

## IV.

## CLINTON SCOLLARD'S "THE CLOISTERING OF URSULA."\*

Some books remind us pleasantly, yet firmly, that we never entirely outgrow the artless enjoyments of childhood. This is one of that class. The reviewer admits (with all the more frankness because of what he intends to say next) that the sight of *The Cloistering of Ursula*, when he took it up to read, with its gay, vermilion binding, its felicitous romantic title, and the introductory rigmarole about being the hitherto unpublished memoirs of the Italian Marquis of So-and-So, caused a slight sinking of the heart. Indeed, however much one despises the narrowness of those persons who prefer one sort of subject matter in their novels to the exclusion of every other, it is no sin to assert that, while a great many spirited romances of the lady and the sword have been written (and enthusiastically received) not all of them have been actually enthralling, and that with each addition to their number the chance that the old story in its new form will prove potent in securing and holding the attention becomes smaller. All the more remarkable is it, then, to find one in which the interest is as lively as the theme demands.

Just as in the Golden Age you were not merely absorbed, but, perhaps, set a-tinging in every nerve by the humble narrative of Archie's escape from the den of the counterfeiters—an exit made with the staccato accompaniment of pistol shots, an episode punctuated with the possibilities of sudden death—so again you may find in the sanguinary but fortunate adventures of Andrea Uccelli a similar means of making the hours fly by like minutes while the book lasts; that is, if you are not an irretrievably mature person.

The story is very well written. The style is flowing throughout, and is without affectation other than the harmless use of a few old English phrases put in to impart a flavour of old Italian to the sup-

\*The Cloistering of Ursula. By Clinton Scollard. Boston: L. C. Page Co. \$1.50.

posed translation. The author tells his story without digressions concerning the conditions of the time or the scenery of the place, suggesting much of both, nevertheless, in a cleverly unobtrusive way. He takes a certain amount of pains with his characters, moreover, to let you know the kind of people they are, yet at the same time is very much alive to the fact that the complexities of ordinary human nature are not under examination upon this occasion: the plot is the thing—the prolongation of the distresses and perils of the hero to the limit; then the happy consummation. All in all it is a clever book.

It concerns itself with the rivalry between two powerful noble houses in the ancient city of Lorennia. The feud speedily becomes bloody, and as the outcome of a wholesale slaughter of his family by the opposing faction, Andrea burdens himself with the task of revenge single-handed. Ursula, the heroine, is an object of inspiration and of tender care to him throughout. Her heart was at one time set upon entering a sisterhood, but it is no serious breach of confidence to declare that in the last chapter she consents to select Andrea's ancient garden seat as the scene of her cloistering.

The most strenuous aspect of the novel is revealed in the following passage:

Both men were bleeding from many wounds. Their arms were tightly pinioned and their legs partially secured. There was an aching hush of apprehension, then some one not visible screamed a word of command, whereat the two prisoners were seized by the powerful men guarding them, lifted in air, and hurled head foremost downward. An instant later their bodies lay, masses of crushed flesh and bone, on the uneven pavement of the piazza.

Then, to add to the grisly horror of the scene, men with long, glistening knives leaped out of the throng. Upon the breathless corpses they flung themselves, gashed their hearts out, and pinned them, reeking with blood, high upon one of the doors of the Palazzo Pubblico.

This is the vengeance of the Uccelli upon the Neri.

Carl Hovey.

# FUEL OF FIRE

By ELLEN THORNEYCROFT FOWLER

## CHAPTER II.

### BAXENDALE HALL.

Upon a hill the old house stood,  
Commanding stream and field and wood.

Baxendale Hall, which was built for the third time—having been twice destroyed by fire—in the reign of James the Second was a fine, square house of red brick, with stone facings, and the coat-of-arms of the Baxendales, also in stone, carved over the front door. It stood in the centre of a beautiful park, on the borders of Mershire and Salopshire; and the house was situated upon such an eminence that its cellars were on a line with the top of the tower of Silverhampton Church. Thus Silverhampton and Baxendale Hall looked at each other, from their respective hills, across a fruitful and well-populated valley, a pleasant land of meadows and orchards and comfortable houses, made happy by the money that was coined in the murky coal-fields on the other side of Silverhampton town.

The Baxendales were one of the oldest families in Mershire; and they had lived at Baxendale Hall ever since Domesday Book was edited—and probably before that. But of late years their prosperity had dwindled, as is the way nowadays of all prosperity which has its being solely in land; and when the late Mr. Baxendale died of a broken heart, owing to the pecuniary difficulties which beset him, it was found that the rents of the estate were so reduced, and the mortgages upon it so heavy, that his son came into an income of only some very few hundreds a year; and those few hundreds were made still fewer by the enormous fire insurance which all the owners of Baxendale were bound to pay, in consideration of the family curse, which foretold that Baxendale Hall should once more—for the third time—"be made fuel of fire."

