

**A NEW  
ARISTOCRACY**

BY  
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“Talk about questions of the day. There is but one question and that is the Gospel. It can and will correct everything that needs correction.... My only hope for the world is in bringing the human mind into contact with Divine Revelation.

“WM. E. GLADSTONE.”

## INTRODUCTION.

“Write ye for art,” the critics cry,  
“And give your best endeavor,  
That down the aisles of length’ning time  
Your fame may speed forever!”

“Write ye for truth,” my heart replies,  
“And prove that generous giving,  
May help some blinded eyes to find  
The noblest way of living.”

The simple story, plainly told,  
May bear its own conviction,  
And words alive with buoyant hope  
May supersede their diction.

Give me the horny-handed clasp  
Of some good honest neighbor,  
Who finds within the words I speak  
A strength for earnest labor.

Give me the lifted, grateful smile  
Of some poor fainting woman,  
Who knows that I regard her soul  
As something dear and human.

Give me the fervent, heartfelt prayer  
Of just the toiling masses;  
To be remembered with their love  
Your boasted art surpasses.

And this be mine, whate’er the fault  
Of manner, not of matter,  
Along the rocky ways of life  
Some living truths to scatter.

BIRCH ARNOLD.

# **A NEW ARISTOCRACY.**

## CHAPTER I.

Mr. Murchison was dead. The villagers announced the fact to each other with bated breath as they gazed with reverent awe at the crape on the door.

“Poor man,” they sighed, vaguely sympathetic; “it’s well enough with him now, but there’s the children.”

“Ay, there’s the children,” more than one responded feelingly.

Mr. Murchison had been the rector of the small parish of Barnley, distant perhaps a hundred miles from the city of C——, the great commercial center of the West, and having attended faithfully to his duties for a series of years, had been stricken at last with the dread pangs of consumption. Two years of painful waiting had passed away, and now the release had come. Devout, patient, and faithful, who could doubt that it was well with him?

“God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb,” tremblingly spoke the clergyman who had been summoned to conduct the burial service. “Surely He will so influence the hearts of His people that these bereft ones, these fatherless and motherless children, shall not suffer from contact with the cold and bitter side of life.”

Comforting words truly; words that fell, as rain falls on parched fields, upon the benumbed senses of those who wept for their dead; words that touched the hearts of the little band of parishioners, and made each one wonder for the time being what he could do for them; words that resulted in offerings of flowers and fruit for one week and—so soon do good impulses die—in comment and unsought advice for another.

It was a well-known fact that aside from his library and household belongings Mr. Murchison had left nothing. A student and a bibliophile of rare discernment, he was happiest when deep in abstruse research, and many a dollar of his meagre salary had gone for volumes whose undoubted antiquity might help him to the completion of some vexed problem. Sometimes, looking up from his treatise or his sermon, he would glance at Margaret, his eldest daughter and careful housekeeper for the last five lonely years of his life, and think painfully of the time, the dread sometime, that was sure to leave his darlings unprotected. He wished, good man, that he might have money; not that he coveted the dross of earth, but that it might be the Lord's will to shield his loved ones from contact with bleak and bitter poverty. Many a prayer was rounded with that earnest supplication, to which he supplemented, always in complete resignation, "Thy will, not mine, be done." But he never saw the earthly realization of his hopes. He always grew poorer; his clothing just a trifle shabbier, the table a little plainer, and Margaret daily more and more put to her wit's ends in the difficult problem of making something out of nothing. But who shall say the faith of a life-time met with no recompense? Who can declare, with certainty, the blinded eyes saw not afterward with clearer vision that he had left each of his darlings God's highest riches, a brave human intelligence?

