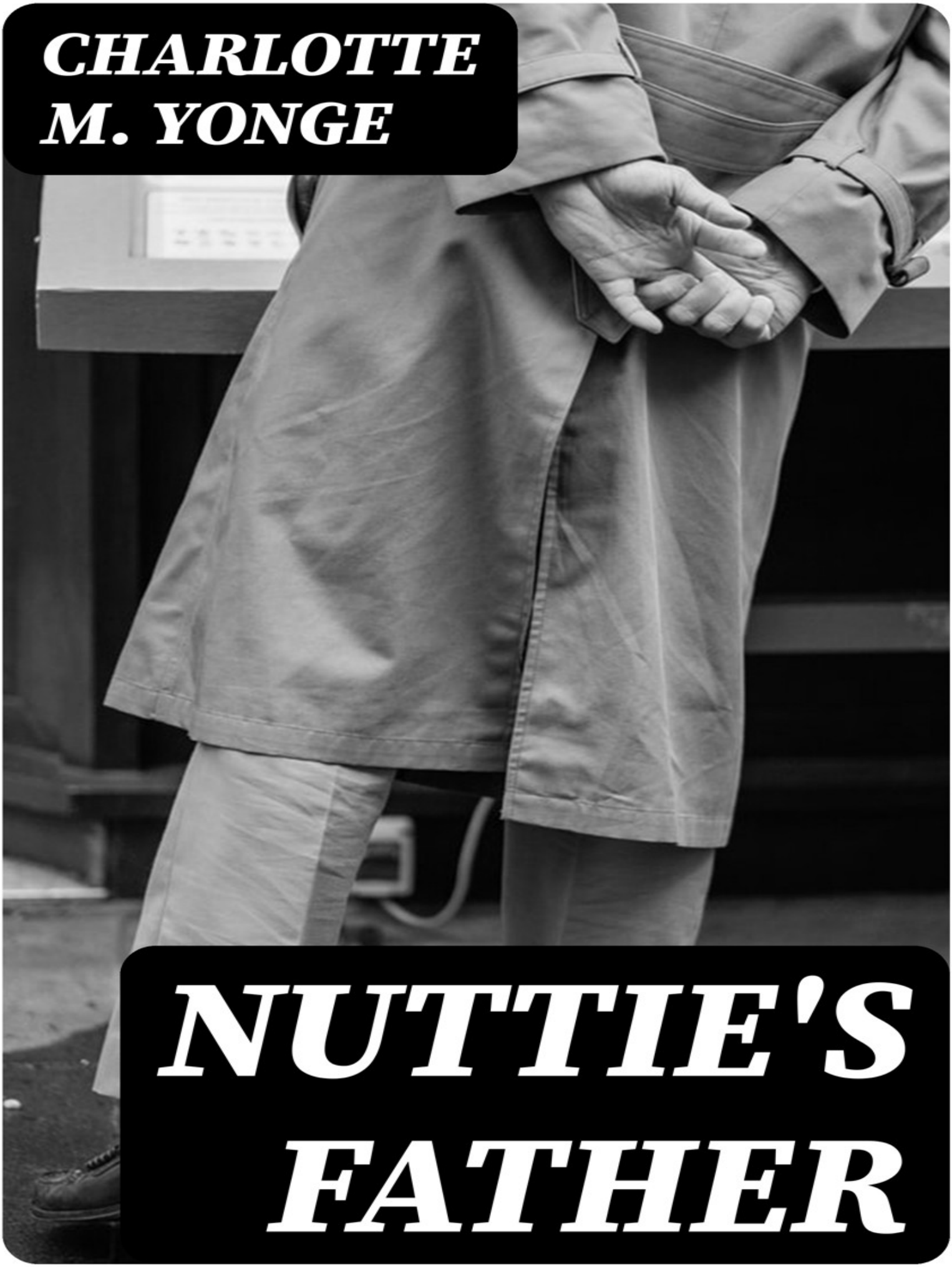
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