The late Mr. Baxendale had married for love and not for money—a peculiarity of his race—Lady Alicia Moate, a daughter of the Earl of Portcullis; and by her had one child, a son, Laurence. Her ladyship possessed as little wit as money, but she had beauty in excess; and for her beauty Alwyn Baxendale loved, wooed and married her, and lived beyond his income, and finally died broken-hearted because that income was insufficient to supply her somewhat

exorbitant daily needs. Thus matters came to a crisis, Baxendale Hall was shut up, and only an old man and his wife left in it as caretakers; and Alicia went to rule the house of her brother, Lord Portcullis, while Laurence Baxendale officiated as tutor to his lordship's eldest son. When, however, Lord Portcullis took unto himself a second wife, Lady Alicia was compelled to seek a home elsewhere; so she and her son repaired to an untenanted farmhouse near The Ways (a hamlet on the Baxendale estate), and about a mile and a half from the Hall.

The Ways was probably so called because five ways met there: one went eastward past the Burton's house, and through the pretty village of Tettleigh, straight to Silverhampton: another took the opposite direction, and led the traveller, by the hills of Salopshire and Wales, to the coast of the western sea; a third went northward, down a shady lane, past Ways Hall, the home of the Fairfax family, to Codswell—a picturesque village whose cobble-paved street climbed bravely up a church-crowned hill which stood as high as Baxendale or Silverhampton; a fourth lay through the well-wooded glades of Baxendale Park, and finally—by slow ascents—reached the Hall itself; and the fifth went due south into a green maze of lanes, which wandered on and on until they finally lost themselves in fairyland—as English lanes have a knack of doing, if only they are taken in the right way.

There are few things more beautiful than a Mershire lane. It is beautiful in the winter, when the elm trees that overshadow it are transformed into coral-reefs by the magic touch of the hoar-frost; it is beautiful in the spring, when its hedges are white with May-blossom and its ditches fringed with the lace-like hemlock; and it is beautiful in the autumn, when the climbing brambles adorn it on either side with crimson and gold; but it is most beautiful of all on a summer's evening, when the low-lying shafts of light touch the bents and the feathery grasses and turn the pathway into a golden pavement encircled by a veritable rainbow of emerald, until the traveller feels that he is treading a ladder worthy of the feet of angels, leading him—as the beauty of nature will always lead those who have eyes to see it—straight from earth to heaven.

The spot where these five ways met was

marked by a group of fine old elm trees growing upon a grassy mound; and round about it were clustered a farm or two and sundry cottages, a picturesque post-office and blacksmith's forge. It was a pretty hamlet in the typical English style; and its quaint little inn, by name "The Crown," slumbered in a cosy bed of blossom, with a coverlet of climbing roses.

Ways Hall was a long, low, white house, clothed with Virginia creeper, which made it as a green bower in summer, while in autumn it appeared as a house which was enveloped by crimson flames, and yet was not consumed. It was set in the centre of velvet lawns which—like the famous lawns of Oxford—had been "rolled for five hundred years," and which sloped down to a large sheet of water, inhabited—and defended to the best of their ability—by a family of swans. The banks of this lake were covered every spring with daffodils and periwinkles, which looked at their reflection in the water and danced with pleasure at the sight. At least the daffodils did: the periwinkles only nodded and said to themselves, "What nice blue eyes we have!"

The Fairfaxes of The Ways were a good old family, but now had dwindled down to two—namely, Mrs. Fairfax and her daughter Faith. Mrs. Fairfax was a stately dame of the old school, who had never in her life sat in an easy chair or said a silly thing; and Faith was the raw material out of which saints and angels are manufactured. She had soft, fair hair and a Madonna-like face; and in her eyes was that look which dwells in the eyes of all those chosen ones who see beyond this present world. Unselfish was an adjective not applicable to Faith Fairfax; selfless was the only description available for her. Had she lived in earlier times Faith would inevitably have taken the veil; for she was one of the women who have a special vocation for religion, and seem made for the cloister rather than the hearth. As it was, she devoted herself to her mother and the poor; and the human side of her—as far as anything about Faith Fairfax was purely human—fell in love with Laurence Baxendale, and loved him in the ideal, worshipping way in which only such nun-like women can love. The high-minded, inflexible part of his character, which stirred up opposition in Nancy Burton, fitted exactly into Faith's more saintly nature; and while Nancy was slightly defiant and greatly afraid, Faith was humbly adoring.

As a boy, whenever anything went wrong, Laurence Baxendale turned to Faith to set it right again; as a man, he pursued very much the same course. She was a year or two older

than he, and filled in his life the place which his mother had left empty; for motherliness was the last attribute which could be laid to the charge of pretty, foolish Lady Alicia.

It is strange how, in the give and take of life, men take from the angelic and give to the purely human women with whom they are brought into contact. They make demands—excessive demands—upon the patience and forbearance and unselfishness of the women who love them; but it is the women who make excessive demands upon them that they love the best. Women who behave well rather than wisely take credit to themselves for carrying their own cloaks, and climbing over their own stiles, and generally saving trouble for the men who are treading life's paths by their side. Foolish creatures! The men want to carry their cloaks and help them over the stiles, if only they will let them. Which shows that the proverbial Selfishness of Man is as effete and worn-out a bogey as the Dodo or the Sea Serpent or Religious Disability.

