

SQUIRE ARDEN.

VOL. II.

BY
MRS. OLIPHANT

Table of Contents

SQUIRE ARDEN. CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

CHAPTER V.

CHAPTER VI.

CHAPTER VII.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHAPTER IX.

CHAPTER X.

CHAPTER XI.

CHAPTER XII.

CHAPTER XIII.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHAPTER XV.

CHAPTER XVI.

CHAPTER XVII.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CHAPTER XIX.

CHAPTER XX.

CHAPTER XXI.

CHAPTER XXII.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CHAPTER XXV.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SQUIRE ARDEN.

CHAPTER I.

UP to this time it had been Clare who had made herself anxious about her brother, worrying herself over his ways and his words, and all the ceaseless turns of thought and expression and perplexing spontaneousness which made him so unlike the Ardens; and Edgar had been conscious of her anxiety with a sense of amusement rather than of any other feeling. But now that their positions were reversed, and that it was he who was anxious about Clare, the matter was a great deal more serious. Edgar Arden felt but lightly the slights or the censures of fortune; he was not specially concerned about himself, nor prone to consider, unless on the strongest provocation, what people thought of him, or if he was taking the best way to obtain their suffrage. But this easy mind, which Clare sometimes took as a sign of levity of disposition, forsook him completely when his own duties were in question. He took them not lightly, but seriously, as Mr. Fazakerley, and Perfitt the steward, and everybody connected with the estate already knew. And not even the estate was so important as Clare. He asked himself, with a puzzled sense of ignorance and incapacity, what in such circumstances a brother ought to do. He had all the theories of a young man against any restraint or contradiction of the affections; but held them much more strongly than most young men, who it must be admitted are apt to see very clearly the necessity of interference in the love affairs of their sisters, however much they may dislike it in their own. Edgar had no family training to help him, and he was aware that English habits in such matters were different from those foreign habits which were the only ones with which he had any acquaintance, and which transferred all power in

the matter into the hands of parents. Poor Clare! who had no mother to sympathise with her, no father to guide her—was it not his business to be doubly careful of all her wishes, to watch over her with double anxiety, and anticipate everything she would have him to do? But then, supposing she should wish to marry this landless and not very virtuous cousin, this man whose prospects were naught, whose character was so unsatisfactory, and with whom he himself had so little sympathy—would it be right to let her do it? Should he acquiesce simply without a word? Should he remonstrate? Should he speak of it to her? Or should he wait until she had first consulted him? Edgar found it very hard to answer these questions. He took to watching his sister, and her manner to Arthur Arden, her ways and her looks, and every passing indication; and got hopelessly bewildered, as was natural, in that maze of fluctuating evidence, which sometimes seemed to him to go dead against, and sometimes to be entirely in favour of his cousin.

For Clare did not let herself go easily down that dangerous slope. She stopped herself now and then, and became utterly repellant to Arthur; now and then she relapsed into softness. Sometimes she would ask, wonderingly, when he meant to go? “Is he to stay on at Arden for ever? Did you ask him to stay as long as he liked?” she would say with a frown on her brow, expending upon her innocent brother the excitement and restless agitation of her own mind. “Should you like him to stay as long as he wished?” Edgar asked on one of these occasions, with a look which he tried hard not to make too anxious. “I think we were far happier before anybody came,” Clare answered, with curious heat, and a tone almost of resentment. What did it mean? Did she want really to get rid of the visitor? Did she really hate him, as she had once said she