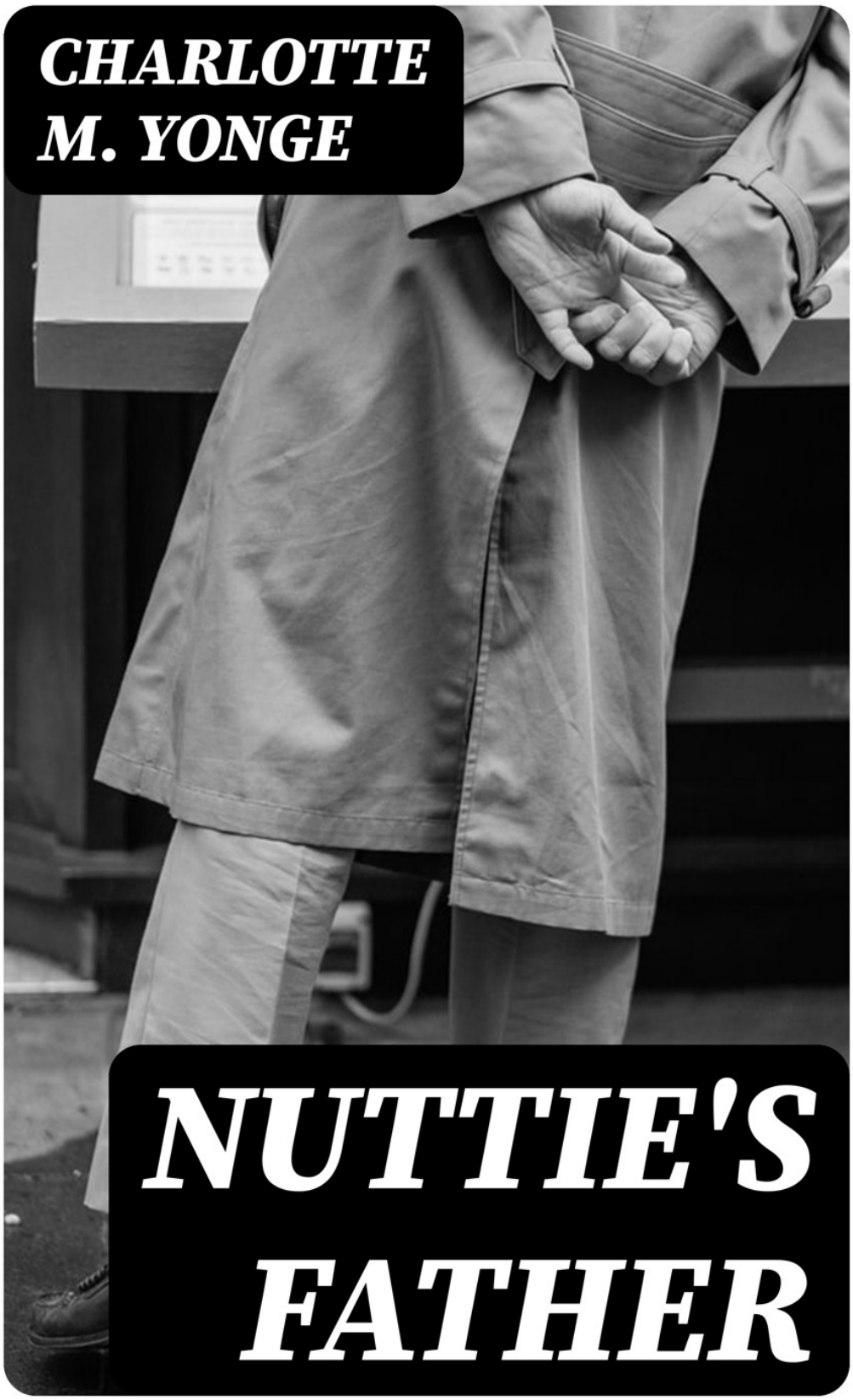
CHARLOTTE
M. YONGE
NUTTIE'S
FATHER