The most interesting feature of Baxendale Hall was a large library, filled with all manner of rare old books and fine pictures, containing many priceless manuscripts and valuable prints. It occupied the whole length of the front of the house upon the first floor, and was exactly over the great entrance hall. Behind it, and over the dining and the drawing-rooms, was the suite of rooms always occupied by the master and mistress of the house; and next to these the nurseries and school-room, where generations of little Baxendales had played their games and learned their lessons. The guest-chambers were in one wing of the house over the justice-room and the muniment-room, and the rooms where the men smoked, played billiards and managed the estate; the opposite wing was devoted to the kitchens and offices, and over them the servants' apartments. The front of the Hall looked east, to where the old churches of Silverhampton and Sedgehill were landmarks to all the surrounding country; and the gardens at the back borrowed much of their glory from the sun which set behind the distant Welsh hills.

"I wish, mother, if it wouldn't bother you, that you would see rather more of the Burton girls," Laurence Baxendale said to Lady Alicia the day after he had been to tea at Wayside. "I know they aren't exactly your style; but I should be awfully glad if you would be kind to them, as they are always very kind to me, and I enjoy going there immensely."

"Certainly, dear Laurence, certainly. I have called on Mrs. Burton and she has returned the

call, but there is no real friendship in conventionalities such as that; and real friendship is so beautiful between neighbours, I think—so very beautiful; and makes everyday life such a touching and exquisite thing.”

“Yes; it is a good thing to be on friendly terms with the people about you.”

“As you say, dear Laurence, they are not exactly my style or in our set; their father makes iron, and I think it is beautiful to make iron—it must teach men to be so great and strong. And then it is so sweet and Christian, I always think, to show kindness to persons not quite in one’s own rank of society; because, I daresay, one can do one’s duty in an iron-works as well as on a landed property. In fact, one can do one’s duty in almost any rank of life; that, I think, is such a comforting thought, because it is always so nice for everybody to do their duty if they can. There is something very soothing in doing one’s duty, don’t you think?”

“*Soothing* isn’t exactly the word I should have used,” said Laurence dryly.

“And then the Burton girls are so charming, too—such sweet, simple, unsophisticated creatures!”

Lady Alicia had an amiable habit of praising all the people with whom she was brought into contact; but she slightly took the edge off her own commendation by invariably praising them for the qualities which they did not happen to possess.

The next afternoon she walked up to Wayside, and found the girls and their mother at home.

“I am so glad you are in, dear Mrs. Burton,” she began in her usual gushing manner; “it always seems so insincere and hollow to call upon people when they are not at home; and insincerity and hollowness are such terrible things, don’t you think?—such very terrible things.”

“They are certainly not lovable qualities,” agreed Mrs. Burton: and Nancy winked at Nora behind Lady Alicia’s elegant back.

“I want to see more of you and your dear girls. I was only saying to my son yesterday how beautiful it is to be neighbourly with the people who live near one—so sweet and Christian—even if they don’t happen to be the sort of people one would choose.”

“It is very kind of you to say so, Lady Alicia,” replied Mrs. Burton, manfully repressing her natural desire to smile.

“And what are your dear girls’ Christian names? I am always so interested in people’s Christian names and the months in which their

birthdays are. I think one can learn so much from these, don’t you? They are so interesting and suggestive, and often such a key to character.”

“Do you mean to the characters of the people themselves, or of their godfathers and godmothers?” asked Nancy, with ominous demureness.

“Oh! dear child, of the people themselves, of course. How could it be the key to the character of their godfathers and godmothers, when we never know who their godfathers and godmothers are? They are not given in the Peerage, you know; though I am not at all sure that they ought not to be. It would be rather nice and orthodox if they were, don’t you think?”

“It would be rather interesting,” said Nancy, “as showing whom they expected to leave them a fortune.”

“And there is so much in names. I always think it was such a mistake of dear Shakespeare to say that a rose would smell as sweet if you called it something else; it couldn’t, you know. And what are you dear girls’ names, Mrs. Burton?”

“Nancy and Nora.”

“Oh, how sweet! How very sweet for them both to begin with the same letter! I always think there is so much sympathy between people whose names begin with the same letter. It was such a comfort to me that my dear husband’s name began with A, like mine. Do you know, I don’t think I could ever have loved a man whose Christian name began with B? He would have seemed so far off; almost as if he were living in another planet. I remember once meeting a man and his wife who were called Francis and Frances. I thought it so very touching and beautiful.”

“It will be rather a bore if Nancy and I have to marry men whose names begin with N,” said Nora, “because there are so few nice men’s names beginning with N.”

“And it would be horrid to marry men who weren’t nice,” added Nancy.

Lady Alicia took it all in solemn earnest: “Oh! dear children, there is Nathaniel—not exactly a pretty name, you know, but so Biblical and suggestive. I think it must be lovely to have a Bible name, especially on Sundays; it must make one feel in such perfect harmony with the day.”

“But we can’t both marry men who are called Nathaniel,” persisted Nancy; “it would be so very confusing, and we should get them all mixed up.”

“So you would, my dear; but I feel sure

## The Bookman

there are other nice names beginning with N, if only one could recall them."

"But you didn't call your son by a name beginning with A," suggested Nora.

