

The Two Guardians

by

Charlotte Mary Yonge

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Preface

In putting forth another work, the Author is anxious to say a few words on the design of these stories; not with a view to obviate criticism, but in hopes of pointing to the moral, which has been thought not sufficiently evident, perhaps because it has been desired to convey, rather than directly inculcate it.

Throughout these tales the plan has been to present a picture of ordinary life, with its small daily events, its pleasures, and its trials, so as to draw out its capabilities of being turned to the best account. Great events, such as befall only a few, are thus excluded, and in the hope of helping to present a clue, by example, to the perplexities of daily life, the incidents, which render a story exciting, have been sacrificed, and the attempt has been to make the interest of the books depend on character painting.

Each has been written with the wish to illustrate some principle which may be called the key note. "Abbeychurch" is intended to show the need of self-control and the evil of conceit in different manifestations; according to the various characters, "Scenes and Characters" was meant to exemplify the effects of being guided by mere feeling, set in contrast with strict adherence to duty. In "Henrietta's Wish" the opposition is between wilfulness and submission--filial submission as required, in the young people, and that of which it is a commencement as well as a type, as instanced in Mrs. Frederick Langford. The design of the "Castle Builders" is to show the instability and dissatisfaction of mind occasioned by the want of a practical, obedient course of daily life; with an especial view to the consequences of not seeking strength and assistance in the appointed means of grace.

And as the very opposite to Emmeline's feeble character, the heroine of the present story is intended to set forth the manner in which a Christian may contend with and conquer this world, living in it but not of it, and rendering it a means of self-renunciation. It is therefore purposely that the end presents no great event, and leaves Marian unrecompensed save by the effects her consistent well doing has produced on her companions. Any other compensation would render her self-sacrifice incomplete, and make her no longer invisibly above the world.

October 14th, 1852.

Chapter I.

"With fearless pride I say
That she is healthful, fleet, and strong
And down the rocks will leap along,
Like rivulets in May."

WORDSWORTH.

Along a beautiful Devonshire lane, with banks of rock overhung by tall bowery hedges, rode a lively and merry pair, now laughing and talking, now summoning by call or whistle the spaniel that ran by their side, or careered through the fields within the hedge.

The younger was a maiden of about twelve years old, in a long black and white plaid riding-skirt, over a pink gingham frock, and her dark hair hidden beneath a little cap furnished with a long green veil, which was allowed to stream behind her in the wind, instead of affording the intended shelter to a complexion already a shade or two darkened by the summer sun, but with little colour in the cheeks; and what there was, only the pale pink glow like a wild rose, called up for the moment by warmth and exercise, and soon to pass away. Still there was no appearance of want of health; the skin was of a clear, soft, fresh shade of brown; the large dark eyes, in spite of all their depth of melancholy softness, had the wild, untamed animation of a mountaineer; the face and form were full of free life and vigour, as she sat erect and perfectly at ease on her spirited little bay pony, which at times seemed so lively that it might have been matter of surprise to a stranger that so young a horsewoman should be trusted on its back.

Her companion was a youth some ten or eleven years her senior, possessing a handsome set of regular features, with a good deal of family likeness to hers; dark eyes and hair, and a figure which, though slight, was rather too tall to look suitable to the small, stout, strong pony which carried him and his numerous equipments, consisting of a long rod-case, a fishing-basket and landing-net, in accordance with the lines of artificial flies wreathed round his straw hat, and the various oddly contrived pockets of his grey shooting-coat.

In the distance at the end of the lane there appeared two walking figures. "Mrs. Wortley!" exclaimed the young lady.

"No, surely not out so soon!" was the answer. "She is in the depth of lessons."

"No, but Edmund, it is, look, and Agnes too! There, Ranger has better eyes than you; he is racing to them."

"Well, I acknowledge my mistake," said Edmund, drawing up his rein as they came upon the pair,--a pleasing lady, and a pretty blue-eyed girl of fourteen. "I did not believe my eyes, Mrs. Wortley, though Marian tried to persuade me. I thought you were always reading Italian at this time in the morning, Agnes".

"And I thought you were reading Phædrus with Gerald," said Mrs. Wortley.

"Ay," said Agnes, "we did not know what to make of you coming up the lane; you with your lance there, like the Red Cross Knight himself, and Marian with her palfry for Una."