did? When Edgar recollected that his sister had said so, and that Arthur Arden had confirmed it, he was quite staggered. And thus June ran on amid difficulties, which much confused the relations between the brother and sister. Lord Newmarch too left traces of himself in the field. He had started a correspondence with both, according to his opportunities—that is, he wrote long letters to Edgar upon the state of the political world, and sent messages and *brochures* to Miss Arden, who sent him messages in return. If she was to marry either of them, surely Lord Newmarch was the more appropriate of the two. He was younger as well as richer, and, though he was a prig, had the reputation of being a good man. He was *galantuomo*, as well as my lord; and, alas! it was quite uncertain whether Arthur Arden was *galantuomo*. Poor Edgar felt like an anxious mother, and laughed at himself, but could not mend it, until at last it occurred to him that the best way was to ask advice. Accordingly, he set out very solemnly one day about the end of June to consult his chief authorities. He meant to conceal his personal trouble under the guise of a fable. He would ask Mr. Fielding what a brother (in the abstract) ought to do in such a position, and he would ask Miss Somers. Miss Somers was not a very wise counsellor; but no doubt her brother must have interfered in her affairs one time at least, and she would have some practical knowledge. He went to lay his case before them with a little trepidation, wondering whether they would find him out at all, and what they would say. Dr. Somers probably would have been the best counsellor of all, but Edgar had no confidence nor pleasure in the Doctor since their last interview. So he chose Mr. Fielding in his study, and Miss Somers on her sofa, two people whose lives had not come to much; but surely they were old enough to know.

Mr. Fielding was in his study writing his sermon. It was the day after one of his grand discussions with the Doctor, and the good man was excited. He was engaged in the manufacture of a polemical sermon, culling little bits out of the polemical sermons which had gone before, but combining them so with links of the new that his adversary might not perceive the antiquity of some of his arguments. It was a relief to him to lay down his pen and clear his mind from the fumes of controversy. "I am very glad to see you, Edgar," he said. "You find me in the midst of my troubles. Young Denbigh, you know, ought to take the preaching more than he does, but I have no confidence in him in a doctrinal point of view. He would be bringing up some of the new notions, and setting our good folks by the ears—though it is rather hard upon me to preach so often myself."

"But you are the best able to instruct us, Sir," said Edgar, who to tell the truth did not often derive a great deal of instruction from Mr. Fielding's good little sermons. And then the excellent Rector coughed modestly, and blushed a little, and put his paper away from him with a gently deprecating air.

"I suppose, when one lives to be seventy, one must have learned a little—if one has made a right start," he said, "at least I hope so, Edgar, I hope so; though some of us unfortunately— The thing that startles me is that Somers should take the Calvinist view. I would not judge him—I would be, indeed, the very last to judge any one; but how a man who has lived, on the whole, rather a careless sort of life—not culpable, I don't say that—but careless, as, indeed, the best of us are—should stand up for hell and torture, and all that, is more than I can guess. If he had taken another view—more lax instead of more strict——"

“Do you think he cares at all?” said Edgar, still under the prejudice of his last interview.

“God bless us, yes; surely he must care; don’t you think he cares, Edgar? Why, then, he must be sniggering in his sleeve at me. No, no, my dear boy, of course he must be in earnest; no man could be such a humbug as that. But if it was Mrs. Murray, who is Scotch, it would seem more natural. I hear she was in Church on Sunday, looking very serious. But, bless me, Edgar, you are very serious too. Is there anything wrong—with Clare?”

“There is nothing wrong—with anybody,” said Edgar. “The fact is, I want your advice. At least, it is not I that want it, but—a very intimate friend of mine. He has got a sister, just like me, very pretty, and all that; but he does not know what to do——”

“About his sister?” asked Mr. Fielding, with a smile. “What does he want to do?”

“Did I tell you there was some one who—wanted to marry her?” said Edgar. “Yes, to be sure, that was it; somebody I—he don’t approve of—not a proper match. And he doesn’t know what to do, whether to speak to her, or to wait till she speaks, or whether he has any right to interfere. He is not her father, of course, only her brother, and he is in an utter muddle what to do. And of all the people in the world,” said Edgar, with a little hysterical laugh which sounded like a giggle, “he has asked me.”

“Well, that was a very curious choice, though the circumstances so much resemble your own,” said the Rector, with a smile; “what do you think you would do if it were Clare?”

“That is just the question I have been asking myself,” said Edgar, embarrassed. “Supposing, for the mere sake of argument, that it was Clare—I have not the remotest conception what I should do.”

