

'Now, Gregor, you must show me some of your work,' he said, as they entered the studio, 'and you must let me give you my honest criticism, just as old Don used to do at Edinboro'. Is this your last picture? "Parting," you call it? Ah, it is wonderful! The grouping and colouring are exquisite; but, old man, there's something lacking—'

'Just what they all say,' said Gregor, sadly. 'Both the world and my inner self tell me I lack something, but neither the one nor the other tell me what the want is.'

'I think I know what is the matter, John,' said Kent, looking gravely from the canvas to his friend's face; 'you lack something that so many of us miss as we go through the world—it is touch with the great human brotherhood around us, with its joy and sorrow, its hope and despair. And how can we touch this great heart-note of mankind when our own hearts have never been attuned to it? It is the broad, quick sympathy that you need, my friend—you have not yet entered into the lives, the wants, the soul-strifes of men.' He paused, and Gregor sat with his face bowed in his hands. 'Am I preaching, old man? It is only because I want to help you to have the promise of your work fulfilled. Let me suggest something. You are rich, you are young—leave your work for a time and go study in the living school. My word on it, you'll be thankful when you take up your work once more. Now, old fellow, I must go—I have an appointment for this evening. Think over what I've said and come up to see me. I'm at the Continental.'

John Gregor did think. A week later, when Kent called up at the studio again, he found it closed and its owner gone; they did not know where or for how long, the concierge said. Richard Kent smiled as he went down the steps. 'It will do him good,' he said.

II.

There are four walls around a little Provençal garden that hold their little world of sorrow. In the cottage opening on the tiny grass plot lives an old French peasant and her grandchild. The old woman's face is marked with many a line that tells its silent history of pain and struggle. She has had more than falls to the lot of most women and men, this old French peasant. But one bit of happiness seems left to her—it is the little Babbette. The child seems to understand it all and she gives the old woman a greatheartful of the love she craves. But now the little one is dying, and the old grandmother's heart is heavy with hopelessness. Each day as she carries the lighter-growing burden into the little garden, she feels the feeble life-pulse beating fainter, she sees the pale face grow paler.

'Gran'mere,' said the child one day at twilight as she leaned back, white and tired, on the pillows of her great chair, 'gran'mere, see the sun is almost gone! He will not come to-day.'

'Oh, yes, chérie, he will come; he never lets the sun die without coming to brighten thee up a bit, petite. See, there he is now!'

It was John Gregor who walked so quickly across the little gravelled walk; but not the same John we left in the Paris studio. He is a happier and a better man for his year with the people. He has wandered through many lands in that year, living always the fuller life that is born of intercourse with the lives and hearts of common men. For the past three months he has lived in the little Provençal town. Walking through the streets and lanes of the sleeping village, he met often the little Babbette, and he was strangely attracted by the pure, flower face of the child. Afterwards, he went to see her, and now that she was ill, he went each day with his great bunch of the wood-flowers that she loved and his kind smile, helping to while away the long hours and cheering the old grandmother with his hopefulness.

'Am I late to-day, little one?' he asked, as he laid his cool hand on her fevered head. 'Never mind, we shall have a long evening together to make up for it. Come, grandmother, the evening air will soon be too chill for her; but we'll put her chair close to the window where we can watch each star as it peeps out of the darkness.'

That night, when the stars came, they beckoned the little soul away, and at last, when Gregor went out into the darkness, he left the old grandmother alone beside the window, holding tight the little cold form and speaking tender words that only the stars could hear.

All the long night John Gregor thought. The coming of the silent death so near him has stirred old feelings, old regrets. He had knelt in the shadow of eternity and he rose up to look with clearer eyes in the face of the living duty. He looked within himself and shuddered at the sight. He looked at the boy-dreamer among the Scottish meadows—he looked at the years of patient sacrifice, at the hopes his baseness had shattered—he saw the simple, loving hearts trampled and crushed by his ingratitude. And then he did a strange thing—this world-schooled man: 'Help me, O God!' he moaned. 'O, God!' And when the dawn came, the little dead face seemed to smile on him in blessing.

In another month he was back at Lachlan. The old town still slumbered among the blue hills, and as he left the little station and mounted the worn path, he saw that the autumn glory again covered leaf and fell and meadow, as it had done when years ago he went away.

'I must find out if there are any changes in the old place,' he said, as he paused before the smith shop, the village gathering place. Had he changed so much, he wondered, that none of the familiar faces that he remembered so well lighted up with recognition as he stepped in amongst them. The old villagers looked up, surprised, as a stranger entered.

'Good day to ye, sir,' said one; 'hay ye made muckle o' journey th' da?'

'Maybe ye're gaein' t' bide o' Lachlan?' another ventured, voicing the curiosity of the group.

'I have not been here for many years,' said George, 'not since I was a lad. But I know something of the village. I suppose farmer Gregor still lives in the old farm house under the hill? And Maister Douglas? Does he still teach the village school?'

