



CHAPTER II.

Rodrick Jardine was not, I hope, a worse young fellow than most others of his age, or less soft-hearted.

Yet when he had fairly bade good-by to his good, fearful mother, who, he knew well, would do anything in the world for him, except let him do what he felt was best for himself—this parting once over, he breathed more freely than he had done for many weeks.

His "wild-goose chase" had resolved itself into a delicate purpose, or as much so as was possible to his nature, and at his age. He had not been to Blackhall—he hardly knew why, except that his mother had thrown a good many impediments in the way of his journey, so that perceiving that she did not like it, he gave it up. But he had a long correspondence with Mr. Black, the old factor there, who knew all the family affairs.

From him Rodrick discovered that there had been, half a century back, three branches of the Jardine family, represented by Silence Jardine, Archibald Jardine, and Henry Jardine, his father. Thence Archibald had suddenly disappeared abroad, taking his little patrimony. After many years he was heard of as a "pastor" in some Swiss canton; no very great change, he having been intended for the Scotch Church; and he was said to be married, with a family. But he had never revisited acquaintance with either of his cousins, and what was his present circumstances, whether he were alive or dead, nobody knew.

He had only been able to catch one clue whereby he might find his cousin. Mr. Black, the Blackhall factor, a strong Free Church man, had shown some interest in a similar disruption in the Swiss Church, and in one of the controversial writers therein, a "professor" or "pastor," or both—the good man's ideas on the subject were at once strikingly original and tender. Rodrick brought a letter of introduction, but, on delivering it, found the family were still at their summer retreat in the Jura Mountains. So he decided to make the best of a bad business, and amuse himself till they came back. He knew the language, and was one comfort—and he was not of the stolid Saxon temperament, which refuses to take in any new ideas, or to see any perfection in things to which he is unaccustomed. He was a true Celt, impressionable and flexible by nature, ready to love, quick to hate, until the experience of life should teach caution in the one and tolerance in the other. "The world will go hard with you, my boy," his father had sometimes said, half tenderly, half pensively; and Rodrick, shaking his black curls, had only laughed, afraid of nothing.

Nor was he discouraged or afraid. In fact, he rather enjoyed this dropping from the clouds, and the soaking clouds—into a new place and new people. Not so very new after all, for when on Sunday morning he followed the dripping multitude up the steep street which led to the cathedral—now a Protestant church—the few everything so like home that but for the language he could have imagined himself "sitting under" his mother's favorite minister at Blackhall. Only when the psalm arose, to a quaint and beautiful tune, and it was the very psalm, too, for he read it out of his neighbor's book, beginning—

"Grand Dieu, nous te louons, nous t'adorons, Seigneur."

It contrasted favorably with the nasal hymns which so tormented him in Scotland. It was sung not badly, especially by one pure high soprano, who sat behind, a voice so good that he vainly tried to catch sight of the singer; and in its sweet musical French it seemed to express what he missed so often at home, the sense of cheerfulness in religion. To the last verse, *Nous t'adorons, O Dieu, d'un te grande amour*, he felt as if he were in the presence of the invisible singer behind gave such paths that it went right to his heart. The young man, called out by his "by his mother, because his religion lay very deep down, longed earnestly for those *jeux heureux*, any means content, and wondered if, by any means, he could attain to the like—be it alone, with and it was his high to be good, hundreds ready to assure him to be bad.

It was a small thing, one of those trifling incidents which befall us all—only some of us note them, and others do not; but long after he had returned, he remembered it with a strange solemnity, like a person who, believing he was walking in his own way, on his own feet, finds out that hands unseen, unfelt, have been leading him all the while.

Plunging back through the muddy streets—"home"—what a ridiculous word—to the dreary hotel, Rodrick made up his mind to give one day's more chance to the weather, and to the absent Professor Reynier, upon whom, all his family depended, the gar on dilator, enthusiastically, for everybody seemed to know every body in this innocent little town. If, on the morrow, it did not cease raining, and some token did not come in answer to his letter, he would be p. h. by "fresh words and pastures new"—take, in short, to pleasure instead of duty, and pursue the search after this vague distant cousin no more.

But the next day, as he awoke, behold a change! And such a change!

The mist had entirely lifted off from the lake. Its wide bosom lay, still gray, but motionless and clear in the soft dawn. And beyond their intense purple sharply distinct against the bright amber of the sky, was the high line of Alps. Through one deep indentation, between the Jungfrau and the Pensternhorn, the sun was slowly rising, dyeing the snows rose-color, and then, as he mounted above the clouds, pouring a sudden stream of light right across the lake—that "golden path of rays," which always feels like a bridge where we or loved ones might walk—they to us or to them—those that on earth we see no more.

Rodrick, as he gazed, was conscious of the same sensation which had come over him a few days before—that intuition of approaching fate—bless or be; which by those who have it is esteemed mere fancy, and supremely ridiculous; and even those who have it have need to be rather afraid of it, just as a very imaginative person would be less in fear of the ghosts he

fully decorated table, with its dainty china, flowers, and fruit. One missed a little the bright English fire, and the stove gave a certain closeness to the room—a sense of warm darkness, which, however, was not unpleasant; there was a sort of mystery about it, and youth likes mystery. Rodrick glanced round him at the party, evidently quite a family party.

