

CHAPTER VI

*Of the sad condition of the Haunting Spectre
of the Might Have Been*

DAPPLEMERE Farm House, or "The Manor," as it was still called by many, had been built when Henry the Eighth was King, as the carved inscription above the door testified.

The House of Dapplemere was a place of many gables, and latticed windows, and with tall, slender chimneys shaped, and wrought into things of beauty and delight. It possessed a great, old hall; there were spacious chambers, and broad stairways; there were panelled corridors; sudden flights of steps that led up, or down again, for no apparent reason; there were broad, and generous hearths, and deep window-seats; and everywhere, within, and without, there lurked an indefinable, old-world charm that was the heritage of years.

Storms had buffeted, and tempests had beaten upon it, but all in vain, for, save that the bricks glowed a deeper red where they peeped out beneath the clinging ivy, the old house stood as it had upon that far day when it

was fashioned, — in the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Five Hundred and Twenty-four.

In England many such houses are yet to be found, monuments of the "Bad Old Times" — memorials of the "Dark Ages" — when lath and stucco existed not, and the "Jerry-builder" had no being. But where, among them all, might be found such another parlour as this at Dapplemere, with its low, raftered ceiling, its great, carved mantel, its panelled walls whence old portraits looked down at one like dream faces, from dim, and nebulous backgrounds. And where might be found two such bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked, quick-footed, deft-handed Phyllises as the two buxom maids who fitted here and there, obedient to their mistress's word, or gesture. And, lastly, where, in all this wide world, could there ever be found just such another hostess as Miss Anthea, herself? Something of all this was in Bellew's mind as he sat with Small Porges beside him, watching Miss Anthea dispense tea, — brewed as it should be, in an earthen tea-pot.

"Milk and sugar, Mr. Bellew?"

"Thank you!"

"This is blackberry, an' this is raspberry an' red currant — but the blackberry jam's the best, Uncle Porges!"

"Thank you, nephew."

"Now aren't you awful' glad I found you — under that hedge, Uncle Porges?"

"Nephew, — I am!"

"Nephew?" repeated Anthea, glancing at him with raised brows.

"Oh yes!" nodded Bellew, "we adopted each other — at about four o'clock, this afternoon."

"Under a hedge, you know!" added Small Porges.

"Wasn't it a very sudden, and altogether — unheard of proceeding?" Anthea enquired.

"Well, it might have been if it had happened anywhere but in Arcadia."

"What do you mean by Arcadia, Uncle Porges?"

"A place I've been looking for — nearly all my life, nephew. I'll trouble you for the blackberry jam, my Porges."

"Yes, try the blackberry, — Aunt Priscilla made it her very own self."

"You know it's perfectly — ridiculous!" said Anthea, frowning and laughing, both at the same time.

"What is, Miss Anthea?"

"Why that you should be sitting here calling Georgy your nephew, and that I should be pour-

ing out tea for you, quite as a matter of course."

"It seems to me the most delightfully natural thing in the world," said Bellew, in his slow, grave manner.

"But — I've only known you — half an hour —!"

"But then, friendships ripen quickly — in Arcadia."

"I wonder what Aunt Priscilla will have to say about it!"

"Aunt Priscilla?"

"She is our housekeeper, — the dearest, busiest, gentlest little housekeeper in all the world; but with — very sharp eyes, Mr. Bellew. She will either like you very much, — or — not at all! there are no half measures about Aunt Priscilla."

"Now I wonder which it will be," said Bellew, helping himself to more jam.