Charlotte M. Yonge

Nuttie's Father

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CHAPTER I.

ST. AMBROSE'S CHOIR.

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'For be it known
That their saint's honour is their own.'—SCOTT.

The town of Micklethwayte was rising and thriving. There were salubrious springs which an enterprising doctor had lately brought into notice. The firm of Greenleaf and Dutton manufactured umbrellas in large quantities, from the stout weather-proof family roof down to the daintiest fringed toy of a parasol. There were a Guild Hall and a handsome Corn Market. There was a Modern School for the boys, and a High School for the girls, and a School of Art, and a School of Cookery, and National Schools, and a British School, and a Board School, also churches of every height, chapels of every denomination, and iron mission rooms budding out in hopes to be replaced by churches.

Like one of the animals which zoologists call radiated, the town was constantly stretching out fresh arms along country roads, all living and working, and gradually absorbing the open spaces between. One of these arms was known as St. Ambrose's Road, in right of the church, an incomplete structure in yellow brick, consisting of a handsome chancel, the stump of a tower, and one aisle just weather-tight and usable, but, by its very aspect, begging for the completion

of the beautiful design that was suspended above the alms-box.

It was the evening of a summer day which had been very hot. The choir practice was just over, and the boys came out trooping and chattering; very small ones they were; for as soon as they began to sing tolerably they were sure to try to get into the choir of the old church, which had a foundation that fed, clothed, taught, and finally apprenticed them. So, though the little fellows were clad in surplices and cassocks, and sat in the chancel for correctness sake, there was a space round the harmonium reserved for the more trustworthy band of girls and young women who came forth next, followed by four or five mechanics.

Behind came the nucleus of the choir—a slim, fair-haired youth of twenty; a neat, precise, well-trimmed man, closely shaven, with stooping shoulders, at least fifteen years older, with a black poodle at his heels, as well shorn as his master, newly risen from lying outside the church door; a gentle, somewhat drooping lady in black, not yet middle-aged and very pretty; a small eager, unformed, black-eyed girl, who could hardly keep back her words for the outside of the church door; a tall self-possessed handsome woman, with a fine classical cast of features; and lastly, a brown-faced, wiry hardworking clergyman, without an atom of superfluous flesh, but with an air of great energy.

'Oh! vicar, where are we to go?' was the question so eager to break forth.

'Not to the Crystal Palace, Nuttie. The funds won't bear it. Mr. Dutton says we must spend as little as possible on locomotion.'

'I'm sure I don't care for the Crystal Palace. A trumpery tinsel place, all shams.'

'Hush, hush, my dear, not so loud,' said the quiet lady; but Nuttie only wriggled her shoulders, though her voice was a trifle lowered. 'If it were the British Museum now, or Westminster Abbey.'

'Or the Alps,' chimed in a quieter voice, 'or the Ufizzi.'

'Now, Mr. Dutton, that's not what I want. Our people aren't ready for that, but what they have let it be real. Miss Mary, don't you see what I mean?'

'Rather better than Miss Egremont herself,' said Mr. Dutton.

'Well,' said the vicar, interposing in the wordy war, 'Mrs. Greenleaf's children have scarlatina, so we can't go to Horton Bishop. The choice seems to be between South Beach and Monks Horton.'

'That's no harm,' cried Nuttie; 'Mrs. Greenleaf is so patronising!'

'And both that and South Beach are so stale,' said the youth.

'As if the dear sea could ever be stale,' cried the young girl.

'I thought Monks Horton was forbidden ground,' said Miss Mary.

'So it was with the last regime', said the vicar; 'but now the new people are come I expect great things from them. I hear they are very friendly.'

'I expect nothing from them,' said Nuttie so sententiously that all her hearers laughed and asked 'her exquisite reason,' as Mr. Dutton put it.

'Lady Kirkaldy and a whole lot of them came into the School of Art.'

'And didn't appreciate "Head of Antinous by Miss Ursula Egremont,"' was the cry that interrupted her, but she went on with dignity unruffled—'Anything so foolish and inane as their whole talk and all their observations I never heard. "I don't like this style," one of them said. "Such ugly useless things! I never see anything pretty and neatly finished such as we used to do."' The girl gave it in a tone of mimicry of the nonchalant voice, adding, with fresh imitation, "'And another did not approve of drawing from the life—models might be such strange people."'

'My ears were not equally open to their profanities,' said Miss Mary. 'I confess that I was struck by the good breeding and courtesy of the leader of the party, who, I think, was Lady Kirkaldy herself.'

'I saw! I thought she was patronising you, and my blood boiled!' cried Nuttie.

'Will boiling blood endure a picnic in the park of so much ignorance, folly, and patronage?' asked Mr. Dutton.

'Oh, indeed, Mr. Dutton, Nuttie never said that,' exclaimed gentle Mrs. Egremont.

'Whether it is fully worth the doing is the question,' said the vicar.

'Grass and shade do not despise,' said Miss Mary.

'There surely must be some ecclesiastical remains,' said the young man.

'And there is a river,' added the vicar.

'I shall get a stickleback for my aquarium,' cried Nuttie. 'We shall make some discoveries for the Scientific Society. I

shall note down every individual creature I see! I say! you are sure it is not a sham waterfall or Temple of Tivoli?'

'It would please the choir boys and G. F. S. girls quite as much, if not more, in that case,' said Miss Mary; 'but you need not expect that, Nuttie. Landscape-gardening is gone by.'

'Even with the county people?' said Nuttie.

'By at least half a century,' said Mr. Dutton, 'with all deference to this young lady's experience.'

'It was out of their own mouths,' cried the girl defiantly. 'That's all I know about county people, and so I hope it will be.'

