

CHAPTER IX

*In which may be found some description of
Arcadia, and gooseberries*

ANTHEA, leaning on her rake in a shady corner of the five-acre field, turned to watch Bellew who, stripped to his shirt-sleeves, bare of neck, and arm, and pitch-fork in hand, was busy tossing up great mounds of sweet-smelling hay to Adam who stood upon a waggon to receive it, with Small Porges perched up beside him.

A week had elapsed since Bellew had found his way to Dapplemere, a week which had only served to strengthen the bonds of affection between him and his "nephew," and to win over sharp-eyed, shrewd little Miss Priscilla to the extent of declaring him to be: "First a gentleman, Anthea, my dear, and Secondly, — what is much rarer, now-a-days, — a true man!" A week! and already he was hail-fellow-well-met with everyone about the place, for who was proof against his unaffected gaiety, his simple, easy, good-fellowship? So he laughed, and joked as he swung his pitch-fork, (awkwardly enough, to be sure), and received all hints, and

directions as to its use, in the kindly spirit they were tendered. And Anthea, watching him from her shady corner, sighed once or twice, and catching herself, so doing, stamped her foot at herself, and pulled her sunbonnet closer about her face.

"No, Adam," he was saying, "depend upon it, there is nothing like exercise, and, of all exercise, — give me a pitch-fork."

"Why, as to that, Mr. Belloo, sir," Adam retorted, "I say — so be it, so long as I ain't near the wrong end of it, for the way you do 'ave of flourishin' an' a whirlin' that theer fork, is fair as-tonishin', I do declare it be."

"Why you see, Adam, there are some born with a leaning towards pitch-forks, as there are others born to the pen, and the — er — palette, and things, but for me, Adam, the pitch-fork, every time!" said Bellew, mopping his brow.

"If you was to try an' 'andle it more as if it *was* a pitchfork now, Mr. Belloo, sir —" suggested Adam, and, not waiting for Bellew's laughing rejoinder, he chirrupped to the horses, and the great waggon creaked away with its mountainous load, surmounted by Adam's grinning visage, and Small Porges' golden curls, and followed by the rest of the merry-voiced hay-makers.

Now it was, that turning his head, Bellew espied Anthea watching him, whereupon he shouldered his fork, and coming to where she sat upon a throne of hay, he sank down at her feet with a luxurious sigh. She had never seen him without a collar, before, and now she could not but notice how round, and white, and powerful his neck was, and how the muscles bulged upon arm, and shoulder, and how his hair curled in small, damp rings upon his brow.

"It is good," said he, looking up into the witching face, above him, "yes, it is very good to see you idle — just for once."

"And I was thinking it was good to see you work, — just for once."

"Work!" he exclaimed, "my dear Miss Anthea, I assure you I have become a positive glutton for work. It has become my earnest desire to plant things, and grow things, and chop things with axes; to mow things with scythes. I dream of pastures, and ploughs, of pails and pitchforks, by night; and, by day, reaping-hooks, hoes, and rakes, are in my thoughts continually, — which all goes to show the effect of this wonderful air of Arcadia. Indeed, I am as full of suppressed energy, these days, as Adam is of the 'Old Adam.' And, talking of Adam reminds me that he has sol-

emly pledged himself to initiate me into the mysteries of swinging a scythe to-morrow morning at — five o'clock! Yes indeed, my heart bounds responsive to the swish of a scythe in thick grass, and my soul sits enraptured upon a pitch-fork."

"How ridiculous you are!" she laughed.

"And how perfectly content!" he added.

"Is anyone ever quite content?" she sighed, glancing down at him, wistful-eyed.

"Not unless they have found Arcadia," he answered.

"Have you then?"

"Yes," he nodded complacently, "oh yes, I've found it."

"Are you — sure?"

"Quite sure!"

"Arcadia!" she repeated, wrinkling her brows, "what is Arcadia and — where?"

"Arcadia," answered Bellew, watching the smoke rise up from his pipe, with a dreamy eye, "Arcadia is the — Promised Land, — the Land that everyone tries to find, sometime or other, and may be — anywhere."

"And how came you to — find it?"

"By the most fortunate chance in the world."

"Tell me," said Anthea, taking a wisp of

hay, and beginning to plait it in dexterous, brown fingers, "tell me how you found it."

"Why then you must know, in the first place," he began in his slow, even voice, "that it is a place I have sought for in all my wanderings, and I have been pretty far afield, — but I sought it so long, and so vainly, that I began to think it was like the El Dorado of the old Adventurers, and had never existed at all."