"Ah! no. Dear Laurence was called after an ancestor of his who did something very heroic and touching—I forget exactly what it was. And I think it is so ennobling to call one's children by names which remind one of heroic deeds, don't you? It seems to elevate the tone of everyday life by beautiful memories; and there is nothing more refining, I find, than beautiful memories. Ah! what a priceless gift memory is! What should we do without it, I wonder?"

The girls thought that Lady Alicia ought to know; but they did not say so.

Her ladyship ambled on as usual, without giving any one else a chance to speak: "I do hope, dear Mrs. Burton, that your girls are cultured. I think it is so sweet for young people to be cultured, and to read nice poetry. I remember when I was a girl—I used to read all the poetry I could lay my hands on, except Lord Byron's *Don Quixote*; dear papa never would allow that."

"Ah! we have not been allowed to read it, either," remarked Nancy.

"Haven't you? How very interesting! I think it is so very beautiful when parents overlook their children's reading. It seems to bring the Fifth Commandment into everyday life. And it is so sweet and Christian to keep the Commandments when one can, don't you think? I think one should always try to do so for the sake of setting the servants a good example, if not for one's own."

"I think it is nice for parents to take an interest in everything that their children do," said Mrs. Burton.

"It is, indeed, dear Mrs. Burton. And I do hope your young people are fond of culture. I am devoted to reading myself, but, unfortunately, the minute I begin to read my thoughts begin to wander, so, unfortunately, I am unable to indulge my literary taste as I should wish. It is a great deprivation!"

"But you have the pleasure of your own thoughts," suggested Nora; "and that is far greater. I'd much rather think my own thoughts than read other people's."

Lady Alicia sighed: "Ah! my dear, that is because you are not literary. If you had my temperament you would live upon books. I remember once starting a Shakespeare-reading society when I was living with my dear brother, Lord Portcullis, for all the girls in the neigh-

bourhood. I thought it would train their minds; and it is so nice for the minds of the young to be trained."

"Very nice," said Mrs. Burton; and she had not time to say more before Lady Alicia went on:

"Of course, there are things in Shakespeare not altogether suitable for the young to read, so I asked the clergyman's wife to mark all the passages which she felt could be read without detriment to the fresh and untrained minds I was endeavouring to cultivate. I think clergymen's wives are just the people to do that sort of thing, don't you, dear Mrs. Burton? It seems exactly the kind of duty they would enjoy."

"I feel sure they would. And did this particular one justify the confidence you had placed in her?" Mrs. Burton asked.

"Well, it was very unfortunate, but there was a mistake. Instead of marking all the passages to be read, as I had asked her, she marked all the passages to be left out. And, most naturally, the class read those and left the others out. But how could I help it? I assumed that she had done what I had asked her."

The two girls coughed violently in order to stifle their laughter, and their mother managed to inquire, with a fairly sober front: "But didn't it occur to you at the time what had happened?"

"Well, it did occur to me that the remarks were a little disjointed. But remarks are often disjointed in plays—to allow for changing the scenery or the actor's clothes, I suppose; so I took it as a matter of course. But it was annoying all the same. It made people laugh, though what there was to laugh at I cannot imagine. But that is a growing evil of the present day, don't you think? People treat everything as a joke, and speak lightly of quite serious things."

"It is a virtue of the present day, I think," argued Nancy, "to laugh instead of crying, whenever it is possible. My heart is like Beatrice's—'keeps, poor fool! on the windy side of care;' and I'm thankful for it."

Lady Alicia sighed her dainty little sigh: "Ah! my poor dear husband was like that, and so is Laurence. They both of them have always laughed at things that seem to me quite pathetic. But then I am extremely sensitive, and my poor husband was not, nor is Laurence. They could not, of course, help being so unlike me, nor do I in any way blame them for it; but it has been to me a matter of regret."



"What sort of things does Mr. Baxendale laugh at?" asked Nancy, who was athirst for any form of knowledge concerning Laurence.

"Just the things his poor, dear father used to laugh at—things that you would have expected them to be quite sorry about instead. Our poverty, for instance; and the way we have come down in the world; and his own shyness and unpopularity; and the fact that he can't afford to marry; and lots of really quite sad things like that."

"I see." And Nancy's voice was very low.

"I often say to him what a pity it is that he can't afford to marry, because a charming wife is such a nice thing for a man to have, don't you think? In fact, I should quite pity him, poor boy! if only he would let me. But whenever I mention the subject he just turns it off into a joke, and never seems to take it seriously at all, so my sympathy is wasted. And I am such a sympathetic creature, you know, that Laurence's callousness pains me."

"I don't think it need," said Mrs. Burton gently.

"Ah! but I am so sensitive: I shrivel up like a sensitive plant when my feelings are hurt; and Laurence is always hurting them. I am sure he does not mean to do so, but he is so thick-skinned that he does not understand a sensitive nature like mine. His poor father was just the same."

"What sort of things did he laugh at?" asked Nancy, with unslaked curiosity.

"Oh! he used to laugh at our poverty too, and at what a wretched match he had turned out for me. Of course, I ought to have done much better, and I used to say so, but he just treated it as a joke. And it really was no joke at all for me, who had so many really good offers when I was young."