'Come in, my dear, you are talking very fast,' interposed Mrs. Egremont, with some pain in the soft sweet voice, which, if it had been a little stronger, would have been the best in the choir.

These houses in St. Ambrose's Road were semi-detached. The pair which the party had reached had their entrances at the angles, with a narrow gravel path leading by a tiny grass plat to each. One, which was covered with a rich pall of purple clematis, was the home of Mrs. Egremont, her aunt, and Nuttie; the other, adorned with a Gloire de Dijon rose in second bloom, was the abode of Mary Nugent, with her mother, the widow of a naval captain. Farther on, with adjoining gardens, was another couple of houses, in one of which lived Mr. Dutton; in the other lodged the youth, Gerard Godfrey, together with the partner of the principal medical man. The opposite neighbours were a master of the Modern School and a scholar. Indeed, the saying of the vicar, the Rev. Francis Spyers, was, and St. Ambrose's Road

was proud of it, that it was a professional place. Every one had something to do either with schools or umbrellas, scarcely excepting the doctor and the solicitor, for the former attended the pupils and the latter supplied them. Mr. Dutton was a partner in the umbrella factory, and lived, as the younger folk said, as the old bachelor of the Road. Had he not a housekeeper, a poodle, and a cat; and was not his house, with lovely sill boxes full of flowers in the windows, the neatest of the neat; and did not the tiny conservatory over his dining-room window always produce the flowers most needed for the altar vases, and likewise bouquets for the tables of favoured ladies. Why, the very daisies never durst lift their heads on his little lawn, which even bore a French looking-glass globe in the centre. Miss Nugent, or Miss Mary as every one still called her, as her elder sister's marriage was recent, was assistant teacher at the School of Art, and gave private drawing lessons, so as to supplement the pension on which her mother lived. They also received girls as boarders attending the High School.

So did Miss Headworth, who had all her life been one of those people who seem condemned to toil to make up for the errors or disasters of others. First she helped to educate a brother, and soon he had died to leave an orphan daughter to be bred up at her cost. The girl had married from her first situation; but had almost immediately lost her husband at sea, and on this her aunt had settled at Micklethwayte to make a home for her and her child, at first taking pupils, but when the High School was set up, changing these into boarders; while Mrs. Egremont went as daily governess to the children of a family of somewhat

higher pretensions. Little Ursula, or Nuttie, as she was called, according to the local contraction, was like the child of all the party, and after climbing up through the High School to the last form, hoped, after passing the Cambridge examination, to become a teacher there in another year.

CHAPTER II.

MONKS HORTON.

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'And we will all the pleasures prove,
By shallow rivers, by whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.'—Old Ballad.

It was holiday-time, and liberties were taken such as were not permissible, when they might have afforded a bad precedent to the boarders. Therefore, when two afternoons later Mary Nugent, returning from district visiting, came out into her garden behind the house, she was not scandalised to see a pair of little black feet under a holland skirt resting on a laurel branch, and going a few steps more she beheld a big shady hat, and a pair of little hands busy with a pencil and a blank book; as Ursula sat on the low wall between the gardens, shaded by the laburnum which facilitated the ascent on her own side.

'Oh Miss Mary! Delicious! Come up here! You don't know how charming this is.'

She moved aside so as to leave the ascent—by an inverted flower-pot and a laurel branch—open to her friend, thus knocking down one of the pile of books which she had taken to the top of the wall. Miss Nugent picked it up, 'Marie Stuart! Is this your way of studying her?'

'Now, you know 'tis holiday time, and volunteer work; besides, she was waiting for you, and I could not help doing

this.' She held out a hand, which was scarcely needed, and Mary sprang lightly to share her perch upon the wall. 'Look here!'

'Am I to guess the subject as in the game of historic outlines,' said Miss Nugent, as the book was laid on her lap. 'It looks like a modern—no, a mediaeval—edition of Marcus Curtius about to leap into the capital opening for a young man, only with his dogs instead of his horse. That hound seems very rationally to object.'

'Now don't! Guess in earnest.'

'A compliment to your name. The Boy of Egremont, poor fellow, just about to bound across the strid.'

'Exactly! I always feel sure that my father must have done something like this.'

'Was it so heroic?' said Miss Mary. 'You know it was for the hundredth time, and he had no reason to expect any special danger.'

'Oh, but his mother was waiting, and he had to go. Now, I'll tell you how it must have been with my father. You know he sailed away in a yacht before I was born, and poor mother never saw him again; but I know what happened. There was a ship on fire like the Birkenhead, and the little yacht went near to pick up the people, and my father called out, like Sir Humphrey Gilbert—

"Do not fear, Heaven is as near
By water as by land."