Margaret Murchison, the eldest of the three children, was too strongly built, physically and mentally, to be beautiful. It is indisputably true that where nature puts strength she also puts hard lines, and every feature of Margaret's face bespoke the positive nature; quick to comprehend and fearless to execute. Yet hers was by no means a masculine or an ugly face. Though strongly marked, there was still an indefinable attraction in the warm depths of her



blue eyes and the smile of her mobile and sympathetic mouth. She was, withal, strangely wholesome to look upon; one of those rare beings, as it came afterward to be said of her, whose faces rest you as calm waters and green fields rest eyes that are blinded with the dust and turmoil of the city's streets. In figure she was tall, with that breadth of shoulder and hip which indicates endurance, free and graceful in her movements, apt in her utterances, and unusually keen in her intuitions. At the time of her father's death she was twenty-four years of age, thoughtful even beyond her years. Hers had been a hard school. Poverty prematurely sharpens wits and generates ambition, and ever since her earliest recollection she had witnessed the daily pinchings and privations of stern necessity. Questioning often with wondering eyes and grave thought, she had early learned to strive against this oppressor of her household; but the best of effort had only kept the lean wolf of hunger from the door. The father, wedded to abstruse speculation and erudite research, had not that talent for money-getting which is expected of the "working parsons" of country villages; and though the mother had been possessed of uncommon tact, meagreness in every detail of Margaret's physical growth had always confronted her. Not so intellectually, however. The bond of sympathy between parents and children had always been strong, and in the communion of thought the barren home life was lifted into realms of peace and plenty. Nobody remembered how Margaret learned to read. The faculty seemed to come with her growth, like her teeth, and almost as soon as she had mastered the rudiments of reading, her father delighted to feed the grave little head with as much of the mental pabulum upon which he feasted as the infantile brain could digest. Her capacity proved something like that of the sponge, growing receptive in proportion as it was fed, and when at eighteen she was vouchsafed a year of school life

at a church institution, she astonished both faculty and pupils by disclosing such an odd mixture of knowledge as no other pupil had ever brought to the school. Latin and Greek were far more familiar to her than fractions, and the geography of the Holy Land an open page beside the study of her own state and its form of government. Her aptitude for language was wonderful, and her ability for philosophical reasoning much beyond her years. She achieved marvels of learning in the one short year, only at its expiration to be called away by the sad announcement of her mother's mortal sickness. She reached home in time to comfort the anxious heart with the promise to keep always a home for the loved ones left behind. For five years she had faithfully fulfilled this promise, and now death had come again to take her last and only support. In the moment of her bereavement she did not realize how largely she had been not only self-dependent, but had been the mainstay of the little household. Love makes even the strongest natures yield to its silken leading-strings, and the tie between father and daughter had been no common one. But it was she who had been the prop that upheld the fabric of his life in these weary later years. It was on her brave heart he had leaned more and more; but she had no thought of what she had given. She had received, ah! who shall count the memories and pledges that loyal love has in its keeping?

But the prosaic side of life confronted Margaret one morning a week after she had laid her dead away, and roused her from the apathy of grief that follows even the wildest tempest of tears.

“Not even time to mourn,” she said wearily. “Death comes; but life goes on, and it must be fed and comforted. I must work to drive the cobwebs from my brain and this strange inertia from my limbs. Something to do, some duty that must not be evaded, will heal and strengthen anew.”

These reflections had been induced by a visit Margaret had just received from one of the vestrymen of the church at Barnley, who had called with words of condolence and inquiry. He desired to know, if it was not impertinent, what course Miss Murchison had decided upon relative to her future and her family.

“I have made no decision as yet,” answered Margaret wearily; “I have been too absorbed in other things. Why do you ask, Mr. Dempster?”

“Well—ahem!—my wife and I had a talk about your—your prospects, and we thought that if—if—that is, we would like to help you, seein’ as you’re one of our pastor’s family.”

“You are very kind,” said Margaret gently.

“Well, you see,” began Mr. Dempster hurriedly, “we’ve always kind o’ liked your folks, and my wife and I was sayin’ that seein’ as you’d be pretty likely to have a hard time, we’d like to help you out a bit. Now, there’s Elsie: she’s young, you know, and real bright and smart, and we thought maybe you’d be willin’ we should take her and bring her up. She’d have a fust-rate home, you know.”

“Mr. Dempster,” said Margaret, ignoring the half-boastful tone in which the last assertion had been made, “do you think I could give away one of these children over whom I’ve watched for five years, and whom I promised never to leave as long as they needed a home? No, sir. My life has been hard, as you say; it may be harder yet; but as long as I have life and health I shall keep my promise. Besides, you forget that Elsie has not yet finished school.”

