

**EUSTACE  
MARCHMONT**

**A FRIEND OF THE PEOPLE**

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**“‘There he is,’ said Bride softly to Eustace. ‘I think you had better go to him alone.’... Without pausing to rehearse any speech, Eustace walked up to the lonely figure on the rocks, holding out his hand in greeting.”**



**EUSTACE MARCHMONT**

# ***CHAPTER I***

## ***ON CHRISTMAS EVE***

“Yer’s tu thee, old apple-tree,  
Be zure yu bud, be zure yu blaw,  
And bring voth apples gude enough  
Hats vul! caps vul!  
Dree bushel bags vul!  
Pockets vul and awl!  
Urrah! Urrah!  
Aw ’ess, hats vul, caps vul!  
And dree bushel bags vul!  
Urrah! Urrah! Urrah!”

THIS strange uncouth song was being chanted by moonlight by two score or more of rough West-Country voices. For half-a-mile the sound was carried by the sea-breeze, and all the cottagers within hearing of the chant had run forth to join, both in the song and in the ceremony which it marked.

For it was Christmas Eve, and Farmer Teazel was “christening his apple-trees,” according to the time-honoured custom of the place. And when the trees were being thus christened, there was cider to be had for the asking; and the farmer’s cider was famed as being the best in all St. Bride’s, or indeed in any of the adjacent parishes.

The moon shone frostily bright in a clear dark sky. A thin white carpet of sparkling frost coated the ground; but the wind blew

from the west over the rippling sea, and was neither cruel nor fierce, so that even little children were caught up by their mothers to assist at this yearly ceremony; and Farmer Teazel's orchard had, by ten o'clock, become the centre of local attraction, fully a hundred voices swelling the rude chant as the largest and best trees in the plantation were singled out as the recipients of the peculiar attentions incident to the ceremony.

First, copious libations of cider were poured round the roots of these trees, whilst large toast sops were placed amid the bare branches; all this time the chant was sung again and again, and the young girls and little children danced round in a ring, joining their shriller voices with the rougher tones of the men. The cider can that supplied the trees with their libations passed freely amongst the singers, whose voices grew hoarse with something beyond exercise.

When the serenading and watering had been sufficiently accomplished, guns were fired through the branches of the chosen trees, and the company broke up, feeling that now they had done what was necessary to ensure a good crop of cider-apples for the ensuing year.

But whilst the singing and drinking was at its height, and the moon gazed calmly down upon the curious assembly beneath the hoary old trees in the farmer's orchard, a keen observer might have noted a pair of figures slightly withdrawn from the noisy throng around the gnarled trees that were receiving the attentions of the crowd—a pair that gravitated together as if by mutual consent, and stood in a sheltered nook of the orchard; the man leaning against the rude stone wall which divided it from the farm buildings of one side, the girl standing a few

paces away from him beside a sappling, her face a little bent, but a look of smiling satisfaction upon her red lips. She was clasping and unclasping her hands in a fashion that bespoke something of nervous tremor, but that it was the tremor of happiness was abundantly evident from the expression of her face.

The moon shone clearly down upon the pair, and perhaps gave a touch of additional softness and refinement to them, for at that moment both appeared to the best advantage, and looked handsome enough to draw admiring regards from even fastidious critics.

The man was very tall, and although he was habited in the homely garb of a farm labourer of the better sort, there was a something in his air and carriage which often struck the onlooker as being different from the average man of his class. If he had been a gentleman, his mien would have been pronounced "distinguished;" but there was something incongruous in applying such a term as that to a working man in the days immediately prior to the Reform agitation of 1830. If the artisan population of the Midlands had begun to recognise and assert their rights as members of the community, entitled at least to be regarded as having a voice in the State (though how that was to be accomplished they had hardly formulated an opinion), the country labourer was still plunged in his ancient apathy and indifference, regarding himself, and being regarded, as little more than a serf of the soil. The years of agricultural prosperity during the Great War had been gradually followed by a reaction. Whilst trade revived, agriculture was depressed; and the state of the labourers in



many places was very terrible. Distress and bitter poverty prevailed to an extent that was little known, because the sufferers had no mouthpiece, and suffered in silence, like the beasts of the field. But a growing sense of sullen discontent was slowly permeating the land, and in the restless North and the busy Midlands there was a stirring and a sense of coming strife which had not yet reached the quiet far West. And here was this young son of Anak, with the bearing of a prince and the garb of a labourer, standing beside the farmer's daughter, Genefer, and telling her of his love.