And the little yacht was so close when the great ship blew up that it got sucked down in the whirlpool, and

rescuers and all died a noble death together!'

'Has your mother been telling you?' asked Miss Mary.

'Oh no! she never mentions him. She does not know. No one does; but I am quite sure he died nobly, with no one to tell the tale, only the angels to look on, and that makes it all the finer. Or just suppose he was on a desert island all the time, and came back again to find us! I sometimes think he is.'

'What? When you are *quite sure* of the other theory?'

'I mean I am quite sure while I am thinking about it, or reading Robinson Crusoe, or the Swiss Family.'

'Oh!'

'Miss Mary, has no one ever told you anything about my father?'

'No one.'

'They never tell me. Mother cries, and aunt Ursula puts on her "there's-an-end-of-it look." Do you think there is anything they are waiting to tell me till I am older?'

'If there were, I am sure you had better not try to find it out beforehand.'

'You don't think I would do anything of *that sort?* But I thought you might know. Do you remember their first settling here?'

'Scarcely. I was a very small child then.'

Miss Nugent had a few vague recollections which she did not think it expedient to mention. A dim remembrance rose before her of mysterious whisperings about that beautiful young widow, and that it had been said that the rector of the Old Church had declared himself to know the ladies well, and had heartily recommended them. She thought it wiser

only to speak of having been one of their first scholars, telling of the awe Miss Headworth inspired; but the pleasure it was to bring a lesson to pretty Mrs. Egremont, who always rewarded a good one with a kiss, 'and she was so nice to kiss—yes, and is.'

'Aunt Ursel and mother both were governesses,' continued the girl, 'and yet they don't want me to go out. They had rather I was a teacher at the High School.'

'They don't want to trust their Little Bear out in the world.'

'I think it is more than that,' said the girl. 'I can't help thinking that he—my father—must have been some one rather grand, with such a beautiful name as Alwyn Piercefield Egremont. Yes; I know it was that, for I saw my baptismal certificate when I stood for the scholarship; it was Dieppe,—Ursula Alice, daughter of Alwyn Piercefield and Alice Elizabeth Egremont, May 15, 1860. James Everett—I think he was the chaplain at Dieppe.'

Mary Nugent thought it the wisest way to laugh and say: 'You, of all people in the world, to want to make out a connection with the aristocracy!'

'True love is different,' said Ursula. 'He must have been cast off by his family for her sake, and have chosen poverty —

> "To make the croon a pund, my Alwyn gaed to sea,
> And the croon and the pund, they were baith for me."'

Miss Mary did not think a yacht a likely place for the conversion of a croon into a pound, and the utter silence of mother and aunt did not seem to her satisfactory; but she feared either to damp the youthful enthusiasm for the lost father, or to foster curiosity that might lead to some painful discovery, so she took refuge in an inarticulate sound.

'I think Mr. Dutton knows,' proceeded Nuttie.

'You don't mean to ask him?'

'Catch me! I know how he would look at me.'

'Slang! A forfeit!'

'Oh, it's holiday time, and the boarders can't hear. There's Mr. Dutton's door!'

This might in one way be a relief to Miss Nugent, but she did not like being caught upon the wall, and therefore made a rapid descent, though not without a moment's entanglement of skirt, which delayed her long enough to show where she had been, as Mr. Dutton was at the same moment advancing to his own wall on the opposite side of the Nugent garden. Perhaps he would have pretended to see nothing but for Nuttie's cry of glee.

'You wicked elf,' said Miss Mary, 'to inveigle people into predicaments, and then go shouting ho! ho! ho! like Robin Goodfellow himself.'

'You should have kept your elevation and dignity like me,' retorted Ursula; 'and then you would have had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Dutton climbing his wall and coming to our feet.'

'Mischievous elves deserve no good news,' said Mr. Dutton, who was by no means so venerable that the

crossing the wall was any effort or compromise of dignity, and who had by this time joined Mary on her grass plat.

'Oh, what is it! Are we to go to Monks Horton?' cried Nuttie.

'Here is a gracious permission from Lord Kirkaldy, the only stipulations being that no vestiges of the meal, such as sandwich papers or gooseberry skins, be left on the grass; and that nobody does any mischief,' he added in an awful tone of personality. 'So if I see anybody rooting up holly trees I shall be bound to interfere.'

'Now, Mr. Dutton, it was only a baby holly in a chink.'

'Only a holly tree! Just like the giant's daughter when she only carried off waggon, peasant, oxen, and all in her pinafore.'

'It is not longer than my finger now!'