"The knight must have borrowed the dwarf's ass," said Edmund, laughing, and putting his lance in rest.

"And where have you been, then, at this portentous time of day, Agnes?" asked Marian.

"We heard a report of Betty Laphorn's child having another fit," said Agnes, "and set off to see; but it turned out to be a false alarm. And now we are going up to the Manor House to ask Lady Arundel if she has any arrowroot for it, for ours is all used up."

"Shall we find her at leisure?" added Mrs. Wortley.

"Yes," said Marian. "Gerald has finished his lessons by this time. Mamma thought it would be too far for him to go with us, and besides he frightens the fish."

"Which you are in too good training to do, Marian," said Mrs. Wortley. "And how is your papa to-day?"

"Oh, it is a good day," said Marian: "he was up before we set off."

"Down stairs? For perhaps we had better not go now, just after he is tired with coming down," said Mrs. Wortley. "Now, Mr. Arundel, you will tell me honestly, and this arrowroot will do just as well another time; or if Marian will carry home the message--"

"Well," said Edmund, smiling, "to give you a proof of my sincerity, I think you had better perhaps go rather later in the day. My uncle very unnecessarily hurried himself, thinking that he was keeping me waiting to help him down stairs, and I thought he seemed rather tired; but he will be very glad to see you in the afternoon. Indeed, he would be very glad now, only you asked me as a question of prudence."

"Don't make civil speeches at the end to spoil just such a reply as I wanted," said Mrs. Wortley. "I am afraid you do not think Sir Edmund much better since you were last at home."

Edmund shook his head. "If he has not lost ground, it is well," said he, "and I think at least there is less pain."

"Well, I will not keep you any longer," said Mrs. Wortley; "good-bye, and good sport to you."

And with a wave of the hand on rode the two cousins, Edmund and Marian Arundel.

"What an excellent thing it is for the village that those Wortleys are come!" said Edmund.

"Yes; now that mamma cannot attend much to the school and poor people, I don't know what we should do without them. How different it was in old Mr. May's time! I hope we shall get the Church set to rights now, when papa is well enough to attend to it."

"It is high time, certainly," said Edmund; "our Church is almost a disgrace to us, especially with the Arundel aisle, to show what our ancestors did."

"No, not quite to us," said Marian; "you know papa would have done it all long ago, if the idea had not vexed poor old Mr. May so much. But Ranger! Ranger! where is Ranger, Edmund?"

Edmund whistled, and presently, with whirring, rushing wing, there flew over the hedge beside them a covey of partridges, followed by Ranger's eager bark. Marian's pony started, danced, and capered; Edmund watched her with considerable anxiety, but she reined it in with a steady, dexterous, though not a strong hand, kept her seat well, and rode on in triumph, while Edmund exclaimed, "Capital, Marian!" Then looking back, "What a shot that was!" he added in a sort of parenthesis, continuing, "I am proud, Mayflower is not a bit too much for you now, though I think we must have given her up if you had had another tumble."

"Oh, no, no, I do so delight in Mayflower, pretty creature!" said Marian, patting her neck. "I like to feel that the creature I ride is alive--not an old slug, like that animal which you are upon, Edmund."

"That is decidedly ungrateful of you, Marian, when you learnt to ride upon this identical slug, and owe the safety of your neck to its quiet propensities. Now take care down this stony hill; hold her up well--that is right."

Care was certainly needed as they descended the steep hill side; the road, or rather pathway, cut out between high, steep, limestone rocks, and here and there even bare of earth. Any one but a native would have trembled at such a descent but though the cousins paid attention to their progress, they had no doubts or alarms. At the bottom a clear sparkling stream traversed the road, where, for the convenience of foot passengers, a huge flat stone had been thrown across from one high bank to the other, so as to form a romantic bridge. Marian, however, did not avail herself of it, but rode gallantly through the shallow water, only looking back at it to observe to Edmund, "We must make a sketch of that some day or other."

"I am afraid we cannot get far enough off," said Edmund, "to make a good drawing of it. Too many things go to the making of the picturesque."

"Yes, I know, but that is what I never can understand. I see by woeful experience that what is pretty in itself will not make a pretty drawing, and everyone says so; but I never could find out why."

"Perhaps because we cannot represent it adequately."

"Yes, but there is another puzzle; you sometimes see an exact representation, which is not really a picture at all. Don't you know that thing that the man who came to the door did of our house,--the trees all green, and the sky all blue, and the moors all purple?"