"Oh, she'll like you, a course!" nodded Small Porges, "I know she'll like you 'cause you're so different to Mr. Cassilis, — he's got black hair, an' a mestache, you know, an' your hair's gold, like mine, — an' your mestache — isn't there, is it? An' I know she doesn't like Mr. Cassilis, an' I don't, either, 'cause —"

"She will be back to-morrow," said Anthea,

silencing Small Porges with a gentle touch of her hand, "and we shall be glad, sha'n't we, Georgy? The house is not the same place without her. You see, I am off in the fields all day, as a rule; a farm, — even such a small one as Dapplemere, is a great responsibility, and takes up all one's time — if it is to be made to pay —"

"An' sometimes it doesn't pay at all, you know!" added Small Porges, "an' then Auntie Anthea worries, an' I worry too. Farming isn't what it was in Adam's young days, — so that's why I must find a fortune — early to-morrow morning, you know, — so my Auntie won't have to worry any more —"

Now when he had got thus far, Anthea leaned over, and, taking him by surprise, kissed Small Porges suddenly.

"It was very good, and brave of you, dear," said she in her soft, thrilling voice, "to go out all alone into this big world to try and find a fortune for me!" and here she would have kissed him again but that he reminded her that they were not alone.

"But, Georgy dear, — fortunes are very hard to find, — especially round Dapplemere, I'm afraid!" said she, with a rueful little laugh.

"Yes, that's why I was going to Africa, you know."

"Africa!" she repeated, "Africa!"

"Oh yes," nodded Bellew, "when I met him he was on his way there to bring back gold for you — in a sack."

"Only Uncle Porges said it was a good-ish way off, you know, so I 'cided to stay an' find the fortune nearer home."

And thus they talked unaffectedly together until, tea being over, Anthea volunteered to show Bellew over her small domain, and they went out, all three, into an evening that breathed of roses, and honeysuckle.

And, as they went, slow-footed through the deepening twilight, Small Porges directed Bellew's attention to certain nooks and corners that might be well calculated to conceal the fortune they were to find; while Anthea pointed out to him the beauties of shady wood, of rolling meadow, and winding stream.

But there were other beauties that neither of them thought to call to his attention, but which Bellew noted with observing eyes, none the less: — such, for instance, as the way Anthea had of drooping her shadowy lashes at sudden and unexpected moments; the wistful droop of her warm, red lips, and the sweet, round column of

her throat. These, and much beside, Bellew noticed for himself as they walked on together through this midsummer evening. . . . And so, betimes, Bellew got him to bed, and, though the hour was ridiculously early, yet he fell into a profound slumber, and dreamed of — nothing at all. But, far away upon the road, forgotten, and out of mind, — with futile writhing and grimaces, the Haunting Shadow of the Might Have Been jibbered in the shadows.

CHAPTER VII

*Which concerns itself among other matters,
with "the Old Adam"*

BELLEW awakened early next morning, which was an unusual thing for Bellew to do under ordinary circumstances since he was one who held with that poet who has written, somewhere or other, something to the following effect:

"God bless the man who first discovered sleep. But damn the man with curses loud, and deep, who first invented — early rising."

Nevertheless, Bellew, (as has been said), awoke early next morning, to find the sun pouring in at his window, and making a glory all about him. But it was not this that had roused him, he thought as he lay blinking drowsily, — nor the black-bird piping so wonderfully in the apple-tree outside, — a very inquisitive apple-tree that had writhed, and contorted itself most un-naturally in its efforts to peep in at the window; — therefore Bellew fell to wondering, sleepily enough, what it could have been. Presently it came again, the sound, — a very peculiar sound the like of

which Bellew had never heard before, which, as he listened, gradually evolved itself into a kind of monotonous chant, intoned by a voice deep, and harsh, yet withal, not unmusical. Now the words of the chant were these:

“When I am dead, diddle, diddle, as well may hap,
Bury me deep, diddle, diddle, under the tap,
Under the tap, diddle, diddle, I'll tell you why,
That I may drink, diddle, diddle, when I am dry.”

Hereupon, Bellew rose, and crossing to the open casement leaned out into the golden freshness of the morning. Looking about he presently espied the singer, — one who carried two pails suspended from a yoke upon his shoulders, — a very square man; that is to say, square of shoulder, square of head, and square of jaw, being, in fact, none other than the Waggoner with whom he had fought, and ridden on the previous afternoon; seeing which, Bellew hailed him in cheery greeting. The man glanced up, and, breaking off his song in the middle of a note, stood gazing at Bellew, open-mouthed.