'Well, remember, mischief either wanton or scientific is forbidden. You are to set an example to the choir-boys.'

'Scientific mischief is a fatal thing to rare plants,' said Mary.

'If I'm not to touch anything, I may as well stay at home,' pouted Nuttie.

'You may gather as many buttercups and daisies as the sweet child pleases,' said Mr. Dutton; whereupon she threatened to throw her books at his head.

Miss Nugent asked how they were to go, and Mr. Dutton explained that there was only a quarter of a mile's walk from the station; that return tickets would be furnished at a tariff of fourpence a head; and that there would be trains at 1.15 and 7.30.

'How hungry the children will be.'

'They will eat all the way. That's the worst of this sort of outing. They eat to live and live to eat.'

'At least they don't eat at church,' said Nuttie.

'Not since the peppermint day, when Mr. Spyers suspended Dickie Drake,' put in Mary.

And the Spa Terrace Church people said it was incense.'

'No. Nuttie!'

'Indeed they did. Louisa Barnet attacked us about it at school, and I said I wished it had been. Only they mustn't eat peppermint in the train, for it makes mother quite ill.'

'Do you mean that Mrs. Egremont will come?' exclaimed Mr. Dutton.

'Oh yes, she shall. It is not too far, and it will be very good for her. I shall make her.'

'There's young England's filial duty!' said Mary.

'Why, I know what is good for her, and she always does as "I wish."'

'Beneficent despotism!' said Mr. Dutton. 'May I ask if Miss Headworth is an equally obedient subject.'

'Oh! Aunt Ursel is very seldom tiresome.'

'Nuttie! Nuttie! my dear,' and a head with the snows of more than half a century appeared on the other side of the wall, under a cap and parasol. 'I am sorry to interrupt you, but it is cool enough for your mother to go into the town, and I wish you to go with her.'

CHAPTER III.

HEIR HUNTING.

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'And she put on her gown of green,
And left her mother at sixteen,
To marry Peter Bell!'—WORDSWORTH.

In the shrubberies of Monks Horton were walking a lady somewhat past middle age, but full of activity and vigour, with one of those bright faces that never grow old, and with her a young man, a few years over twenty, with a grave and almost careworn countenance.

More and more confidential waxed the conversation, for the lady was making fresh acquaintance with a nephew seldom seen since he had been her pet and darling as almost a baby, and he was experiencing the inexpressible charm of tone and manner that recalled the young mother he had lost in early boyhood.

'Then your mind is made up,' she said; 'you are quite right to decide on having a profession; but how does your father take it?'

'He is quite convinced that to repeat my uncle's life, dangling on as heir, would be the most fatal mistake.'

'Assuredly, and all the legal knowledge you acquire is so much in favour of your usefulness as the squire.'

'If I ever am the squire, of which I have my doubts.'

'You expect Mr. Egremont to marry?'

'Not a future marriage, but one in the past.'

'A private marriage! Do you suspect it?'

'I don't suspect it—I know it. I have been hoping to talk the matter over with you. Do you remember our first governess, Miss Headworth?'

'My dear Mark, did I not lose at Pera the charms of your infancy?'

'Then neither my mother nor my grandmother ever wrote to you about her?'

'I do remember that it struck me that immunity from governesses was a compensation for the lack of daughters.'

'Can you tell me no details,' said Mark anxiously. 'Have you no letters? It was about the time when Blanche was born, when we were living at Raxley.'

'I am sorry to say that our roving life prevented my keeping old letters. I have often regretted it. Let me see, there was one who boxed May's ears.'

'That was long after. I think it was that woman's barbarity that made my father marry again, and a very good thing that was. It was wretched before. Miss Headworth was in my own mother's time.'

'I begin to remember something happening that your mother seemed unable to write about, and your grandmother said that she had been greatly upset by "that miserable affair," but I was never exactly told what it had been.'

'Miss Headworth came when I was four or five years old. Edda, as we used to call her in May's language, was the first person who gave me a sense of beauty. She had dark eyes and a lovely complexion. I remember in after times being

silenced for saying, "not so pretty as my Edda." I was extremely fond of her, enough to have my small jealousy excited when my uncle joined us in our walks, and monopolised her, turning May and me over to play with his dog!'

'But, Mark, Mr. Egremont is some years older than your father. He could not have been a young man at that time.'

