

and we now find ourselves, writer and readers, like the materials of which we have been speaking, brought back, after all these various processes, to the refinery from which we set out.

PARADISE LOST.

My knapsack was on my shoulder—

—So said Armand, a young artist, when a little company of us were sitting together the other evening.

—My knapsack was on my shoulder, my ash-rod in hand; three leagues of dusty road had whitened me like a miller. Whence I came, whither I was going—what matters it? I was not twenty years of age. My starting point, therefore, was home; my goal was Paradise—any earthly Paradise I could find. The country was not particularly picturesque; and the weather was very hot. Great undulations of harvest-laden fields rolled irregularly on all sides. Here was a hamlet; there a solitary farm-house; yonder a wood; on each eminence a windmill. Some peasants that were in the fields, sang; and the birds chirped at them as if in mockery. One or two waggons, dragged by oxen and horses, slowly moved along the tree-bordered road. I sat down on a heap of stones. A waggoner, gruffly asked me if I was tired, and offered me “a lift.” I accepted; and soon I was stretched, where dung had been; jolted into an uneasy, half-slumber, not without its charm, with the bells of the lazy team softly jingling in my ears, until I thought fifty silver voices were calling me away to a home that must be bright, and a land that must be beautiful.

I awoke in a mood sufficiently benign to receive an apology. The man had forgotten me when he turned off the high road, and had taken me half a league into the country. Where was the harm, honest waggoner? I am not going anywhere; “I am only going to Paradise.” There was no village of that name in the neighbourhood, he said; but he had no doubt I would be pleased to see the grounds of the chateau. Of course, I had come on purpose for that. I handed him his *pour-boire*. “Drink my health, good man, and injure your own. Let us see these grounds.” The man showed me through a meadow near the farm (to which he belonged) and left me, tossing the silver piece I had given him in his hard hand. I soon observed that the place was worth seeing.

A hasty glance showed it to be a fragment of wild nature, occupied in its original state, and barricaded against civilisation. There were woods, and solitary trees, and lakes, and streams of sufficient dimensions for grandeur; and, when once the wall disappeared amidst the heavy foliage, I could at first discern no traces whatever of the presence of man. However, on closer examination, I discovered that nature had been improved upon; that all objects which might ungraciously intercept the view, or deform a

landscape, had been removed. There were no sham ruins nor artificial cascades; but the stranger's steps were led, by some ingenious process of plantation, insensibly to the best points of view. I felt, and was thankful, for the presence of the art which so industriously endeavoured to conceal itself; but being, at that time, as most young men are, inclined to compare great things with small—thinking to be epigrammatic and knowing—I exclaimed aloud: “The toilette of this park has been admirably performed.”

“A vulgar idea, vulgarly expressed,” said a clear firm voice above me. I looked up, thinking that somebody was hidden in a tree; and, to my surprise, saw a young woman upon a fine large horse, holding a riding-whip playfully over my head. She had approached across the turf unheard; and had heard my exclamation, which, I assure you, was meant for no ears but my own.

“Madam,” replied I, when I had recovered from my confusion, “I think you misunderstand me. There is no vulgarity in comparing a prospect, in which every superfluity is thus tastefully pruned away, to a woman; who, instead of loading herself with ornaments, uses the arts of the toilette to display all her beauties to the best advantage.”

“The explanation will not do,” she replied. “It wants frankness. Your phrase simply meant that you were ashamed of the admiration this view had at first excited; and that you thought it necessary to exert the manly privilege of contempt. If I had not seen you yonder using your sketch-book, I should take you for a travelling hair-dresser.”

The tone and manner of my new acquaintance puzzled me exceedingly; and I was at first rather irritated by the hostile attitude she assumed on such slight grounds. It was evident she wished to provoke an intellectual contest; for, at the moment, I did not understand that her real desire was to suppress the formalities of an introduction. I returned to the charge; she replied. A broadside of repartee was fired off on either side; but insensibly we met upon common ground; affectation was discarded; and, as we streamed irregularly along the swardy avenues, or stopped at the entrance of a long vista—she gently walking her docile genet; I, with my hand upon its mane,—we made more advances towards familiarity and friendship in an hour than would have been possible, under any other circumstances, in a season.

Let me describe my impressions as I received them. Otherwise, how will the narrative illustrate the theory? I am endeavouring to show, by example, what an immense structure of happiness may be built upon a very flimsy ground; that the material sequence of this life's events need have no correspondence with the sequence of our sentiments; that—But I must not anticipate.

The lady, dressed in a green riding-habit,

was remarkably handsome, as this miniature will show—

—And Armand drew a small case from his breast.

“It is made from memory; but I will answer for its exactitude.”