“With such a suitor as Arthur Arden, for instance? Edgar, never try to take in anybody, for you cannot do it. I feel for you sincerely——”

“But stop,” said Edgar; “I never said Arthur Arden had anything to do with it. I never implied——”

“You have been perfectly wary and prudent,” said Mr. Fielding; “but I knew Arthur Arden long before you did, and I am quite sure he means to mend his fortune, if he can, by means of Clare. I knew it before you did, Edgar, and that was why I was so grieved to see him here. Now you know it, my dear boy, send him away.”

“Why did not you warn me, if you knew?” asked Edgar, surprised.

“What was the good? He might have changed his mind, or you might have thought me mistaken, and I did not know Clare’s feelings, or even yours, Edgar; if you had liked him, for instance— But, my dear fellow, now you have found it out, send him away.”

“I know as little about Clare’s feelings as you do,” said Edgar, almost sullenly, feeling that this was really no solution of his difficulties. “Clare, I suppose, is the chief person to be consulted. Should I speak to her? Should I bring matters to a conclusion? Perhaps it might come to nothing if they were let alone.”

“Edgar, my advice to you is to make short work,” said the Rector, solemnly, “and send him away.”

“That is very easy to say,” said Edgar, “but it takes more trouble in the doing. What, my nearest relative, my heir if I die! How can I turn him out of the house which is almost as much his as mine? So long as I am unmarried, which I am likely to be for some time, he is my heir.”

“Then you like him?” said the Rector; “that was what I feared. Of course, if you like him, and Clare likes him, nobody has any right to say a word.”

“But I never said I liked him,” said Edgar, pettishly. “Neither love nor hatred seems necessary so far as I am concerned; but could not something be done that would be just without being disagreeable? I don’t like to treat him badly, and yet——”

The Rector shook his head. “I think I would have courage of mind to do what I advise,” he said; “he is too old for Clare, and he has not a good character, which is a great deal worse. He will make love to her one day, and then the next he will come down to the village——Faugh! I don’t like to soil my lips with talking of such things. He is not a good man. I love Clare like my own child, and I would fight to the last before I would give her to that man. He ought never to have come here, Edgar, never again.”

“Did anything happen when he was here before; do you know anything?” said Edgar, eagerly.

“He is your enemy, my dear boy, he is your enemy,” said Mr. Fielding; and that was all that could be elicited from him. Edgar remembered that Clare had used the very same words, and it did

not make him more comfortable. But yet, an enemy to himself was of so very much less importance; in short, it mattered next to nothing. He smiled, and tried to persuade Mr. Fielding that it was so, but produced no result. "Send him away" was all the Rector would say: and it was so easy for one who had not got it to do to give such advice to Edgar, who was a man incapable of sending any stranger away who claimed his hospitality, and whose sense of that virtue was as keen as an Arab's. He would have taken in the worst of enemies had he wanted shelter, with a foolish, young, highminded scorn of any danger. Danger! Let the fellow do his worst; let him put forth all the powers he had at his command, Edgar was not afraid. But then! when Clare was in question, the importance of the matter increased in a moment tenfold, and he could not make up his mind what to do.

CHAPTER II.

FROM Mr. Fielding Edgar went to Miss Somers, to whom he told his story under the same disguise, but who unlike the Rector believed him undoubtingly, and gave him her best sympathy, but not much enlightenment, as may be supposed. And he returned to Arden very little the wiser, asking himself still the same question, What should he do? Must he go home and be patient and look on while Arthur Arden, quite unmolested and at his ease, laid snares and toils for Clare? Clare had no warning, no preparation, no defence against these skilful and elaborate plots. She might fall into the net at any moment. And was it possible that her brother's duty in the matter was to sit still and look on? Would not his very silence and passive attitude embolden and encourage the suitor? Would it not appear like a tacit consent to his plans and hopes? He was walking up the avenue while these thoughts were passing through his mind, when all at once there came to Edgar a suggestion which cleared his whole firmament. I call it a suggestion, because I do not understand any more than he himself did how it happened that all at once, being in utter darkness, he should see light, and perceive in a moment what was the best thing to do. If some unseen spirit had whispered it all at once in his ear it could not have been more vivid or more sudden. "I must go to town," Edgar said to himself. He did not want to go to town, nor had the idea occurred to him before; but the moment it came to him he perceived that this was the thing to do. Arthur could not stay when he was gone; indeed, to take him away from Clare he did not object to his cousin's company in London. "Poor fellow! after all I have the sweet and he has the bitter," Edgar thought; and