"As like as it can stare; yes, I know."

"Well, why does that not satisfy us? why is it not a picture?"

"Because it stares, I suppose. Why does not that picture of my aunt at Mrs. Week's cottage satisfy you as well as the chalk sketch in the dining-room?"

"Because it has none of herself--her spirit."

"Well, I should say that nature has a self and a spirit which must be caught, or else the Chinese would be the greatest artists on the face of the earth."

"Yes, but why does an archway, or two trees standing up so as to enclose the landscape, or--or any of those things that do to put in the foreground, why do they enable you to make a picture, to catch this self and spirit."

"Make the phial to enclose the genie," said Edmund. "Abstruse questions, Marian; but perhaps it is because they contract the space, so as to bring it more to the level of our capacity, make it less grand, and more what we can get into keeping. To be sure, he would be a presumptuous man who tried to make an exact likeness of that," he added, as they reached the top of the hill, and found themselves on an open common, with here and there a mass of rock peeping up, but for the most part covered with purple heath and short furze, through which Ranger coursed, barking joyously. The view was splendid, on one side the moors rising one behind the other, till they faded in grey distance, each crowned with a fantastic pile of rocks, one in the form of a castle, another of a cathedral, another of a huge crouching lion, all known to the two cousins by name, and owned as familiar friends. On the other side, between two hills, each surmounted by its own rocky crest, lay nestled in woods the grey Church tower and cottages of the village of Fern Torr; and far away stretched the rich landscape of field, wood, and pasture, ending at length in the blue line of horizon, where sky and sea seemed to join.

"Beautiful! how clear!" was all Marian's exclamation, though she drew up her horse and gazed with eager eyes, and a deep feeling of the loveliness of the scene, but with scarcely a remark. There was something in the sight which made her heart too full for words.

After a time of delighted contemplation, Ranger was summoned from a close investigation of a rabbit-hole, and turning into a cart track, the cousins rode down the side of the hill, where presently appeared an orchard full of gnarled old apple trees, covered with fruit of all shades of red, yellow, and green. A little further on were the large stone barns, and picturesque looking house, which enclosed a farm-yard strewn with heaps of

straw, in which pigs, poultry, and red cows were enjoying themselves. The gate was opened by a wild-looking cow-boy, who very respectfully touched his cap; and at the house door appeared a nice elderly looking old fashioned farmer's wife, who came forward to meet them with bright looks of cordiality, and kindly greetings to Master Edmund and Miss Marian.

"Thank you, thank you, Mrs. Cornthwayte," said Edmund, as he held Marian's pony; "we are come to ask if you will give our ponies stable room for a couple of hours, while we go fishing up the river."

"O yes, certainly, sir, but won't you come in a little while and rest? it is a long walk for Miss Marian."

They did comply with her invitation so far as to enter the large clean kitchen; the kitchen for show, that is to say, with the sanded floor, the bunch of evergreens in the covered kitchen-range, the dark old fashioned clock, the bright range of crockery, and well polished oaken table; and there, while Marian laid aside her riding-skirt, the good woman commenced her anxious inquiries for Sir Edmund.

"Pretty much the same as usual, thank you," said Edmund.

"No better, then, sir? Ah! I was afraid how it was; it is so long since I have seen him at church, and he used to come sometimes last summer: and my husband said when he saw him last week about the rent, he was so fallen away that he would hardly have known him."

"It has been a very long illness," said Edmund.

"Yes, sir; I do wish we could see him about among us again, speaking as cheerful as he used."

"Why he is very cheerful now, Mrs. Cornthwayte," said Edmund. "No one who only heard him talk would guess how much he has to suffer."

Mrs. Cornthwayte shook her head with a sort of gesture of compassionate admiration, and presently added,

"But do you think he gets better on the whole, Master Edmund? Do the doctors say there is much likelihood of his being well again, and coming among us?"

Edmund looked down and did not reply very readily. "I am afraid we must not hope for that; we must be satisfied as long as he does not lose ground, and I certainly think he has had less pain of late."

A little more conversation passed between Edmund and the good wife, and a few words from Marian; after which they set off across one or two fields towards the place of their

destination, Marian carrying her little sketching-basket in silence for some distance, until she suddenly exclaimed, "Edmund, is papa really getting worse?"

"Why should you think so, Marian?"