It was an odd little group of things; but dropping down as it from the clouds upon this little town which a week ago was to him a mere dot on the map, he felt himself quite at home there. He was a Cambridge man and a man of fortune—more at home than he had done in Richardson society all his days. And when, re-entering the salon, he found a few other guests, scarcely visible in the dim light, and was introduced expressly to a "Monsieur Somebody" from Edinburgh; who, with his painful blunder in the broadest of Scotch accents, he heartily wished his own country-people were well, that they were all safe at home!

"And here, monsieur," continued his host, leading him to the latest, most politely worded billet, inviting him, in the name of M. le Professeur and Mme. Reynier, to pass the evening at their house.

"Six o'clock, and a soiree! What simple folks they must be here!"

But finding, he could be back in time to accept the invitation in his very best French, and started off to the railway station, on his little bit of solitary sight-seeing.

No one shared his carriage—abroad there is a saying that nobody travels first-class except the Englishmen—so he admired all alone the picturesque country which skirts the long chain of lakes; very comfortable, but just a trifle dull. Not that Rodrick disliked his own company; on the contrary, he preferred it to that of most people he met—but he had had so much of it lately. It would have been rather pleasant to have somebody to whom he could say that Berne was a most curious old town, with whom he could have thrown hints of the wars, the important personages, "tenors" on their own account; still better, when inquiring his way to Terrasse, and finding the view hopeless, the mountains being again "couverts," he had to content himself with admiring the river which flows below it, circling the pretty town like a tender arm. Still more would he have liked somebody, anybody, beside him, with whom he could lean over the low wall and argue about the sensations of the man on horseback, who leaped down from Heaven knows how many feet—without being killed; and what sort of sermons he preached—since, the inscription says, he at once entered the Church and was a minister in it for many years.

"Suppose," Rodrick thought, "these were to jump down now, just to feel a sensation, or create one—Folly!"

And laughing at himself, and his inordinate veneration at the dull gray day, the miserable mountains, the solitude, everything he went to look for in a restaurant, and lounge away the time till return time.

Just before it started, by a sudden impulse, hoping against hope, he walked back to the Terrasse, and turned a last look in the direction of the mountains. One instant—no wonderful, bewildering instant—and then—"If, after my death, I open my eyes in Paradise, I know, I feel, it will look like that."

Such was the thought which passed through Rodrick's mind—the only thought, for every feeling was absorbed into mere gazing—drinking in through eyes and soul a vision, utterly indelible to those who have never seen it.

The Jungfrau in the sunset, spiritualized by a clear amber glow, till it resembles nothing earthly, only that new Jerusalem "coming down from heaven like a bride prepared for her husband," and the clouds, and gazed, almost out of himself with ecstasy, thinking of nothing, seeing nothing, though there was a little group beside him gazing too. But he never noticed him, still, stepping backward, he came against some one, and fell. "Pardon, madame," he murmured, and saw it was madame all—mademoiselle.

She had never observed him—not in the least. Here he was too fixed up on the mountains, in entire absorption—gazing, gazing, almost, English eyes. And her short, curly fair hair might have been English too. But when at the second "Pardon" she turned, there was an unmistakable foreign grace in her slight acknowledgment. She and her companion, an older lady, exchanged a word or two, but it was French, spoken with the purest of accents. So Rodrick had had any hope of finding a countrywoman faded out at once.

And the lovely vision of the Jungfrau and Pensternhorn already begun to fade. Yet still the little group stood silently gazing, in a common sympathy. Rodrick never looked even at his young neighbor, until, suddenly turning, their eyes met. Both were full of tears:

"At the first sight They have changed eyes."

People dispute this truth, and yet it is a truth to some people and under some circumstances.

Started to a degree that almost annoyed him—bowing instinctively, and then blushing deeply to think that he had done so, that he had taken such a liberty with any strange lady, Rodrick hurried away, having indeed waited so long that his swift young feet and the happy tardiness of Swiss railways alone saved him from losing his train and the Reynier soiree.

"But I will come back to Berne tomorrow," he thought. "It is a far prettier town than Neuchâtel; and—wonder if she is a Bernoise? wonder if I shall ever see her face again?"

Just then—as it was possible—in the dim light a gray gown passed him and slipped into a third-class carriage. And he had an impression that she wore a gray gown.

"Nonsense," laughing at himself as he lounged back in his luxurious wagon; "a creature like that could not possibly travel third-class."

So he tried to forget her, and think only of the Jungfrau; then, suddenly, of the means he must take to interest M. Reynier in his search for Archibald Jardine—in whom it must be confessed, his own interest was fast dying out. Anything tedious, or dull, or unpleasant, was so new to him. He did not appreciate it at all.

The train being late, he had only just time to dart out and fly to his hotel to dress for the evening.

He had a fine face and a graceful figure, a bearing that was "very nice the gentleman"—and manners—well, he could not have said a harsh or discourteous word to a woman—any woman, high or low, ugly or pretty, young or old—for his life. Thus he appeared as he entered the salon of M. le Professeur Reynier.

It was very dimly lighted, with shaded lamps, so that at first Rodrick distinguished nothing; then he became aware of a gray-haired gentleman, a matronly lady, and a crowd of young people of different ages, down to quite small children; of a courteous and kindly reception, and of passing into a salle-a-manger, where was laid out a simple but abundant meal, corresponding to the "hungry tea" of Scotch habit. Everything, indeed, was extremely simple—but so pretty, from the shiny parquet floor to the taste-

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