“What, — be that you, sir?” he enquired, at last, and then, — “Lord! an' what be you a doing of up theer?”

“Why, sleeping, of course,” answered Bellew.

“W'ot — again!” exclaimed the Waggoner with a grin, “you do be for ever a-sleepin' I do believe!”

“Not when you're anywhere a'bout!” laughed Bellew.

“Was it me as woke ye then?”

“Your singing did.”

“My singin'! Lord love ye, an' well it might! My singin' would wake the dead, — leastways so Prudence says, an' she's generally right, — leastways, if she ain't, she's a uncommon good cook, an' that goes a long way wi' most of us. But I don't sing very often unless I be alone, or easy in my mind an' 'appy-'earted, — which I ain't.”

“No?” enquired Bellew.

“Not by no manner o' means, I ain't, — contrari-wise my 'eart be sore an' full o' gloom, — which ain't to be wondered at, nohow.”

“And yet you were singing.”

“Aye, for sure I were singin', but then who could help singin' on such a mornin' as this be, an' wi' the black-bird a-piping away in the tree here. Oh! I were singin', I don't go for to deny it, but it's sore 'earted I be, an' filled wi' gloom sir, notwithstanding.”

“You mean,” said Bellew, becoming suddenly thoughtful, “that you are haunted by the

Carking Spectre of the—er Might Have Been? ”

“ Lord bless you, no sir! This ain’t no spectre, nor yet no skellington,— which, arter all, is only old bones an’ such,— no this ain’t nothin’ of that sort, an’ no more it ain’t a thing as I can stand ’ere a maggin’ about wi’ a long day’s work afore me, axing your pardon, sir.” Saying which, the Waggoner nodded suddenly and strode off with his pails clanking cheerily.

Very soon Bellew was shaved, and dressed, and going down stairs he let himself out into the early sunshine, and strolled away towards the farm-yard where cocks crew, cows lowed, ducks quacked, turkeys and geese gobbled and hissed, and where the Waggoner moved to and fro among them all, like a presiding genius.

“ I think,” said Bellew, as he came up, “ I think you must be the Adam I have heard of.”

“ That be my name, sir.”

“ Then Adam, fill your pipe,” and Bellew extended his pouch, whereupon Adam thanked him, and fishing a small, short, black clay from his pocket, proceeded to fill, and light it.

“ Yes sir,” he nodded, inhaling the tobacco with much apparent enjoyment, “ Adam I were

baptized some thirty odd year ago, but I generally calls myself ‘ Old Adam.’ ”

“ But you’re not old, Adam.”

“ Why, it ain’t on account o’ my age, ye see sir,— it be all because o’ the Old Adam as is inside o’ me. Lord love ye! I am nat’rally that full o’ the ‘ Old Adam ’ as never was. An’ ’e’s alway a up an’ taking of me at the shortest notice. Only t’other day he up an’ took me because Job Jagway (’e works for Squire Casilis, you’ll understand sir) because Job Jagway sez as our wheat, (meanin’ Miss Anthea’s wheat, you’ll understand sir) was mouldy; well, the ‘ Old Adam ’ up an’ took me to that extent, sir, that they ’ad to carry Job Jagway home, arterwards. Which is all on account o’ the Old Adam,— me being the mildest chap you ever see, nat’rally,— mild? ah! sucking doves wouldn’t be nothin’ to me for mildness.”

“ And what did the Squire have to say about your spoiling his man? ”

“ Wrote to Miss Anthea, o’ course, sir,— he’s always writing to Miss Anthea about summat or other,— sez as how he was minded to lock me up for ’sault an’ battery, but, out o’ respect for her, would let me off, wi’ a warning.”