“We all know the face well enough, my friend,” quoth Prevost; “it re-appears in nearly all your pictures, like Raphael’s *Fornarina*. Last year you made it do duty for *Medea*; this year, modified to suit the occasion, it will appear in the *Salon* as *Charlotte Corday*. Why have you so carefully avoided that type in your *Juliet* and your *Heloise*? One would imagine that, instead of being associated with pleasant recollections, it suggested nothing but strife, violence, and despair.”

“Were that the case, you know,” quoth Armand, with feigned sprightliness, “my theory falls to the ground; and, in telling you my story, I am only impertinently taking advantage of your good-nature to make a confession, and thus ease a somewhat troubled mind. Listen to the end; it is not far off.”

We reached a grotto on the borders of a little lake, where, to my surprise, an elegant breakfast was laid out. There were two seats placed ready; and *Fifine*, the maid, was there to serve. We partook of the meal together, talking of everything except of ourselves; but thinking of nothing else. Once or twice a reflection on the oddity of this reception flitted across my mind; but I thought that I had fallen in with some eccentric mistress of the castle—such as one reads of in middle-age romances—who was proud to give hospitality to a wandering artist. The lady called me *Hector*, and I called her *Andromache*; and, under the influence of some generous wine that came in with the dessert, I went so far as to declare that my love for her was unbounded, and that she must be my bride. I was thrown into ecstasies of delight by the frank reply, that it only depended upon me to fix the day! What follies I committed I scarcely recollect; but I know that *Fifine* scolded me; and said that, for a well-educated young man, I was dreadfully forward.

What a delightful half-hour was that which succeeded! The entrance of the grotto was wreathed with vines. The ripples of the lake broke upon a little beach of sand, that seemed of gold dust; the path by which we had come along at the foot of a precipice for about thirty yards, and then climbed a steep bank; the expanse of water—possibly it was merely a large pool, but these things magnify in memory—nestled at the feet of some lofty wooded slopes, which, with the pure blue sky, it reflected. We sat, side by side, hand in hand; but *Fifine*, whose notions of propriety were extremely rigid, expostulated vehemently. I whispered that she ought to be sent away; and *Andromache* was, perhaps, of my opinion; but she did not venture to agree with me aloud. Thus the hour passed in silent happiness; for our hearts soon became too full

for words; and I solemnly declare, that, to spend such another day, I would discount ten years of my existence.

As evening drew near, and I began to dream of the delights of a twilight stroll along the margin of the lake, *Fifine* pitilessly suggested an adjournment to the chateau. The word grated harshly on my ear. I had almost pictured to myself the lady as a dryad, or a nymph living ever amidst trees and grottoes. But prosy *Fifine* carried her point; and, in half-an-hour, we were in the saloon of a most comfortable modern dwelling, furnished with Parisian elegance. Several very commonplace looking servants stared at me as I entered. My romantic ideas at once received a shock. Five minutes afterwards a post-chaise rolled up to the door, and a stout old gentleman, accompanied by a tall handsome young man, issued therefrom.

Why should I give you the ludicrous details of the explanation? *Andromache* was betrothed to *Monsieur Hector Chose*; but she had never seen him. Her father, a wealthy naturalist, had gone that day to meet the bridegroom at a neighbouring town. The young lady (who was of a romantic disposition) had descried me in the park, and had fancied this was a pre-arranged surprise. She had got up the breakfast in the grotto; and had made my acquaintance as I have related. I answered to the name of *Hector*; she naturally retorted *Andromache*. This was the whole explanation of the mistake. I was overwhelmed with shame, when the father and the real *Hector*, with vociferous laughter, undeceived me; and the young lady herself went away in tears of vexation. For a moment, I hoped that I had produced an ineffaceable impression; but I was soon undeceived. In my mortification I insulted *Hector*. A hostile meeting was the result. I received a severe wound, and lay a long time helpless in a neighbouring hamlet. Still my love was not cured. Even when I heard that the marriage had been celebrated, I persisted in looking upon the bride as my *Andromache*; but when *Madam Duclique*, her cousin, came to see me, she destroyed all my illusions. *Andromache*, she said, though with much affectation of romance, was a very matter-of-fact personage, and remembered our love-passage only as a ridiculous mistake. She had married *Hector*, not only without repugnance, but with delight. He brought her everything she desired—a handsome person, a fine fortune, an exalted position; and she was the first to joke on the subject of “that poor counterfeit *Hector*.”

This interview cured me at once. I discovered that I was strong enough to leave the *Paradise* I had lost. *Madam Duclique*, an amiable and beautiful person, gave me a seat in her carriage, and drove me to the town of *Arques*. I feel grateful to my *Andromache* for having impressed upon my mind an enduring form of beauty.

“Let us drink her health!”