'Nae, nae, friend, the auld Gregor fairm is empty an' the gude mon is dead these two year. Ye ken he ha' ae son—a likely lad enow till he took up wi' paintin' an' sich foolishness. They sent th' lad awa' t' study an' they worked sair hard, th' day an' nicht, tha' he maun ha' a'. Ay weel, sir, it cam' about tha' th' auld fauk war nae gude enow' for th' bairn—he ne'er cam' back to them, an' it brecht their hearts. It was a sicht to mak' a mon's e'en tak' t' battin' to see th' two. sae sad an' sae patient, fadin' awa' for grief—for the bairn was their a'. The blaw just techt their bit o' life awa' an' ain brecht day in the summer-time we laid them i' th' auld kirk-yard yonder. They went together, sir, an' there wa' nae better fauk in' a' the country round. Aye, an' th' auld maister—God bless him! went summat afair them. His heart was crushed, too, for he loved th' Gregor lad an'—why mon, wha, ails thee? Why, he maun be crazed!'

For John Gregor had turned and fled, as men do flee from that most merciless of pursuers—self.

III.

'What a crush this is, to be sure! Lady Craigie's receptions are always so overcrowded! I'm so glad to find this quiet corner—and you. Yes, I have tickets for the academy to-morrow; it will be the best exhibit of years, they say. You have heard of the first-place pictures, of course—those two by John Gregor. You remember him, do you not? The young artist that gave so much promise five or six years ago. You know he disappeared rather suddenly, and some thought he was dead; but it seems he has been living like a hermit way up in some unheard of place in North Scotland. They say he's had a great sorrow—maybe he's been crossed in love, poor fellow! he looks like a man to love or suffer deeply. I saw him the other day when they were hanging his pictures. I thought he was a young man, but his hair is quite white, and such a face as looks out from under that hair! His pictures are certainly wonderful, though the subjects are very simple. One is a scene at twilight in an old Provençal garden—a peasant woman with a seamed and careworn face is looking with despair in her eyes at a frail, wistful child, on whom there rests already the shadow of the coming death. She holds a few faded flowers in her hands and is looking at something afar off—beyond the grey, sad twilight of the peaceful garden. The other picture is beyond words—it is the painting of a soul, all unrest, sin, shame, despair. Strange, but as the artist looked up at it, I caught a flash of resemblance between the dark, shadowed face in the picture and the one raised beneath it. But you'll see them to-morrow for yourself. I hope you'll see the artist as well, but I hear he shuns these fashionable cru-hes. Indeed, he's a modern St. Francis, they say—an apostle of the poor and all that kind of thing, you know. At any rate, he seems to have that something in his work that draws out the hearts of men and makes them akin to him and his thought. But I'm keeping you with my enthusiasm. Good-bye, I'll see you to-morrow. And, by the way, don't fail to notice the pictures of Richard Kent—he's next to Gregor, I think. They are great friends, those two; I believe it was Kent who persuaded Gregor to come out of his seclusion and take up his art again.'

The fullness of the years has brought John Gregor what he sought. He has touched the great chord of sympathy and its echoes have rung in the hearts of men.

THE POPE'S MAIL.

I MET a prelate engaged in the Vatican the other day (writes the Rome correspondent of the *Pall Mall Gazette*), and in the course of our conversation began to deplore my hard lot in having to stay in Rome during the heat of the summer and work. 'Oh, well,' he said, 'you are not worse off than we in the Vatican. Now that most of the employees are away, we who are left have to work hard.'

'Work!' I exclaimed. 'Yes, walk in the Vatican gardens and count the grapes of the Pope's vineyard.'

'Do you know that every evening the mail brings to the bronze doors of the Vatican an average of 20,000 letters and newspapers, to say nothing of telegrams? All the letters have to be opened, sorted, and classified, while the newspapers are read, and selections out or extracts made during the night to be ready for perusal by the officers of State early the next morning.'

'And where does the Pope come in?' I interrupted. 'They say he also works so hard.'

'Much of this work is submitted to him, and he should read all the letters addressed *Sanctitati Suae Leoni Papae XIII feliciter regnanti*. However, as the whole 24 hours of the day would not be sufficient for the Pontiff to even glance over them, he only sees what Cardinal Rampolla thinks necessary for his inspection.'

'In other words, he knows only what they choose?'

'Oh, no; there are communications which really go directly to the Holy Father, namely, those through the diplomatists accredited to the Vatican. Still, the most secure way of having a letter read by the Pope is to address it as follows: 'To his Holiness the Pope,' as any other than the head of the Church guilty of opening a document so addressed will be excommunicated according to a bull promulgated by the Carafa Pope, Paul IV.'

It would be easier to calm the most furious hurricane at sea, or flames of fire, than to curb the unbridled insolence of the multitude during a revolution.