'So much the worse. Most likely he seemed to her quite paternal. The next thing I recollect was our being in the Isle of Wight, we two children, with Miss Headworth and the German nurse, and our being told of our new sister. Uncle Alwyn and his yacht were there, and we went on board once or twice. Then matters became confused with me, I recollect a confusion, papa and grandmamma suddenly arriving, everybody seeming to us to have become very cross, our dear Miss Headworth nowhere to be found, our attendants being changed, and our being forbidden to speak of her again. I certainly never thought of the matter till a month ago. You know my uncle's eyes have been much affected by his illness, and he has made a good deal of use of me. He has got a valet, a fellow of no particular country, more Savoyard than anything else, I fancy. He is a legacy, like other evils, from the old General, and seems a sort of necessity to my uncle's existence. Gregorio they call him. He was plainly used to absolute government, and viewed the coming down amongst us as an assertion of liberty much against his will. We could see that he was awfully jealous of my father and me, and would do anything to keep us out; but providentially he can't write English decently, though he can speak any language you please. Well, the

man and I came into collision about a scamp of a groom who was doing intolerable mischief in the village, and whom they put it on me to get discharged. On that occasion Mr. Gregorio grew insolent, and intimated to me that I need not make so sure of the succession. He knew that which might make the Chanoine and me change our note. Well, my father is always for avoiding rows; he said it was an unmeaning threat, it was of no use to complain of Gregorio, and we must digest his insolence. But just after, Uncle Alwyn sent me to hunt up a paper that was missing, and in searching a writing-case I came upon an unmistakable marriage certificate between Alwyn Piercefield Egremont and Alice Headworth, and then the dim recollections I told you of began to return.'

'What did you do?'

'I thought I had better consult my father, expecting to hear that she was dead, and that no further notice need be taken of the matter. But he was greatly disturbed to hear of the certificate, and would hardly believe me. He said that some friend of my grandmother had written her word of goings on at Freshwater between his brother and the young governess, and that they went off at once to put a stop to it, but found us left with the German maid, who declared that Miss Headworth had gone off with Mr. Egremont in the yacht. No more was heard of my uncle for six weeks, and when he came back there was a great row with the old General, but he absolutely denied being married. I am afraid that was all the old sinner wished, and they went off together in the yacht to the West Indies, where it was burnt; but they, as you know, never came to England again, going

straight off to the Mediterranean, having their headquarters at Sorrento, and cruising about till the General's death ten years ago.'

'Yes, I once met them at Florence, and thought them two weary pitiable men. One looked at the General as a curious relic of the old buck of the Regency days, and compassionated his nephew for having had his life spoilt by dangling after the old man. It was a warning indeed, and I am glad you have profited by it, Mark.'

'He came back, after the old man died, to club life in London, and seldom has been near the old place; indeed, it has been let till recently, and he wants to let it again, but it is altogether too dilapidated for that without repairs. So he came down to see about it, and was taken ill there. But to return to what my father told me. He was shocked to hear of the certificate, for he had implicitly believed his brother's denial of the marriage, and he said Miss Headworth was so childish and simple that she might easily have been taken in by a sham ceremony. He said that he now saw he had done very wrong in letting his mother-in-law take all the letters about "that unhappy business" off his hands without looking at them, but he was much engrossed by my mother's illness, and, as he said, it never occurred to him as a duty to trace out what became of the poor thing, and see that she was provided for safely. You know Mrs. Egremont says laissez faire is our family failing, and that our first thought is how *not* to do it.'

'Yes, utter repudiation of such cases was the line taken by the last generation; and I am afraid my mother would be very severe.'

'Another thing that actuated my father was the fear of getting his brother into trouble with General Egremont, as he himself would have been the one to profit by it. So I do not wonder so much at his letting the whole drop without inquiry, and never even looking at the letters, which there certainly were. I could not get him to begin upon it with my uncle, but Mrs. Egremont was strongly on my side in thinking that such a thing ought to be looked into, and as I had found the paper it would be best that I should speak. Besides that there was no enduring that Gregorio should be pretending to hold us in terror by such hints.'

'Well, and has there been a wife and family in a cottage all this time?'

'Aunt Margaret, he has never seen or heard of her since he left her at Dieppe! Would you believe it, he thinks himself a victim? He never meant more than to amuse himself with the pretty little governess; and he took on board a Mr. and Mrs. Houghton to do propriety, shady sort of people I imagine, but that she did not know.'

'I have heard of them,' said Lady Kirkaldy, significantly.