Nancy's lip curled with scorn, and she judged Lady Alicia with the merciless judgment of those who have neither married nor been disappointed in marriage.

"People used to say," her ladyship continued, "that Alwyn died of a broken heart when he found that he would be obliged to turn out of Baxendale. But that was quite a mistake, and merely shows how people ought not to talk about things which they do not understand. I think that is another of the faults of the rising generation, dear Mrs. Burton: people are so prone, so sadly prone, to talk about matters which are quite beyond their comprehension."

"And not only of the rising generation," said Mrs. Burton dryly.

"Ah, no! It was a fault of my poor, dear Alwyn's. He never in the least understood my

finer perceptions, and yet he was always talking about them in a slightly sarcastic way; and he had none of his own, poor dear!"

"Ah!" Nancy remarked.

"And as for dying because he could not afford to live at Baxendale," Lady Alicia continued, "it was all nonsense. He never really felt it at all, but made jokes about bringing me to the workhouse till the hour of his death. Now I did feel it, who had been brought up in such luxury, and always expected to make such a brilliant match."

"I have no doubt you did," said Mrs. Burton kindly, endeavouring, as was her custom, to make the best of everybody. "Both you and Mr. Baxendale must have felt leaving such a beautiful home."

"But he didn't feel it; that was the remarkable thing. He just laughed at it as he did at everything else; a sad habit, as I remarked a few minutes ago, and one which I grieve to say dear Laurence inherits! Almost the last thing he said to me, about an hour before his death, was to make a half-laughing apology for having given me only a heart full of love instead of a purse full of money, but adding that he was about to make the only reparation in his power."

"Poor Mr. Baxendale!" and Mrs. Burton's eyes were full of tears.

"Oh! do you think so? For my part, it quite shocked me to hear him speak sarcastically at such a time. I cannot think that a death-bed is the place for sarcasm. It seems to me so sweet to read the Bible and speak lovingly to all your friends at a time like that, so as to leave a nice impression behind you."

Nancy tossed her head: "It is a pity that a trifling incident such as death should divert the minds of some people from the importance of making an effective exit." She was very impertinent, there was no doubt of that; but perhaps there was some excuse for her.

Her impertinence, however, was lost upon Lady Alicia. That lady would as soon have expected a girl of Nancy's rank to be pert to her as she would have expected a polyanthus to jump up and bite her. So she innocently continued: "In death, as in life, my poor, dear husband never cared about what sort of impression he was making upon anybody. He was far too thick-skinned for that, and Laurence is just like him. Which is really very hard upon me, as I always think it would have been so nice to live with people who really understand one and sympathise with one, and who were alive to the higher traits of a really refined nature. But I suppose such crosses are

intentional, and so must be borne uncomplainingly, as patience under misconception is such a beautiful thing." And Lady Alicia again sighed her dainty sigh as she rose to take her leave, having effectually succeeded, as was her wont, in preventing those with whom she was conversing from putting their oars in even sideways.

### CHAPTER III.

LAURENCE BAXENDALE.

The pride that goes before a fall  
Had ruled the master of the Hall.

Somewhere in the middle of the maze of lanes which lay between The Ways and Teteleigh Wood stood an old red farmhouse sentinelled by a row of poplar trees. From its front windows one could see the stretch of green fields that lay between it and the Wood; and beyond them the distant mountains, which hid from the casual observer the wonderful doings of the setting sun; and from its back windows one could see Baxendale Hall, standing on the top of a green hill and supported by regiments of trees on either side.

It was at this old red house—called Poplar Farm—that Laurence and his mother took up their abode when the second marriage of Lord Portcullis made that nobleman's castle too full (and some people said too warm) to hold them. It belonged to them, being situated on the Baxendale property; and though small, was quite as large an abode as their very limited means permitted to them.

Poplar Farm was about five minutes' walk from Wayside, and propinquity did all that even the late Arthur Hugh Clough himself could reasonably have expected of it for Laurence Baxendale and Nancy Burton. It so happened that they had never become friends until the Baxendales took up their abode at the Farm. In the old days, when the Baxendales lived at the Hall, Nancy had been a small girl whom Laurence may have known by sight, but to whom, so far as he remembered, he had never spoken. In those far-off days—they seemed far off to him, though in fact it was but a short time ago—Laurence had been a quiet boy, reserved and sensitive to a degree, with few acquaintances among boys of his own age and no friends. Even then he gave evidence of a pride which seemed to have been his by birth—pride in the long line of Baxendales, stretching back until it was lost in the dim mist of bygone centuries; pride in the ancestral Hall, whose red bricks and square windows he so much loved; pride even in the

