

THE ORCHARD AND THE HEATH.

BY GEORGE MEREDITH.

I chanced upon an early walk to spy
A troop of children through an orchard gate;
The boughs hung low, the grass was high;
They had but to lift hands or wait
For fruits to fill them; fruits were all their sky.

They shouted, running on from tree to tree,
And played the game the wind plays, on and round.
"Two little, invisible glees;
Pursuing; and a fountain's sound
Of laughter spouted, patterning fresh on me.

I could have seen them in the daylight fled,
Their bower in the sun; like a dry
A small one tumbling sang, "Oh, head!"
The rest to comfort her straghtway
Seized on a branch and thumped down apples red.

The tiny creatures flashing through green grass,
And laughing with her feet and eyes among
Fresh apples, while a little lass
Over as o'er breeze-ripples hung;
That sight I saw, and passed aliens pass.

My footpath left the pleasant farms and lanes, gay
Soft cottage-smoke, straight cocks a-crow, gay
flowers;

Beyond the wheel-ruts of the wains,
Across a heath I walked for hours,

And met its rivel tenants, rays and rains.

Still in my view milo distant fire appeared.

When, under a patched channel-bane enriched

With foxglove whose late-peals dropped scented,

Behold, a family had pitched

Their camp, and laboring the low tent upreared.

Here, too, were many children, quick to scan
A new thing coming; swarthy cheeks, white

teeth;

In many a colored rage they ran,
Like iron runlets of the heath,

Dispersed lay brot-pots, sticks, and drinking-can.

Three girls, with shoulders like a boat at sea
Tipped sideways by the wave (the clothing slid

From either ridge unequally);

Lean, swift and volatile, bestrid

A starting-point, unfrocked to the bent-knee.

They raced; their brothers yelled them on, and

broke

In act to follow, but as on they snuffed

Wood-fumes, and by the fire that spoke

Of provider, its pale flame puned,

And rolled athwart dwarf furzes grey-blue

smoke.

Soon on the dark edge of a rudder gleam

The mother-pot nursing, all stretched flat,

Paused for its bubbling-up supreme;

A dog upright in circ' sat;

And o'er his nose went with the flying steam.

I turned and looked on heaven awhile, where

now

The man-faced sunset, broadend with red

light.

Through high slop a golden bough,

And seemed the dearest of the night

Far down with mellow orchards to endow.

—Athenaeum.

HER LAST CONFESSION.

BY G. P. LATHROP.

A mill without water, wind or steam

to drive it—what a curious thing!

Yet, there it stood, and had stood for

many a year, and no one could tell the

reason, though you could not fail to see

that there must be some story belonging

to the place.

Strangers coming to Nantucket sometimes asked about it, but a l they could

find out was, that one day long ago the

dam of the mill-pond had given way,

the water had all gone out with a rush,

and the stream was scattered in new

channels or was lost in the sandy soil.

The loss came upon old Humphrey

Gurton, the miller, at a time when he

could not afford to rebuild. He was

thenceforth a ruined man. People said

that his loss made him crazy, for he

used to declare that the water could

never have escaped if some one had not

opened the waste-pipe in the dam;

and he vowed vengeance against the person

who had ruined him out of mere mischievousness.

Finally the idea worked upon him so

that he used to go about the streets

with a pistol in his hand.

"Looking for my unknown enemy,"

he said.

The town-people were easy-going, and

since Gurton had always been one of the

kindest men alive, and never had

an enemy in the place, they didn't

dream of harm coming from his threats.

But one day, about four years after

the accident, he met John Bartow, and

in a sudden fury shot him dead.

"He was the man that did it!" cried

old Humphrey, with insane satisfaction.

"Bartow is the enemy I have been looking for. I told you I would kill him

when I found him, and now I've done it."

When this tragedy occurred, everybody saw that Gurton had become a maniac past cure, for Bartow was one of his best friends, and in fact, Bartow's daughter Nelly, then 16, was engaged to marry old Humphrey's son Will, one of the finest fellows on the island.

The poor miller was carried away to the mainland, to an asylum for the insane, and there he died.

A great change had come over Nelly

since the miller's ruin. She was only a

girl of 15 at the time; but she and Will

Gurton had even then promised to

marry each other when they should

grow up.

The engagement was not broken,

though Will came to her when he found

his father was ruined, and told her that

she would have to marry a poor man if

she took him now.

"Still," he said, "I am only 18, and if

you will be true to me when we are

older, Nelly, I may get to be well of

by the time we are married. Only I

must go as a sailor, now, for father has no

business for me, as he expected to have.

I must trust to the sea, and work my

own way."