Although he was but one of the many men who worked by day for her father, and slept at night in a great loft above the kitchen, in common with half-a-dozen more men so employed, yet Genefer was listening to his words of love with a sense of happy triumph in her heart, and without the smallest feeling of condescension on her part. Possibly her father might have thought it presumptuous of the young man thus boldly to woo his only daughter; and yet the girl did not feel much afraid of any stern parental opposition; for Saul Tresithny, in spite of a history that to many men would have been a fatal bar towards raising himself, had acquired in the parish of St. Bride's a standing somewhat remarkable, and was known upon the farm as the handiest and most capable, as well as the strongest man there, and one whom the farmer especially favoured.

Genefer was the farmer's only daughter, and had to work as hard as either father or brothers, for since her mother's death, a year or two ago, the whole management of the dairy and of the house had passed into her hands, and she had as much to do in the day as she could get through. Perhaps it was from the

fact that Saul was always ready to lend a helping hand when her work was unwontedly pressing, and that he would work like a fury at his own tasks by day in order to have a leisure hour to lighten her labours towards supper-time, that she had grown gradually to lean on him and feel that life without him would be but a barren and desolate sort of existence. Her brothers, 'Siah and 'Lias, as they were invariably called, were kind to her in their own fashion, and so was her father, who was proud of her slim active figure, her pretty face, and crimped dark hair. West-Country women are proverbially good to look at, and Genefer was a favourable specimen of a favoured race. Her eyes were large and bright, and of a deep blue tint; her skin was clear, and her colour fresh and healthy, and the winter winds and summer suns had failed to coarsen it. She was rather tall, and her figure was full of unconscious grace and activity. If her hands were somewhat large, they were well shaped and capable, and her butter, and cream, and bread were known far and wide for their excellence. She had a woman and a girl to help her in the house, but hers was the head that kept all going in due order, and her father had good cause to be proud of her.

And now young Saul stood beside the old grey wall in the light of the full moon, and boldly told her of his love.

"I'll be a gude husband to yu if yu'll have me, Genefer," he said in the soft broad speech of his native place, though Saul could speak if he chose without any trace of dialect, albeit always with a subtle intonation, which gave something of piquancy to his words. "I du lovee rarely, my girl. Doe try to love me back. I'll serve day and night for yu if thee'll but say the word."

“What word am I to zay, Zaul?” asked the girl softly, with a shy upward look that set all his pulses tingling. “Yu du talk so much, I am vair mazedheaded with it all. What is it yu would have me zay to thee?”

“Only that yu love me, Genefer,” answered Saul, taking a step forward, and possessing himself of one of the restless hands that fluttered in his grasp, and then lay still, as if content to be there. “It’s such a little word for yu to zay, yet it means such a deal to me.”

She let herself be drawn nearer and nearer to him as he spoke; but there was still a look of saucy mischief in her eyes, despite their underlying softness.

“Yu be such a masterful chap, Zaul, I du feel half afeared on ye. It’s all zoft talk now, but the clapper-claw come afterwards.”

“Nay, lassie, I’ll never clapper-claw yu. Yu needen be afeared of that. I’ll work for yu, and toil for yu, and yu shall be as happy as I can make yu. Only say yu can love me, Genefer. That is all I care to hear yu say to-night.”

He had drawn her close to his side by this time, and she was pressed to his heart. He bent his head and kissed her on the lips, and only when a few minutes had passed by, of which they kept no count, did the sudden salvo of the guns cause them to start suddenly apart, and Genefer exclaimed, almost nervously—

“Whatever will vaither zay?”

“Du yu think he will make a bobbery about it, Genefer?”