'She must have been a kind friend to the poor girl,' said Mark. 'On some report that Lady de Lyonnais was coming down on her, wrathful and terrible, the poor foolish girl let herself be persuaded to be carried off in the yacht, but there Mrs. Houghton watched over her like a dragon. She made them put in at some little place in Jersey, put in the banns, all unknown to my uncle, and got them married. Each was trying to outwit the other, while Miss Headworth herself was quite innocent and unconscious, and, I don't know whether to call it an excuse for Uncle Alwyn or not, but to this hour

he is not sure whether it was a legal marriage, and my father believes it was not, looking on it as a youthful indiscretion. He put her in lodgings at Dieppe, under Mrs. Houghton's protection, while he returned home on a peremptory summons from the General. He found the old man in such a state of body and mind as he tries to persuade me was an excuse for denying the whole thing, and from that time he represents himself as bound hand and foot by the General's tyranny. He meant to have kept the secret, given her an allowance, and run over from time to time to see her, but he only could get there once before the voyage to the West Indies. The whole affair was, as he said, complicated by his debts, those debts that the estate has never paid off. The General probably distrusted him, for he curtailed his allowance, and scarcely let him out of sight; and he—he submitted for the sake of his prospects, and thinking the old man much nearer his end than he proved to be. I declare as I listened, it came near to hearing him say he had sold his soul to Satan! From the day he sailed in the Ninon he has never written, never attempted any communication with the woman whose life he had wrecked, except one inquiry at Dieppe, and that was through Gregorio.'

'What! the valet?'

Yes. I believe I seemed surprised at such a medium being employed, for Uncle Alwyn explained that the man had got hold of the secret somehow—servants always know everything—and being a foreigner he was likely to be able to trace her out.

'I daresay he profited by the knowledge to keep Alwyn in bondage during the old man's lifetime.'

'I have no doubt of it, and he expected to play the same game with me. The fellow reminds me, whenever I look at him, of a sort of incarnate familiar demon. When I asked my uncle whether he could guess what had become of her, he held up his hands with a hideous French grimace. I could have taken him by the throat.'

'Nay, one must pity him. The morals of George IV.'s set had been handed on to him by the General,' said Lady Kirkaldy, rejoicing in the genuine indignation of the young face, free from all taint of vice, if somewhat rigid. 'And what now?'

'He assured me that he could make all secure to my father and me, as if that were the important point; but finally he perceived that we had no right to stand still without endeavouring to discover whether there be a nearer heir, and my father made him consent to my making the search, grinning at its Quixotism all the time.'

'Have you done anything?'

'Yes. I have been to Jersey, seen the register—July 20, 1859—and an old French-speaking clerk, who perfectly recollected the party coming from the yacht, and spoke of her as tres belle. I have also ascertained that there is no doubt of the validity of the marriage. Then, deeply mistrusting Master Gregorio, I went on to Dieppe, where I entirely failed to find any one who knew or remembered anything about them—there is such a shifting population of English visitors and residents, and it was so long ago. I elicited from my uncle that she had an aunt, he thought, of

the same name as herself; but my father cannot remember who recommended her, or anything that can be a clue. Has any one looked over my grandmother's letters?'

'I think not. My brother spoke of keeping them till I came to London. That might give a chance, or the Houghtons might know about her. I think my husband could get them hunted up. They are sure to be at some continental resort.'

'What's that?' as a sound of singing was heard.

'"Auld Langsyne." The natives are picnicking in the ravine below there. They used to be rigidly excluded, but we can't stand that; and this is the first experiment of admitting them on condition that they don't make themselves obnoxious.'

'Which they can't help.'

'We have yet to see if this is worse than an Austrian or Italian festival. See, we can look down from behind this yew tree. It really is a pretty sight from this distance.'

'There's the cleric heading his little boys and their cricket, and there are the tuneful party in the fern on the opposite side. They have rather good voices, unless they gain by distance.'

'And there's a girl botanising by the river.'

'Sentimentalising over forget-me-nots, more likely.'

'My dear Mark, for a specimen of young England, you are greatly behindhand in perception of progress!'

'Ah! you are used to foreigners, Aunt Margaret. You have never fathomed English vulgarity.'

'It would serve you right to send you to carry the invitation to go round the gardens and houses.'

'Do you mean it, aunt?'

'Mean it? Don't you see your uncle advancing down the road—there—accosting the clergyman—what's his name—either Towers or Spires—something ecclesiastical I know. We only waited to reconnoitre and see whether the numbers were unmanageable.'

'And yet he does not want to sit for Micklethwayte?'

'So you think no one can be neighbourly except for electioneering! O Mark, I must take you in hand.'

'Meantime the host is collecting. I abscond. Which is the least showy part of the establishment?'

'I recommend the coal cellar—'and, as he went off—'poor boy, he is a dear good fellow, but how little he knows how to be laughed at!'