"Oh, Will," said the girl, weeping.

"You know I shall love you always, and

it doesn't make any difference about the

mill. And I shall keep my promise, if

you still want me. But I am not

good enough. No, Will, I am not good

enough."

At this the young boy grew a little

angry. "Never say that again, Nelly,"

he commanded her. "I don't know

what you mean when you call yourself

not good enough!"

But they soon came to an understanding again, and Will kissed her, and

Nelly tried to look bright once more,

and the promise was renewed.

The two children had already con-

fided this promise to their parents, and,

though it was looked upon as prema-

tur, it had received their approval.

But the change in Nelly, of which I

have spoken, was this, that, while be-

fore she had been one of the merriest,

romping girls in the town, always full

of fun and tricksiness, she now became

very serious and almost melancholy.

"Why, cheer up, Nelly," her father

would often say to her. "What is my

little girl thinking about? Has any one

done ought to hurt you?"

"No, father," Nelly would answer,

very briefly. And then she would go

away, as if to avoid being questioned.

When she grew older, Mr. Bartow thought perhaps she was grieving about Will, seeing how the childish attachment was ripening into womanly love.

"I know it is hard," he once said to her, "to think how different Will's lot

would have been if he had had the mill; but don't fix your mind on that, my child. You have got a brave fellow, and he is sure to do well for you."

"But I never wanted him to go to sea, you know, father. And now it is coming like a fate. He's going away like all the other boys."

"Pshaw!" said Mr. Bartow, who had served many years on the whale ships and rather despised land employment. "In my time the girls would not have a lover at all who had not toughened his hands on the ropes for one voyage, at least. Don't pout over that."

Nelly agreed to try being braver; but her pensiveness did not diminish, and her father began to suspect that there was some cause for it which she had not revealed.

And then came the terrible day when he was murdered by the poor, crazed miller.

After that, no one wasted any wonder over that melancholy expression which was gradually becoming indelible upon Nelly's face. Her future husband's father had fallen a prey to disaster and died in madness, while her own father had been cut off in his hale vigor by that very hand which should have welcomed her as a daughter. Were not these events enough to have wrought a revolution in her character?

She was terribly overwhelmed when her father was brought home, after the shooting.

Those who saw her related that her grief was almost too awful even to speak of afterward. She seemed to consider herself the cause of the calamity:

"Oh, I wish I had never been born!" she cried. "But for me these griefs would never have come to us all. My poor, poor father—he wondered so what made me sad, and I never told him; and I felt something dreadful coming—but how could I tell it was to be this?"

"Hush!" said one of her friends. "It is wrong to talk so, as if you could make or prevent what Providence has appointed."

"But I am doomed, I am doomed," moaned Nelly. "And all who are nearest to me are being visited with my doom."

"How do you mean?" asked her friend, bewildered.

Then Nelly became quiet at once. She set herself to care for her mother, and never again gave any outward sign of her own dreadful suffering; and she showed such dread when any reference was made to that one outbreak of wild grief, that her friends learned not to speak of it again.

She was so devoted to her stricken mother, that every one pointed her out as a pattern to their children, and poor Mrs. Bartow often said to her that without her she should not have been able to live a week.

"How different you are, Nelly," she would say, "from the thoughtless, fun-loving little thing you used to be. I never thought you would be such a comfort and stay to me."

"Oh, mother," begged Nelly, "don't praise me for that. I don't deserve to have you think so much of me. I ought to have been better than I am. I can't bear to have you call me good."

When she spoke thus it only made her seem all the better for her modesty. But in spite of her tender care, and never again gave any outward sign of her own dreadful suffering; and she showed such dread when any reference was made to that one outbreak of wild grief, that her friends learned not to speak of it again.

She paused, and her abstracted gaze and suffering face seemed to show that she was looking back over her life. Then she went on.

"It was the waste-pipe in the mill-dam, and I kept thinking how funny it would be, and how Mr. Gurton would stare, if I could let all the water out before he knew it. I thought it was all right, because Will made love to me then, and I didn't dream of doing any harm to them that were like to be so near and dear to me. So I went all alone and secret, and I could work at it without being seen, because there were bushes growing close around it. At last I got the plug out, and then I crept away and hurried home. Mr. Gurton—he was the miller, you know—was away. But the water got down so it wouldn't run over the top, and the race was shut off, so it pushed against the dam faster than the plug-hole would let it run out, and the whole thing went and the water was lost."

"I didn't think it was a little thing to feel so about; but that was what I said to myself. I only did it for fun, just for fun, as you put pepper in those flowers, my little Peggy. But see what it did to me afterward! That wasn't for fun, you may be sure."

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