“Nay, I dwon’t know. He is fond of yu, Zaul, but I du not think he will part easy with me; and then——”

“I du not ask that of him, Genefer,” broke in Saul quickly; “yu du know that I have no home tu take yu tu yet. It’s the love I want to make sure of now, lassie. If I know I have your heart, I can wait patiently for the rest. Can yu be patient tu?”

“Oh, yes, Zaul, so as I know yu love me,” answered the girl with a quick blush; “dwon’t yu think that is enow for the present? Why need we speak to vaither about it at all? May be it mid anger un. Why shouldn’t we keep it a secret betwixt us twain?”

“With all my heart, if yu will have it so,” answered Saul, who was fully prepared to wait many years before he should be in a position to marry. That he would one day be a man of some small substance as things went in those parts, he was aware. But his grandfather, from whom he looked to receive this modest heritage, was yet a hale man, and it might not be his for some years to come. Meantime he had at present no ideas beyond working on with Farmer Teazel, as he had done since his boyhood, and it quite satisfied him to feel that he had won Genefer’s heart. He was ready to let this mutual avowal of love remain a secret between them for the present. He had of late been consumed with jealousy of a certain smart young farmer, who paid frequent visits to the Cliff Farm, and appeared to pay a great amount of attention to the pretty daughter who ruled there. It did not take two eyes to see what a treasure Genefer would be as a farmer’s wife, and Saul was afraid the girl’s father had begun to look with favour upon the visits of young Mr. Hewett. It was this fear which made him resolve to put his fate to the touch on this particular Christmas Eve. He half

believed that his love was returned by Genefer, but he could no longer be satisfied with mere hope. He must be certain how things were to be between them in the future; but having been so satisfied, he was quite content to leave matters where they were, and not provoke any sort of tempest by openly letting it be known that he had aspired to the hand of his master's daughter. He knew that his present position did not warrant the step he had taken, yet it was his nature to hazard all upon one throw, and this time he had won. He feared no tempest himself, but he would have been loth to provoke one that might have clouded Genefer's life, and Farmer Teazel could be very irascible when angered, and by no means good to live with then.

Whilst the lovers were thus standing in the corner of the orchard, exchanging vows of constancy which meant more than their quiet homely phrases seemed to imply, an elderly man with a slight stoop in his tall figure and a singularly thoughtful and attractive face, was coming slowly up the long steep slope of down which led to the farm, guided alike by the brilliance of the moonbeams and by the voices singing the rude chant round the apple-trees. That he was a man occupying a humble walk in life was evident from the make and texture of his garments, the knotted hardness of his hands, and other more subtle and less definable indications; but the moonlight shone down upon a face that riveted attention from any but the most unobservant reader of physiognomy, and betrayed at once a man of unusual thoughtfulness for his walk in life, as well as of unwonted depth of soul and purity of character. The face was quite clean shaven, as was common in those times, when beards were regarded as indicative of barbarism in the

upper classes, and were by no means common in any rank of life save that of seafaring men. The features were, however, very finely cut, and of a type noble in themselves, and farther refined by individual loftiness of soul. The brow was broad, and projected over the deep-set eyes in a massive pent-house; the nose was long and straight, and showed a sensitive curve at the open nostril; the mouth was rather wide, but well formed, and indicative of generosity and firm sweetness; the eyes were calm and tranquil in expression. The colour it was impossible to define: no two people ever agreed upon the matter. They looked out upon the world from their deep caverns with a look that was always gentle, always full of reflection and questioning intelligence, but was expressive above all of an inward peace so deep and settled that no trouble from without could ruffle it. Children always came to his side in response to a look or a smile; women would tell their troubles to Abner Tresithny, whose lips were sealed to all the world beside. There was something in the man, quiet though he was, that made him a power in his own little world, and yet he had never dreamed of seeking power. He was at once the humblest and the most resolute of men. He would do the most menial office for any person, and see no degradation in it; he was gentle as a woman and mild as a little child: yet once try to move him beyond the bounds he had set himself in life, and it would be as easy to strive to move that jagged reef of rocks guarding St. Bride's Bay on the south side—the terror of hapless vessels driven in upon the coast—the safeguard and joy of the hardy smugglers who fearlessly drove their boats across it with the falling tide, and laughed to scorn the customs-house officers,

who durst not approach that line of boiling foam in their larger craft.