“ Miss Anthea was worried, I suppose? ”

“Worried, sir! ‘Oh Adam!’ sez she, ‘Oh Adam! ‘aven’t I got enough to bear but you must make it ‘arder for me?’ An’ I see the tears in her eyes while she said it. Me make it ‘arder for her! Jest as if I wouldn’t make things lighter for ‘er if I could,—which I can’t; jest as if, to help Miss Anthea, I wouldn’t let ‘em take me an’—well, never mind what,—only I would!”

“Yes, I’m sure you would,” nodded Bellew. “And is the Squire over here at Dapplemere very often, Adam?”

“Why, not so much lately, sir. Last time were yesterday, jest afore Master Georgy come ‘ome. I were at work here in the yard, an’ Squire comes riding up to me, smiling quite friendly like,—which were pretty good of him, considering as Job Jagway ain’t back to work yet. ‘Oh Adam!’ sez he, ‘so you’re ‘aving a sale here at Dapplemere, are you?’ Meaning sir, a sale of some bits, an’ sticks o’ furnitur’ as Miss Anthea’s forced to part wi’ to meet some bill or other. ‘Summat o’ that sir,’ says I, making as light of it as I could. ‘Why then, Adam,’ sez he, ‘if Job Jagway should ‘appen to come over to buy a few o’ the things,—no more fighting!’ sez he. An’ so he nods, an’ smiles, an’ off he rides. An’ sir, as I watched

him go, the ‘Old Adam’ riz up in me to that extent as it’s a mercy I didn’t have no pitch-fork ‘andy.”

Bellew, sitting on the shaft of a cart with his back against a rick, listened to this narration with an air of dreamy abstraction, but Adam’s quick eyes noticed that despite the unruffled serenity of his brow, his chin seemed rather more prominent than usual.

“So that was why you were feeling gloomy, was it, Adam?”

“Ah! an’ enough to make any man feel gloomy, I should think. Miss Anthea’s brave enough, but I reckon ‘twill come nigh breakin’ ‘er ‘eart to see the old stuff sold, the furnitur’ an’ that,—so she’s goin’ to drive over to Cranbrook to be out o’ the way while it’s a-doin’.”

“And when does the sale take place?”

“The Saturday arter next, sir, as ever was,” Adam answered. “But—hush,—mum’s the word, sir!” he broke off, and winking violently with a side-ways motion of the head, he took up his pitch-fork. Wherefore, glancing round, Bellew saw Anthea coming towards them, fresh and sweet as the morning. Her hands were full of flowers, and she carried her sun-bonnet upon her arm. Here and there a rebellious

curl had escaped from its fastenings as though desirous (and very naturally) of kissing the soft oval of her cheek, or the white curve of her neck. And among them Bellew noticed one in particular, — a roguish curl that glowed in the sun with a coppery light, and peeped at him wantonly above her ear.

“ Good morning! ” said he, rising and, to all appearance, addressing the curl in question, “ you are early abroad this morning! ”

“ Early, Mr. Bellew! — why I’ve been up hours. I’m generally out at four o’clock on market days; we work hard, and long, at Dapplemere,” she answered, giving him her hand with her grave, sweet smile.

“ Aye, for sure! ” nodded Adam, “ but farmin’ ain’t what it was in my young days! ”

“ But I think we shall do well with the hops, Adam.”

“ ‘Ops, Miss Anthea, — lord love you! — there ain’t no ‘ops nowhere so good as ourn be! ”

“ They ought to be ready for picking, soon, — do you think sixty people will be enough? ”

“ Ah! — they’ll be more’n enough, Miss Anthea.”

“ And, Adam — the five-acre field should be mowed to-day.”

“ I’ll set the men at it right arter breakfast, — I’ll ‘ave it done, trust me, Miss Anthea.”

