeline came smiling to her side, and, lifting her book to her face, read the lesson which had been given to her.

“Very well done! You are improving already.” Miss Harper spoke so encouragingly that Madeline looked up into her kind face, and said, without thinking of the place and the occasion, “Thank you!” The young governess had already opened a way into her heart.

“Now, Agnes,” said Miss Harper, “if you are ready with your French lesson, I will hear it.” She spoke kindly and cheerfully, fixing her eyes at the same time steadily upon

her, and with the same look of quiet power which had subdued her a little while before.

“I would rather take my music-lesson first.” Agnes could not yield without a show of resistance. Something was due to pride.

“The hours of study were fixed in consultation with your mother,” said Miss Harper, mildly; “and it is my duty as well as yours to act in conformity therewith.”

“Oh, mother won’t care!” Agnes spoke with animation. “If I prefer this hour to twelve it will be all the same to her.”

“Your mother don’t care for her word, Agnes?” Miss Harper spoke in a tone of surprise.

“I didn’t mean that,” was answered, with some little confusion of manner. “I only meant that if she knew I preferred one time to another she would not hesitate to gratify my wishes.”

“Very well. We will consult her this evening,” said Miss Harper. “And if she consents to a new arrangement of the study-hours I will make no objection. But at present both you and I are bound to observe existing rules. I have no power to change them if I would. So, come up to the line cheerfully, to-day, and to-morrow we will both be governed by your mother’s decision.”

Agnes was subdued. Without a sign of hesitation she went on with her lesson in French, and said it all the better for this little contention, through which she came with an entirely new impression of Miss Harper.

When the young teacher came to George, this little reprobate would do nothing that was required of him. His book he had, from the commencement of the school-hours,

refused to open; replying to every request of Miss Harper to do so with a sullen, “A’n’t a-going to.”

“Now, George, you will say your lesson,” said Miss Harper, in a pleasant tone.

“A’n’t a-going to,” replied the little fellow, pouting out his lips, and scowling from beneath his knit brows.

“Oh, yes; George will say his lesson.”

“A’n’t a-going to.”

“Oh, yes, Georgie,” said Agnes, now coming to the aid of Miss Harper. “Say your lesson.”

“A’n’t a-going to.” His lips stuck out farther, and his brow came lower over his eyes.

“Come, Georgie, do say your lesson,” urged Agnes.

“A’n’t a-going to.” The resolute will of the child had no other expression.

“I’ll tell mother,” said Agnes.

“Don’t care! Tell her! You wouldn’t say *your* lesson.”

“Oh, yes, Georgie, Agnes did say her lesson like a good girl; and so did Madeline.” Miss Harper showed not the least excitement. Her voice was calm and her manner even. “Now say yours.”

“A’n’t a-going to.” The persistent little rebel had no idea of capitulation.

“I knew a little boy once——”

There was such a pleasant, story-telling tone in the voice of Miss Harper that George was betrayed into looking up into her face, when she fixed his eye as she had, not long before, fixed the eye of his self-willed sister.

“I knew a little boy once,” she repeated, “who had no mother. Before he was as old as you are now, his mother

died and went to heaven. Poor, dear little fellow! it was a sad day for him when his good mother died and left him to the care of strangers."

George was all attention. Already the unpleasant lines of frowning disobedience were fading from his childish countenance, and a gentle, earnest look coming into his eyes.

"After this little boy's mother died," went on the governess, "there was nobody in the house to love him as she had done. His father was absent all day, and very often did not get home in the evening until poor little Willy was fast asleep in bed. As it would not do to leave Willy alone with the cook and chambermaid, his father got a governess, who was to have the care of him and teach him all his lessons. Now, it so happened that this governess was not kind and good as Willy's mother had been, but was selfish and cruel. She gave him long, hard lessons, and if he did not get them—which he often could not—would punish him cruelly; sometimes by shutting him up in a dark closet, sometimes by making him go without eating, and sometimes by whipping him. And all the while she managed to make Willy's father believe that she was kind and good to him.

"Poor little Willy! He grew pale and sad-looking, and no wonder. I was at the house one day——"

"Oh, Miss Harper! Did you know him?" said George, with a countenance full of interest.

"Yes, dear, I knew little Willy; and I knew his mother before she died. As I was just saying, I called one day at the house, a few months after his mother was taken away from

him; and, as the servant opened the door for me, I heard the voice of Willy, and he was crying bitterly. All at once the voice was hushed to a low, smothered sound.

"'What is the matter with Willy?' I asked; and the servant answered that she supposed the governess was putting him into the dark closet again. In an instant there seemed to stand before me the child's dead mother, and she pointed upward with her finger. I did not stop to think, but ran up-stairs into the nursery, where I found the governess sitting by the window with a book in her hand.

"'Where's Willy?' I demanded. She started, and looked very much surprised and a little angry. But I was in earnest.

"'Where's Willy?' I repeated my question more sternly. As she did not stir, I went quickly across the room and opened a closet door, which I found locked, with the key on the outside. There, lying on his face, was the dear child. I took him up in my arms and turned his face to the light. It was pale as marble. I thought he was dead.

"'Bring me some water,' I called, in a loud, quick voice. The frightened governess fled from the room, but soon returned with water. I threw it into the dear child's face, and rubbed his hands and feet. In a few minutes, he began to breathe.

"'Give him to me, now,' said the governess, endeavoring to lift him from my arms. But I said, 'No; cruel woman!' She looked angry, but I was not moved. 'Untie my bonnet-strings,' I spoke to the chambermaid; and the girl took off my bonnet.

"'Jenny,' said I to the chambermaid,—I knew her name, —'Jenny, I want you to go for Willy's father.'

“Jenny did not hesitate a minute. ‘There’s no use in sending for his father,’ said the governess. But we didn’t mind what she said. When Willy’s father came, she was gone. He was very much distressed when he saw his dear little boy, and very angry when I told him about the dark closet. After that I became Willy’s nurse and teacher. But he did not stay with us very long. The angels came for him one lovely summer evening, and bore him up to the heavenly land; and he is now happy again with his mother.”

Tears came into the eyes of all the children when Florence Harper ceased speaking. She had found the way to their hearts, and, not only this, had lifted for them just so much of the veil that concealed her true character as to let them see enough to win something of love and something of respectful consideration.

The book was still in the hand of George, and, as he let his eyes fall from the face of Miss Harper, they rested on the open page. Nothing was said by the latter. A few moments of silence passed, and then George, in a low but rather earnest voice, said over his lesson.

The young governess had conquered.