Abner Tresithny had grown up at St. Bride's Bay, and was known to every soul there and in the neighbouring parish of St. Erme, where Farmer Teazel's farm lay. Perhaps no man was more widely beloved and respected than he, and yet he was often regarded with a small spice of contempt—especially amongst the men-folk; and those who were fullest of the superstitions of the time and locality were the readiest to gibe at the old gardener as being a “man of dreams and fancies”—a mystic, they might have called it, had the word been familiar to them—a man who seemed to live in a world of his own, who knew his Bible through from end to end a sight better than the parson did—leastways the parson of St. Bride's—and found there a vast deal more than anybody else in the place believed it to contain.

To-night an unwonted gravity rested upon Abner's thoughtful face—a shadow half of sorrow, half of triumphant joy, difficult to analyse; and sometimes, as he paused in the long ascent and wiped the moisture from his brow, his eyes would wander towards the sea lying far below, over which the moon was shining in misty radiance, marking a shimmering silver track across it from shore to horizon, and he would say softly to himself—

“And she will soon know it all—all the mysteries we have longed to penetrate. All will be known so soon to her. God be with her! The Lord Jesus be near her in His mercy and His love in that struggle! O my God, do Thou be near her in that last hour, when flesh and heart do fail! Let not her faith be

darkened! Let not the enemy prevail against her! Do Thou be very very near, dear Lord. Do Thou receive her soul into Thy hands.”

And after some such softly breathed prayer, during which his eyes would grow dim and his voice husky, he would turn his face once more towards the upland farm and resume his walk thither.

The firing of the guns, which told him the ceremony was over, met his ears just as he reached the brow of the hill, and he began to meet the cottagers and fisher-folk streaming away. They all greeted him by name, and he returned their greetings gently: but he could not refrain from a gentle word of reproof to some whose potatoes had been visibly too deep, and who were still roaring their foolish chant as they staggered together down the slippery slope.

Abner was known all round as an extraordinary man, who, whilst believing in an unseen world lying about us as no one else in the community did, yet always set his face quietly and resolutely against these time-honoured customs of propitiating the unseen agencies, which formed such a favourite pastime in the whole country. It was a combination altogether beyond the ken of the rustic mind, and encircled Abner with a halo of additional mystery.

“Yu should be to home with your sick wife, Nat,” he said to one man who was sober, but had plainly been enjoying the revel as much as the rest. “What good du yu think can come of wasting good zyder over the trees, and singing yon vulish song to them?”



Go home to your sick wife and remember the true Christmas joy when the morrow comes. All this is but idle volly."

"Nay, nay, maister," answered the man, with sheepish submission in his tone, albeit he could not admit any folly in the time-honoured custom. "Yu knaw farmer he wants a 'bundant craap of awples next year, an we awl of us knaw tha' the trees widden gi' us a bit ef we didden holler a bit tu 'm the night."

"Nay, nay, Nat, it's not your hollering that makes the trees give of their abundance," answered Abner, with gentle sadness in his tone. "It's the abiding promise of the Lord that seed-time and harvest shall not vail. Go home, go home, and mind thy wife."

"Ay, ay, maister, I'm gwoan," answered the man, and beat a hasty retreat, secretly wondering whether one of these days the black witches wouldn't "overlook" Abner's house and affairs generally, since he was known for a man of such peculiar views. The Duke's head-gardener was looked upon with considerable respect by the mere labourers, and always addressed as "maister" by them. He came of a good stock himself; and from having been so much with the "quality," he could speak pure English as easily as the Saxon vernacular of the peasantry. It was constant conversation with him which had given to Saul his command of language. From the time of his birth till he began to earn his own bread, Saul had lived with his grandfather; and it had been a disappointment to the old man that his grandson had refused the place of garden boy offered him by the Duchess when he was old enough to be of use on the place. Before that he had scared birds for Farmer

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