“ I do, Adam, — you know that! ” And with a smiling nod she turned away. Now, as Bellew walked on beside her, he felt a strange constraint upon him such as he had never experienced towards any woman before, and the which he was at great pains with himself to account for. Indeed so rapt was he, that he started suddenly to find that she was asking him a question:

“ Do you — like Dapplemere, Mr. Bellew? ”

“ Like it! ” he repeated, “ like it? Yes indeed! ”

“ I’m so glad! ” she answered, her eyes glowing with pleasure. “ It was a much larger property, once, — Look! ” and she pointed away across corn-fields and rolling meadow to the distant woods. “ In my grandfather’s time it was all his — as far as you can see, and farther, but it has dwindled since then, and to-day, my Dapplemere is very small indeed.”

“ You must be very fond of such a beautiful place.”

“ Oh, I love it! ” she cried passionately, “ if ever I had to — give it up, — I think I should — die! ” She stopped suddenly, and as though

somewhat abashed by this sudden outburst, adding in a lighter tone: "If I seem rather tragic it is because this is the only home I have ever known."

"Well," said Bellew, appearing rather more dreamy than usual, just then, "I have journeyed here and there in this world of ours, I have wandered up and down, and to and fro in it,—like a certain celebrated personage who shall be nameless,—yet I never saw, or dreamed, of any such place as this Dapplemere of yours. It is like Arcadia itself, and only I am out of place. I seem, somehow, to be too common-place, and altogether matter-of-fact."

"I'm sure I'm matter-of-fact enough," she said, with her low, sweet laugh that, Bellew thought, was all too rare.

"You?" said he, and shook his head.

"Well?" she enquired, glancing at him through her wind-tossed curls.

"You are like some fair, and stately ladye out of the old romances," he said gravely.

"In a print gown, and with a sun-bonnet!"

"Even so!" he nodded. Here, for no apparent reason, happening to meet his glance, the colour deepened in her cheek and she was silent; wherefore Bellew went on, in his slow, placid tones. "You surely, are the Princess

ruling this fair land of Arcadia, and I am the Stranger within your gates. It behoves you, therefore, to be merciful to this Stranger, if only for the sake of—er—our mutual nephew."

Whatever Anthea might have said in answer was cut short by Small Porges himself who came galloping towards them with the sun bright in his curls.

"Oh, Uncle Porges!" he panted as he came up, "I was 'fraid you'd gone away an' left me,—I've been hunting, an' hunting for you ever since I got up."

"No, I haven't gone away yet, my Porges, you see."

"An' you won't go—ever or ever, will you?"

"That," said Bellew, taking the small hand in his, "that is a question that we had better leave to the—er—future, nephew."

"But—why?"

"Well, you see, it doesn't rest with me—altogether, my Porges."

"Then who—" he was beginning, but Anthea's soft voice interrupted him.

"Georgy dear, didn't Prudence send you to tell us that breakfast was ready?"

"Oh yes! I was forgetting,—awfull' silly

of me wasn't it! But you are going to stay — Oh a long, long time, aren't you, Uncle Porges?"

"I sincerely hope so!" answered Bellew. Now as he spoke, his eyes, — by the merest chance in the world, of course, — happened to meet Anthea's, whereupon she turned, and slipped on her sunbonnet which was very natural, for the sun was growing hot already.

"I'm awful' glad!" sighed Small Porges, "an' Auntie's glad too, — aren't you Auntie?"

"Why — of course!" from the depths of the sunbonnet.

"'Cause now, you see, there'll be two of us to take care of you. Uncle Porges is so nice an' big, and — wide, isn't he, Auntie?"

"Y-e-s, — Oh Georgy! — what are you talking about?"

"Why I mean I'm rather small to take care of you all by myself alone, Auntie, though I do my best of course. But now that I've found myself a big, tall Uncle Porges, — under the hedge, you know, — we can take care of you together, can't we, Auntie Anthea?"

But Anthea only hurried on without speaking, whereupon Small Porges continued all unheeding:

"You 'member the other night, Auntie, when you were crying, you said you wished you had some one very big, and strong to take care of you —"

"Oh — Georgy!"

Bellew heartily wished that sunbonnets had never been thought of.