“I know; but they was a-talkin’ it over in the vestry last evenin’, and they said they didn’t see as you could afford to keep the children in school any more, as your father’s salary is, of course, discontinued. You see, it takes money for clothes and incidentals.”

“I am fully aware of that fact, but I have strong hands and a stout heart; because we are poor and cast down now, I see no reason why we should always be so. Do you, Mr. Dempster?”

“No, no, of course not,” hastily assented Mr. Dempster.

“Is it the opinion of the vestry that Elsie and Gilbert need no further education?”

“Oh, no. They was only a-sayin’, as they was talkin’ about ways and means, that if you couldn’t take care of ’em we—that’s Mr. Dodd and me—would take ’em off your hands.”

“I’ve no doubt that you meant kindly; but I intend to teach them to take care of themselves, and there is no care equal to that. The parish of Barnley has been very kind; but I assure you, sir, there is no happiness like being independent, and that, with God’s help, I mean to teach my brother and sister to be.”

“Then you mean to say you refuse our offers of help, Miss Murchison?” said Mr. Dempster, bristling a little.

“Not at all. Indeed, I shall be glad of any assistance you can give me in the way of work. You know before my father’s health failed I used to make your wife’s dresses. I’m a little out of practice now, but I think I could soon get back the old deftness.”

“Why—yes—but Mrs. Dempster sends to C—— now for her work. She says she gets better styles, and takin’ all things into consideration, it don’t cost such a dreadful sight more.”

Margaret smiled involuntarily. She knew how the Dempsters, from greatest to least, counted the cost of everything, and she knew the offer to take Elsie—dear, sunny-hearted Elsie—off her hands had not been so much a question of philanthropy as gain. Could she so have disposed her heart as to give Elsie away, the bare thought of the drudgery which would have been her portion as maid-of-all-work in that household would have been sufficient to deter her.

“Well, I must be goin’,” said Mr. Dempster as Margaret remained silent. “You know they’ve hired a new parson and he will be here this week,” he added from the doorway.

“So soon!” exclaimed Margaret with a start. “And—and—you will want the parsonage right away?”

“Well, there ain’t no particular hurry, I suppose; but the folks thought it best to give you a week’s notice to quit,” and having delivered this parting shot, Mr. Dempster said “good-day” hastily and walked out of the gate.

So soon! so soon! to leave the dear home that spoke so tenderly of those who had gone away! To leave the cozy corner where stood her mother’s armchair, as it had stood for years, often bringing its memories of the sweet face and gentle hands which had presided over the hearthstone so long ago. To leave the sacred room where stood her father’s desk, from which not a paper had been removed since the nerveless hand had dropped the pen in the midst of a sentence of his last sermon; the room where stood his well-filled book-cases and his shabby furniture, and go—where—oh, where?

asked Margaret's heart in utter anguish. She grew suddenly weak with the rush of memory and regret, and slipped down upon the floor in an abandon of grief.

The outer door swept open and a young girl, entering hastily, cried sharply as she knelt beside the prostrate form: "O Meg! dear, brave Meg! what has happened?"

"Nothing, Elsie dear. I have only been bewildered of late, and had forgotten that this is no longer home."

"Must we leave soon?"

"Within a week."

"It is sudden; but I knew it must come sooner or later. I am not sorry, either, Meg; for we will go out into the world to work for each other and make a new home."

Meg shook her head. "You are brave, Elsie, with the ignorance of youth. You do not know what gulfs lie between your hope and its accomplishment. While I——"

"You, Meg," interrupted Elsie, "are wearied with the weight of your burdens, and I must take them off your shoulders and rest you good and long."