family curse which filled him when a child with a most delightful dread, a most fearful joy. As he grew older and found that despite this terrible curse no one grew a penny the worse, he would look back with a smile at the time when he feared to go to bed at night, fully expecting to be burned alive before morning; yet, for all that, he hugged the ancestral imprecation to his breast as a most cherished possession. But as a boy he chiefly showed his pride to the outside world in what seemed a studied reserve. Part of this was, no doubt, shyness; but, in addition, he intentionally held aloof from companions of his own age. The Baxendales, even then, were not able to mix much in society, so that, except when he paid a rare visit to Drawbridge Castle, he did not come across boys who by birth were his equals. Yet in spite of his pride and reserve, in spite of his unsociable reticence, he was a refined, well-bred boy, with great capacities for good. For his father he had a passionate love and devotion, and it was his father who chiefly influenced his early years. Lady Alicia was fond of her child, proud of his good looks and distinguished air; but she paid far more attention to his clothes than to his character. She was only one of those women who look on the outward appearance of their darlings, but who never win, or even care to win, their children's confidence. From his father Laurence had inherited two excellent gifts: a quick feeling for the humorous and a strong sense of humour. He seemed instinctively to shrink from anything mean and underhand; a hater of cruelty and naturally disposed to be lenient in his judgments in any matter touching honour, he was pitiless in condemnation, and never would allow mercy to temper justice. Having no companions of his own age, he would have found time hang heavily on his hands but for his love of books; hour after hour did he spend in the magnificent library of the Hall. He would probably have turned into a desultory bookworm, as his father could not afford to send him to a public school, had not the then vicar of Teteleigh happened to be an admirable scholar. When Laurence grew too advanced for his father, he was sent for three or four hours every day to the Vicarage to be instructed in Latin and Greek and other excellent things. He was a clever boy, and the vicar took the greatest delight in his instruction. His tutor not only laid the foundation of accurate scholarship, but also instilled into him a love for the English classics, cultivating his naturally good taste until it became almost fastidious, and not only taught him the knack of producing

passable Latin and Greek verses, but also the art of writing excellent English prose. Nevertheless, Laurence did not grow up a milksop. He had a great love of fresh air, and rode his pony daily, and took long walks in Baxendale Park and the maze of adjacent lanes. Moreover, he had boxing and fencing lessons from the retired sergeant who was engaged at the Grammar School of the neighbouring town of Silverhampton. Wherefore, though slight, he was strong, healthy and active. He had his faults, no doubt, as so many of us have; his pride in his race bred in him a certain tolerant scorn for those of humble birth; his pride in his intellect was accompanied by something like contempt for his less gifted brethren; his finished culture shrank from contact with people whose manners were less perfect than his own. Again, his delicate sensitiveness in all matters affecting honour gradually developed into an excessive scrupulousness. In his anxiety to avoid anything to which the most exacting moralist could take exception, he invented scruples where none could be fairly said to exist. He was an adept in finding a lion in the path in all matters affecting his own pleasure or advantage, and he elevated conscience to a position of such eminence that it became almost a bogey. With all this he was not a prig; he was saved from that by the quickness with which he saw the ridiculous side of things, and it is only fair to acknowledge that he was as ready to laugh at himself as at another. From the humorous to the pathetic it is only a step, and Laurence had a vein of tenderness and sympathy, which he strove manfully and not unsuccessfully to conceal, but which was evident enough to the few who knew him well. He loved dumb animals, especially horses and dogs, but he was never much at home with children. An only child himself, and avoiding through both pride and shyness the companionship of others, he had lived a more or less solitary boyhood, and knew little and understood less of children. Which, perhaps, accounts for the fact that he quite ignored the short-frocked Nancy and her sister when he met them taking their walks abroad under the protecting wing and vigilant oversight of their governess, and was quite unconscious that their eyes were not only blue but uncommonly bright and pretty. He had a quick eye for the flight of a bird or a cricket ball, but in things which really mattered he was in those days as blind as a bat.

In due course Laurence went to Oxford, having won a postmastership at Merton, thanks to the admirable coaching of the vicar. His father

was only able to make him a scanty allowance, so that even with his scholarship he had to lead a very quiet life and to indulge in few luxuries. Yet he enjoyed his college days; better, perhaps, than if he had been able to gratify expensive tastes and frequent frivolous (if not rowdy) society. He read hard, and rode hard, and had plenty of friends of a quiet sort. He had not much difficulty in securing a First in both Moderations and Greats: moreover, he won the Gaisford Prize for Greek Verse, a feat which greatly delighted his quondam tutor, the vicar.

During his last year at Oxford Laurence made his first real acquaintance with sorrow. His father, whose finances had been straitened for some years, owing to agricultural depression and the extravagance of Lady Alicia, found that he could no longer maintain his position at Baxendale Hall. He decided to move to a small house—but this decision was never carried into effect: grief at leaving his ancestral home broke his heart; and his last days were rendered more wretched by the selfishness of his foolish wife, who was continually bemoaning her hard fate in having to resign the position in the county which was her due. Thus a narrower home than even the one he had contemplated claimed the broken-hearted man—a home of quietness and peace, where he found rest for his soul.

Mr. Baxendale's death was a terrible blow to Laurence. He had always been devoted to his father, who had made himself a companion and friend to his son. That a time would ever come when that companion and friend should be no more had never occurred to Laurence, and when the blow fell it crushed him. He could not believe at first that it could be true; it seemed to him as though his father had gone on a journey and would soon come back. Then, as he began to realise that it really *was* true, that never again on this earth would he see his father's smile or clasp his father's hand, his faith was staggered. It could not be true that God was a loving Father if He could thus deal with His children. How could He (so Laurence cried in his anguish) permit His creatures to be thus tormented? Why should He have thus cruelly deprived him of his father, in the plenitude of that father's powers, with so much good left undone which he alone, it seemed, could accomplish—so much duty neglected which he alone could fulfil. If God were indeed pitiful and compassionate, why did He permit such misery and unhappiness to innocent men and women? Where was the justice, where was the love of the Creator?