"Yes?" said Anthea, busy with her plaiting.

"But, one day, — Fate, or Chance, or Destiny, — or their benevolent spirit, sent a certain square-shouldered Waggoner to show me the way, and, after him, a very small Porges, — bless him! — to lead me into this wonderful Arcadia."

"Oh, I see!" nodded Anthea, very intent upon her plaiting.

"But there is something more," said Bellew.

"Oh?" said Anthea.

"Shall I tell you?"

"If — it is — very interesting."

"Well then, in this delightful land there is a castle, grim, embattled, and very strong."

"A castle?" said Anthea, glancing up suddenly.

"The Castle of Heart's Desire."

"Oh!" said she, and gave all her attention to her plaiting again.

"And so," continued Bellew, "I am waiting, very patiently, until, in her own good time, she who rules within, shall open the gate to me, or — bid me go away."

Into Bellew's voice had crept a thrill no one had ever heard there before; he leaned nearer to her, and his dreamy eyes were keen now, and eager. And she, though she saw nothing of all this, yet, being a woman, knew it was there, of course, and, for that very reason, looked resolutely away. Wherefore, once again, Bellew heartily wished that sunbonnets had never been invented.

So there was silence while Anthea stared away across the golden corn-fields, yet saw nothing of them, and Bellew looked upon those slender, capable fingers, that had faltered in their plaiting and stopped. And thus, upon the silence there broke a sudden voice shrill with interest:

"Go on, Uncle Porges, — what about the dragons? Oh, please go on! — there's always dragons in 'chanted castles, you know, to guard the lovely Princess, — aren't you going to have any dragons that hiss, you know, an' spit out smoke, an' flames? Oh! — do please have a

dragon." And Small Porges appeared from the other side of the hay-mow, flushed, and eager.

"Certainly, my Porges," nodded Bellew, drawing the small figure down beside him, "I was forgetting the dragons, but there they are, with scaly backs, and iron claws, spitting out sparks and flames, just as self-respecting dragons should, and roaring away like thunder."

"Ah!" exclaimed Small Porges, nestling closer to Bellew, and reaching out a hand to Auntie Anthea, "that's fine! let's have plenty of dragons."

"Do you think a—er—dozen would be enough, my Porges?"

"Oh yes! But s'pose the beautiful Princess didn't open the door,—what would you do if you were really a wandering knight who was waiting patiently for it to open,—what would you do then?"

"Shin up a tree, my Porges."

"Oh but that wouldn't be a bit right—would it, Auntie?"

"Of course not!" laughed Anthea, "it would be most un-knight-like, and very undignified."

"'Sides," added Small Porges, "you

couldn't climb up a tree in your armour, you know."

"Then I'd make an awful' good try at it!" nodded Bellew.

"No," said Small Porges, shaking his head, "shall I tell you what you ought to do? Well then, you'd draw your two-edged sword, an' dress your shield,—like Gareth, the Kitchen Knave did,—he was always dressing his shield, an' so was Lancelôt,—an' you'd fight all those dragons, an' kill them, an' cut their heads off."

"And then what would happen?" enquired Bellew.

"Why then the lovely Princess would open the gate, an' marry you of course, an' live happy ever after, an' all would be revelry an' joy."

"Ah!" sighed Bellew, "if she'd do that, I think I'd fight all the dragons that ever roared,—and kill them too. But supposing she—er—wouldn't open the gate."

"Why then," said Small Porges, wrinkling his brow, "why then—you'd have to storm the castle, of course, an' break open the gate an' run off with the Princess on your charger,—if she was very beautiful, you know."

"A most excellent idea, my Porges! If I

should happen to find myself in like circumstances, I'll surely take your advice."

Now, as he spoke, Bellew glanced at Anthea, and she at him. And straightway she blushed, and then she laughed, and then she blushed again, and, still blushing, rose to her feet, and turned to find Mr. Cassilis within a yard of them.

"Ah, Miss Anthea," said he, lifting his hat, "I sent Georgy to find you, but it seems he forgot to mention that I was waiting."

"I'm awful' sorry, Mr. Cassilis, — but Uncle Porges was telling us 'bout dragons, you know," Small Porges hastened to explain.