"I don't know, only from what you say when people inquire after him; and sometimes when I come to think about it, I believe he can do less than last year. He gets up later, and does not go out so often, and now you say he will never get quite well, and I always thought he would."

"No, I am afraid there is no likelihood of that, Marian: the doctors say he may be much better, but never quite well."

"But do you think he is better?"

"He has had less suffering of late, certainly, and so far we must be thankful; but, as you say, Marian, I am afraid he is weaker than last time I was at home, and I thought him much altered when I came. Still I do not think him materially worse, and I believe I might have thought him improved, if I had been here all the winter."

Marian became silent again, for her disposition was not to express her feelings readily, and besides, she was young enough to be able to put aside anxiety which, perhaps, she did not fully comprehend. It was the ordinary state of things for her father to be unwell, and his illness scarcely weighed upon her spirits, especially on a holiday and day of pleasure like the present; for though she often shared Edmund's walks and rides, a long expedition like this was an unusual treat.

After traversing several fields, they entered a winding path through a copse, which, descending a steep hill side, conducted them at length to the verge of a clear stream, which danced over or round the numerous rocks which obstructed its passage, making a pleasant, rippling sound. Here and there under the overhanging trees were deep quiet pools, where the water, of clear transparent brown color, contained numbers of little trout, the object of Edmund's pursuit. But more frequently the water splashed, dashed, and brawled along its rocky way, at the bottom of the narrow wooded ravine in which the valley ended. It was indeed a beautiful scene, with the sun glancing on the green of the trees and the bright sparkling water; and Marian could scarcely restrain her exclamations of delight, out of consideration for the silence required by her cousin's sport. She helped him to put his rod together, and arrange his reel, with the dexterity of one who well understood the matter; and then sat down under a fern-covered rock with a book in her hand, whilst he commenced his fishing. As he slowly proceeded up the stream, she changed her place so as to follow him at a distance; now and then making expeditions into the wood at the side of the hill to study some remarkable rock, some tree of peculiar form, or to gather a handsome fern-leaf, or nodding fox-glove with its purple bells. Or the little sketch-book came out, and she caught the form of the rock with a few strokes of bold outline and firm shading, with more power over her soft pencil than is usual at her age, though her foliage was not of the most perfect description. Her own occupations did

not, however, prevent her from observing all her cousin's proceedings; she knew whenever he captured a trout, she was at hand to offer help when his hook, was caught in a bramble, and took full and complete interest in the sport.

At last, after a successful fishing up the glen, they arrived at a place where the ravine was suddenly closed in by a perpendicular rock of about twenty feet in height, down which the water fell with its full proportion of foam and spray, forming a cascade which Marian thought "magnificent,"--Edmund, "very pretty."

"Edmund, I am afraid the Lake country has spoiled you for Devonshire. I wish they had never sent your regiment to the north!"

"That would not prevent the falls in Westmoreland from being twice the height of this."

"It would prevent you from saying that here it is not as beautiful as any thing can be."

"And nothing short of that will satisfy you. You had better stand in a narrow pass, and challenge every passer-by to battle in defence of the beauty of Fern Torr."

"I don't care about every body; but you, Edmund, ought to be more dutiful to your own home."

"You are exclusive, Marian; but come," and he stuck his rod into the ground, "let us have some of your sandwiches."

"Not till you confess that you like Fern Torr better than all the fine places that you ever saw."

"Liking with all one's heart is one thing, admiring above all others is another, as you will find when you have seen more of the world, Marian."

"I am sure I shall never think so."

While this contest was going on, Marian had unpacked some sandwiches and biscuits, and they sat down to eat them with the appetite due to such a walk. Then came a conversation, in which Marian submitted to hear something of the beauties of the Lakes, in the shape of a comment on the "Bridal of Triermain," which she had brought with her; next an attempt at sketching the cascade, in which Edmund was successful enough to make Marian much discontented with her own performance, and declare that she was tired of sitting still, and had a great mind to try to climb up the rocks by the side of the fall. She was light, active, and well able to scramble, and with a little help here and there from her cousin's strong hand, the top was merrily gained; and springing along from rock to rock, they traced the windings of the stream even to the end of the copse and the opening of the moor. It was a great achievement for Marian, for even Edmund had only once been this way before when out shooting. She would fain have mounted to the top of a peak which bounded her view, but being assured that she would only find Alps on Alps

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