For a time the mystery of pain and of human sorrow and grief overwhelmed Laurence's soul. But he faced his doubts, and came through the darkness into light at last. It was the remembrance of the father he had lost that was his sheet-anchor in this time of storm-tossed doubt; until he eventually realised the profound truth that the full influence of a man is never felt until his bodily presence has been removed; that, great though the grief may be, yet it is in truest love and divinest knowledge that God sometimes decides that it is expedient for us that our dear ones should go away.

Shortly after his father's death Laurence took his degree. Meanwhile his mother had gone to her brother, Lord Portcullis (whose wife had just died), and had taken charge of his household. As a tutor was required to teach the rising Drawbridge how to shoot, it occurred to heads of the family that Baxendale might undertake the post. He was not specially attracted by the prospect, but his pockets were so empty that there was room in them for his inclinations as well as his salary; so he was compelled to pocket both, on the same principle that thrifty persons drink inferior tea because they therewith receive a book as a bonus.

Meanwhile the Baxendale estates were managed by an agent; but when the agent had been paid his salary, and the heavy fire insurance which the owner was bound to maintain had been discharged, there was not very much left from the diminished rent-roll. The residue, such as it was, was given to Lady Alicia by her son for her apparel, which was by no means that of a meek and quiet spirit, but was after a much more expensive, if more effective style.

So time rolled on until Drawbridge was ready for Eton, and as a consequence his cousin's services were no longer required. It so happened at about this time it occurred to Drawbridge's father that Lady Sarah Sasenach had a pretty face and a charming manner. On pursuing the train of thought thus suggested, he began to speculate how the same face would look at the head of his table. On the whole, he came to the conclusion that he should prefer it to his sister's. In his case, for once, the course of true love ran smooth; as a consequence Lady Alicia, as well as her son, found her occupation gone.

It would have been well for Baxendale if he had withstood the allurements of the immediate income he secured by becoming his cousin's tutor, and instead of devoting such money as he possessed to the decoration of his mother's person, he had spent it on the prep-

aration of himself for the learned profession of the Law.

This at the time had to his scrupulous conscience savoured too much of selfishness; whereas if he had only used common sense, he would have seen that in the long run his mother would have benefited by a temporary restriction in the number and expensiveness of her gowns. But it is so difficult to use a sense that one does not happen to possess; and few of us care to borrow another person's for the occasion—to which minority Laurence did not happen to belong. As things were now, he had lost precious years; moreover, he had to find a home for his mother, whose exodus from Drawbridge Castle was necessitated by the advent of the new Countess. His opportunity was therefore lost; and as the idea of another tutorship was distasteful to him, he determined to dispense with the services of an agent and manage his estate himself. So he betook himself and his mother to Poplar Farm, which happened to be vacant at the time; and—having learned much while he was at Drawbridge from his uncle's agent—found himself quite competent to manage his own property. With the salary saved, and the rent of the house occupied by former agents added to his assets, his income was brought up to a few hundreds a year—sufficient for the needs of himself and his mother, but quite inadequate to the introduction of a Mrs. Laurence Baxendale. He tried of course to let the Hall; but it was a large, rambling building, too old-fashioned for the modern merchant-prince; moreover, its proximity to the town of Silverhampton was against its being let, as it is a notorious theory—which no amount of fact can controvert—that the surrounding country is as dark as Erebus; although any one who has sojourned in South Mershire knows full well that the much-maligned country is—like a certain distinguished personage—not nearly so black as it is painted.

The management of an estate is a healthful occupation, as was evidenced by the bloom upon Baxendale's face and the easy carriage of his slight but athletic frame. Yet it did not occupy his time to the full. The above-mentioned personage is credited—and there are apparently some grounds for the persuasion—with the knack of finding occupation for idle hands. This potentate has many local agents—some paid and some honorary—whom he engaged to carry out his design. On this occasion the vacant post fell to Miss Nancy Burton. Nancy herself was nothing loth to fulfil this useful office. She had an appetite which would

have done credit to Alexander himself for new worlds which should finally be conquered by her bow and spear. There was nothing of the "little Englander" about Miss Burton; in her policy there was no continent too vast to be annexed, no tribe too unmanageable to be added to her dependencies. Therefore she hailed Laurence Baxendale as one of those unknown yet conquerable spheres for which her great prototype sighed in vain. She was very adaptable, and had no difficulty in charming all with whom she came into contact and in persuading them that they and their concerns were objects of absorbing interest to her. There was no insincerity in this; as long as she was in the company of any person, however dull, her desire to put that particular person at ease, and to find topics of conversation agreeable to him or her, led to this result.