"Dragons!" repeated Mr. Cassilis, with his supercilious smile, "ah, indeed! dragons should be interesting, especially in such a very quiet, shady nook as this, — quite an idyllic place for story-telling, it's a positive shame to disturb you," and his sharp, white teeth gleamed beneath his moustache, as he spoke, and he tapped his riding-boot lightly with his hunting-crop as he fronted Bellew, who had risen, and stood bare-armed, leaning upon his pitch-fork. And, as in their first meeting, there was a mute antagonism in their look.

"Let me introduce you to each other," said

Anthea, conscious of this attitude, — "Mr. Cassilis, of Brampton Court, — Mr. Bellew!"

"Of nowhere in particular, sir!" added Bellew.

"And pray," said Mr. Cassilis perfunctorily as they strolled on across the meadow, "how do you like Dapplemere, Mr. Bellew?"

"Immensely, sir, — beyond all expression!"

"Yes, it is considered rather pretty, I believe."

"Lovely, sir!" nodded Bellew, "though it is not so much the beauty of the place itself, that appeals to me so much as what it — contains."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Cassilis, with a sudden, sharp glance, "to what do you refer?"

"Goose-berries, sir!"

"I — ah — beg your pardon?"

"Sir," said Bellew gravely, "all my life I have fostered a secret passion for goose-berries — raw, or cooked, — in pie, pudding or jam, they are equally alluring. Unhappily the American goose-berry is but a hollow mockery, at best —"

"Ha?" said Mr. Cassilis, dubiously.

"Now, in goose-berries, as in everything else, sir, there is to be found the superlative, the quintessence, — the ideal. Consequently I

have roamed East and West, and North and South, in quest of it."

"Really?" said Mr. Cassilis, stifling a yawn, and turning towards Miss Anthea with the very slightest shrug of his shoulders.

"And, in Dapplemere," concluded Bellew, solemnly, "I have, at last, found my ideal —"

"Goose-berry!" added Anthea with a laugh in her eyes.

"Arcadia being a land of ideals!" nodded Bellew.

"Ideals," said Mr. Cassilis, caressing his moustache, "ideals and — ah — goose-berries, — though probably excellent things in themselves, are apt to pall upon one, in time; personally, I find them equally insipid, —"

"Of course it is all a matter of taste!" sighed Bellew.

"But," Mr. Cassilis went on, fairly turning his back upon him, "the subject I wished to discuss with you, Miss Anthea, was the — er — approaching sale."

"The sale!" she repeated, all the brightness dying out of her face.

"I wished," said Cassilis, leaning nearer to her, and lowering his voice confidentially, "to try to convince you how — unnecessary it would be — if —" and he paused, significantly.

Anthea turned quickly aside, as though to hide her mortification from Bellew's keen eyes; whereupon he, seeing it all, became, straightway, more dreamy than ever, and, laying a hand upon Small Porges' shoulder, pointed with his pitch-fork to where at the other end of the "Five-acre" the hay-makers worked away as merrily as ever:

"Come, my Porges," said he, "let us away and join yon happy throng, and — er —"

* With Daphnis, and Clo, and Blowsabel
We'll list to the - er - cuckoo in the dell."

So, hand in hand, the two Porges set off together. But when they had gone some distance, Bellew looked back, and then he saw that Anthea walked with her head averted, yet Cassilis walked close beside her, and stooped, now and then, until the black moustache came very near the curl — that curl of wanton witchery that peeped above her ear.

"Uncle Porges — why do you frown so?"

"Frown, my Porges, — did I? Well, I was thinking."

"Well, I'm thinking too, only I don't frown, you know, but I'm thinking just the same."

"And what might you be thinking, nephew?"

“Why I was thinking that although you’re so awful fond of goose-berries, an’ though there’s lots of ripe ones on the bushes I’ve never seen you eat a single one.”

CHAPTER X

How Bellew and Adam entered into a solemn league and covenant

“Look at the moon to-night, Uncle Porges!”

“I see it.”

“It’s awfull’ big, an’ round, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it’s very big, and very round.”

“An’ — rather — yellow, isn’t it?”

“Very yellow!”

“Just like a great, big golden sovereign, isn’t it.”

“Very much like a sovereign, my Porges.”

“Well, do you know, I was wondering — if there was any chance that it was a — Money Moon?”

They were leaning out at the lattice, Small Porges, and Big Porges. Anthea and Miss Priscilla were busied upon household matters wholly feminine, wherefore Small Porges had drawn Bellew to the window, and there they leaned, the small body enfolded by Bellew’s long arm, and the two faces turned up to the silvery splendour of the moon.

But now, Anthea came up behind them, and,