"But you did you know, Auntie, an' so that was why I went out an' found my Uncle Porges for you, — so that he —"

But here, Mistress Anthea, for all her pride and stateliness, catching her gown about her, fairly ran on down the path and never paused until she had reached the cool, dim parlour. Being there, she tossed aside her sunbonnet, and looked at herself in the long, old mirror, and, — though surely no mirror made by man, ever reflected a fairer vision of dark-eyed witchery and loveliness, nevertheless Anthea stamped her foot, and frowned at it.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, and then again, "Oh Georgy!" and covered her burning cheeks.

Meanwhile Big Porges, and Small Porges, walking along hand in hand shook their heads solemnly, wondering much upon the capriciousness of aunts, and the waywardness thereof.

"I wonder why she runned away, Uncle Porges?"

"Ah, I wonder!"

"Specks she's a bit angry with me, you know, 'cause I told you she was crying."

"Hum!" said Bellew.

"An Auntie takes an awful lot of looking after!" sighed Small Porges.

"Yes," nodded Bellew, "I suppose so,— especially if she happens to be young, and— er—"

"An' what, Uncle Porges?"

"Beautiful, nephew."

"Oh! Do you think she's— really beautiful?" demanded Small Porges.

"I'm afraid I do," Bellew confessed.

"So does Mr. Cassilis,— I heard him tell her so once—in the orchard."

"Hum!" said Bellew.

"Ah! but you ought to see her when she comes to tuck me up at night, with her hair all down, an' hanging all about her— like a shiny cloak, you know."

"Hum!" said Bellew.

"Please Uncle Porges," said Georgy, turning to look up at him, "what makes you hum so much this morning?"

"I was thinking, my Porges."

"'Bout my Auntie Anthea?"

"I do admit the soft impeachment, sir."

"Well, I'm thinking too."

"What is it, old chap?"

"I'm thinking we ought to begin to find that fortune for her after breakfast."

"Why, it isn't quite the right season for fortune hunting, yet—at least, not in Arcadia," answered Bellew, shaking his head.

"Oh!— but why not?"

"Well, the moon isn't right, for one thing."

"The moon!" echoed Small Porges.

"Oh yes,— we must wait for a— er— a Money Moon, you know,— surely you've heard of a Money Moon?"

"'Fraid not," sighed Small Porges regretfully, "but—I've heard of a Honey-moon—"

"They're often much the same!" nodded Bellew.

"But when will the Money Moon come, an'— how?"

"I can't exactly say, my Porges, but come it will one of these fine nights. And when it does we shall know that the fortune is close by, and waiting to be found. So, don't worry your small head about it,— just keep your eye on your uncle."

Betimes they came in to breakfast where Anthea awaited them at the head of the table. Then who so demure, so gracious and self-

possessed, so sweetly sedate as she. But the Cavalier in the picture above the carved mantel, versed in the ways of the world, and the pretty tricks and wiles of the Beau Sex Feminine, smiled down at Bellew with an expression of such roguish waggery as said plain as words: "We know!" And Bellew, remembering a certain pair of slender ankles that had revealed themselves in their hurried flight, smiled back at the cavalier, and it was all he could do to refrain from winking outright.

CHAPTER VIII

Which tells of Miss Priscilla, of peaches, and of Sergeant Appleby late of the 19th Hussars

SMALL PORGES was at his lessons. He was perched at the great oak table beside the window, pen in hand, and within easy reach of Anthea who sat busied with her daily letters and accounts. Small Porges was laboriously inscribing in a somewhat splashed and besmeared copy-book the rather surprising facts that:

A stitch in time, saves nine. 9.

That:

The Tagus, a river in Spain. R.

and that:

Artaxerxes was a king of the Persians. A.

and the like surprising, curious, and interesting items of news, his pen making not half so many curls, and twists as did his small, red tongue. As he wrote, he frowned terrifically, and sighed oft betwixt whiles; and Bellew watching, where he stood outside the window, noticed that Anthea frowned also, as she bent