"Oh, confident youth! What a sweet comfort this little rose is to me," and Margaret took the bright face between her hands and kissed it fondly. It was a rose indeed that Margaret raised to her lips. Brilliant with the rich coloring of the brunette, lit up by a pair of dark velvety eyes, a full, red-lipped, delicately-curved mouth, and framed in a mass of black, lustrous, curling hair, Elsie's face was undeniably beautiful. Somewhat petite in form, she was the

embodiment of grace in every movement. Naturally hopeful and sweet-tempered, she had been all her life a source of comfort to Margaret. If she felt that she had greater patience, she found encouragement in Elsie's greater hopefulness. If she felt in herself greater power to conquer adverse circumstances, she relied equally upon Elsie's faculty of throwing the best light upon everything, and taking trouble as little to heart as possible. Unlike, yet like. Margaret's strength was born of conviction and experience, and duty, her imperial mistress, held her firmly to her course. Elsie's courage and cheerfulness were as inherent a part of herself as her rippling black hair or her daintily-fashioned foot, and love was the governing impulse of her life. She would do for love's sake what no amount of cogent reasoning could convince her ought to be done for duty's. She "hated the name of duty," she had been heard to declare with an imperious stamp of her little foot.

"If one was good, because love prompted her to do all these nice things for other people, wasn't that enough? And as for 'doing good to those who spitefully use you,' she believed the Lord wasn't very angry if you only just didn't do them any harm! And she felt sure that He would forgive her if she *couldn't* and *wouldn't* like the Dempsters."

All this had happened long ago, and now it came back to them as Meg told Elsie of Mr. Dempster's offer.

"The old—gentleman!" exclaimed Elsie as Margaret glanced up apprehensively. "I was only going to say 'heathen,' anyway," she added mischievously. "Do you think it is my duty, Meg, to accept the offer, and learn under their guidance to be a meek and quiet Christian?"

“My poor Elsie, you will never be a meek Christian, I am sure. Let us hope Mr. Dempster meant well, and so forget all about it.”

“With all my heart, since I am not going to him. So long as my dear old Meg commands I obey. He needn’t have troubled himself about the school, for I don’t intend to go back.”

“Indeed you must. I shall write to Dr. Ely to-day and ask a place for you and Gilbert. You know what our prospects are, dear, that it must be head and hands for each of us, and it behooves us to put as much into our heads as time and circumstance will allow.”

“And you, dear?” asked Elsie wistfully.

“I shall find something for my hands to do. They are good strong hands, and they must put bread into that little mouth.”

“What can your hands find to do here? There is nothing better than sewing or dish-washing. You are fitted for better work.”

“I hope I am; but it does not follow that I must refuse to do what I can find to do, because I cannot find what I want. If nothing better offers I shall even try the dish-washing.”

“O Meg! I couldn’t bear to see you so lowered.”

“You misuse the word, Elsie. I should feel that I lowered myself more in refusing the work at hand, in the vain hope of finding something pleasing and genteel. Dear little girl, your solemn old Meg wants to disclose to you the prosaic rule by which she means to measure her life. It will seem dry and hard to you in your youth and bloom; but you must learn some time, and if the bitter tonic is taken early nothing seems quite so bitter afterward. Shall I tell you?”



“Y-yes,” answered Elsie hesitatingly, “only—only——”

“I know. You dislike even to be told that life is uncompromising. Well, then, we’ll say no more about it. I see I cannot learn for you.”

“It is not that,” exclaimed Elsie. “I am only just beginning to see how you had to forego your youth and bloom to learn for all of us. Tell me all about it, and teach me to be your helper. I am such a lover of pleasure, I never can be strong like you. Tell me how you learned it, Meg.”

“I did not learn to be less than happy. I only learned to do well what lay nearest me, and in that there is happiness. There is the whole dread secret, Rosebud, and if you want me to be epigrammatic and terse here is the formula: Aim high; mind is the greatest of God’s forces. Be honest; a clean conscience is the best bed-fellow at night. Do cheerfully what lies nearest you; fortune surprises the faithful.”

“Diogenes in petticoats!” exclaimed Elsie, all her cheerfulness returning. “Make a dictionary, Meg, on the plan that A stands for Apple, and Gilbert and I will not need to go to school.”

“No, I’ve tried philosophy enough on you; you laugh at it.”

“Not for worlds! Trust me, Meg, to learn it all somewhere on the road to threescore and ten. It is a ‘sair’ lesson for one of my temperament; but if it ‘maun be’ it ‘maun be.’”

“I hope your prosy Meg may live long enough to see you safely conning it; for I feel as if I were born to keep your wings from singeing.”

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