Baxendale was an exceedingly clever man, but unfortunately he had the knack of hiding his light under the bushel of shyness. Now Nancy did not know what it was to be shy: more than that, she defied any one to be shy when in her company. Wherefore, as the two met not infrequently, she quickly discovered Laurence's abilities, and found to her delight that he was very different from the average man of her acquaintance, whose superabundance of health was more than balanced by a plentiful lack of wit, not to say brains. Like other men, Laurence found it impossible to be shy in her presence, though he still maintained a reserve which Nancy thought as extraordinary as it was unnecessary. Yet they became close friends in spite of scruples and of struggles on the man's part. Nancy did not exactly set her cap at the impecunious owner of Baxendale Hall. But she dearly loved power; and finding (she was exceedingly quick in discerning feelings) the man resisting her influence, she determined that she would conquer his indifference. She had no intention of breaking his heart, still less her own; but she decided that he should be made to care for her sufficiently to satisfy the point of honour, and then he might depart with slightly scorched fingers but otherwise unhurt.

As for Laurence, he began by thinking he disliked Nancy; her very frankness he critically put down to forwardness, her wit he regarded as pertness, her good-humour as casual indifference. But he soon found himself convinced of folly; he began to recognise the charm of this brilliant young woman; to see that her frankness was the result of absence of self-consciousness, her easy tolerance the perfection of good manners. From this he rapidly

progressed to a recognition of the brightness of her wit and the fascination of her strong personality. A day seemed lost if he did not see her; a day appeared well spent if he had but five minutes of her charming society. Yet, strange to say, the more he was attracted the more reserved he himself became. This puzzled Nancy, who was perfectly aware of his being attracted, and equally conscious of his studied reserve. Laurence himself knew, but he was unable to gratify the girl's natural curiosity. In short, he had fallen in love with Nancy, and his sensitive conscience would not allow him to mention the fact to her. If he had done so nobody would have been more surprised than she.

No one knew what a struggle he had with himself. Day by day as he saw her he fell deeper into the coils. He knew what he was doing; yet he made no effort to escape. He knew that so far as he was concerned Nancy was the only woman in the world, and he accepted this elementary truth without a murmur. Yet his conscience told him that he could never marry her. She was a girl accustomed to walk delicately along the luxurious ways of life; he—with his ancient birth and pride of race—had nothing to offer her but a rambling mansion, with a superb library which the terms of his grandfather's will had made it impossible for him to sell; a large estate that brought him in a scanty income, made scantier by the fact that this same will stipulated that both Laurence and his father could only succeed to the property on condition that they paid a heavy fire insurance to protect the Hall from the consequences of the old curse. Moreover, he had a mother, with by no means inexpensive tastes, to support.

So it came to pass that in his relations with Nancy he was a man of many moods. Sometimes he would yield to the seductive charm of her bright talk. At such moments he would unbend and become his own natural self; he would allow his pleasant vein of humour and natural kindness of heart full play. Then would Nancy regard him as the most delightful of men. And then, all at once, he would freeze up and become stiff and affected, to Nancy's great astonishment. She would ask—and ask with reason—what she had done or said to justify such a change. But to this Laurence would only reply with stately reserve that she had done and said nothing; and would even deny a reserve which no one felt more strongly than himself. When he was in this mood Nancy thought, with some justice, that Laurence was the most disagreeable of men,

and determined that she would drop his acquaintance. She would perhaps have passed a gentler judgment on the unhappy prisoner at the bar if she had only known that these sudden fits of chilling reserve were simply signs of a devotion and a love which Laurence felt were getting beyond his powers of self-control.

If Nancy at such times was irritated almost beyond measure, it is equally true that the man whom she regarded as absolutely devoid of human feelings was suffering the tortures of a self-made Inquisition which would have put to shame most of the inventions of mediæval Spain.

*(To be continued.)*



## TO THE EASTERN SHORE

I's feelin' kin' o' lonesome in my little room to-night,  
 An' my min's done los' de minutes an' de miles,  
 W'ile it teks me back a-flyin' to de country of delight,  
 Whaih de Chesapeake goes grumblin' er wid smiles.  
 Oh, de ol' plantation's callin' to me, Come, come back,  
 Hyeah's de place fu' you to labouh an' to res',  
 Fu' my sandy roads is gleamin' while de city ways is black;  
 Come back, honey, case yo' country home is bes'.

I know de moon is shinin' erpon de Eastern sho',  
 An' de bay's a-sayin' "Howdy" to de lan';  
 An' de folks is all a-settin' down erroun' de cabin do',  
 Wid dey feet a-restin' in de silvah san';  
 An' de ol' plantation callin' to me, Come, oh, come,  
 F'om de life dat's des' a-waihin' you erway,  
 F'om de trouble an' de bustle, an' de agernisin' hum  
 Dat de city keeps ergoin' all de day.

I's tiahed of de city, tek me back to Sandy Side,  
 Whaih de po'est ones kin libe an' play an' eat;  
 Whaih we draws a simple livin' f'om de fo'est an' de tide,  
 An' de days ah failh, an' evah night issweet.  
 Fu' de ol' plantation's callin' to me, Come, oh, come,  
 An' de Chesapeake's a-sayin' "Dat's de ting,"  
 While my little cabin beckons, dough his mouf is closed an' dumb,  
 I's a-comin, an' my hea't begins to sing.

*Paul Dunbar.*