to share his purse with his kinsman was the easiest matter, so long as the kinsman did not object. After he had made this sudden decision his heart sat lightly in his breast, and everything brightened up. He even grew conceited, the simple fellow, thinking on the whole it was so very clever of him to have thought of so beautiful and simple a solution to all his troubles, though, as I have said, he did not think of it at all, but had it simply thrown into his mind without any exertion of his.

“I have taken a great resolution,” he said that evening after dinner before Clare left the table. “I have made up my mind to take the advice of all my good friends, and to betake myself to town.”

“To town!” said Clare and Arthur, in a breath—she with simple astonishment, he with dismay. “To town, Edgar? but I thought you hated town,” added Clare.

“I don’t know anything about it—I don’t love it,” he said; “but one must not always mind that. There is Newmarch, who writes me—and—why, there are the Thornleighs. With such inducements don’t you think it is worth a man’s while to go?”

“The Thornleighs; oh, they are cheap enough. You will meet them everywhere,” said Arthur, with a sneer. “If that is all you go to town for——”

“The Thornleighs!” said Clare; and she made a rapid feminine calculation, and decided that though it was very sudden it must be Gussy, and that a new mistress to Arden was inevitable. It did not strike her so painfully as it might have done, in the tumult of her personal thoughts. “Everything will be strange to you,” she said. “And then you are so fond of the country, and have to make

acquaintance with everything. Don't you think, Edgar—*that* might wait?"

"What might wait?" said Edgar, laughing; but he kept firm to his proposal. "Yes, I must go as soon as it is practicable," he said to Arthur when they were alone. "I have got to make acquaintance with my own country. I don't know London any more than I know Constantinople; I have been in it, and gazed at it, but that is all. And Newmarch is a very sensible fellow," he added, abruptly. "By the way, Arden, what do you say to coming with me? You might share my rooms. If you have not any pressing engagements——"

"I have nothing at all to do," said Arthur. "Of course, I should rather have stayed here. I need not tell you that, after all I have told you. Arden is to me the most captivating place in England. But if you are going, of course I must go too." And he sighed a profound sigh.

"Of course," said Edgar, with quiet calmness; and then there was an uncomfortable pause.

"That is what I object to," said Arthur Arden; "You give me to understand you won't interfere, and then you as good as turn me out of the house by going away yourself. By Jove! I believe that is the reason why——"

"If you think I am to give up all control over my movements because you happen to be in the house——" said Edgar, with a laugh. "No, Arden, that will never do. And I never said I would not interfere. It might be my duty. I am Clare's brother, and the head of the house."

“Clare can take care of herself, and so can the house. Fancy *you*——”

“I am all it has for a head,” said Edgar, keeping his temper with an effort. “But this is very unprofitable sort of talk.”

And then there was a gloomy pause, all conversation being arrested. Arthur Arden had been making, he thought, considerable progress with Clare, which was a thing that made Clare’s brother much less important. She and Old Arden seemed almost within reach of his hand, and what should he care for the Hall and the Squire if he were Mr. Arden of Old Arden, with a beautiful wife? But to be thus sent away at the most critical moment! Arthur was sullen, and did not think it worth his while to conceal it. He asked himself, Should he risk the final effort—should he put it to the test, and know at once what his fortune was to be? in which case he might scorn the spurious Arden and all his efforts; or should he be wary, and flatter him, and wait?

He had not yet resolved the question when they joined Clare on the terrace, which was her summer drawing-room. But Arthur’s mind was not relieved by seeing the lady of his hopes take her brother’s arm, and lead him away along the front of the house, talking to him. “Has anything happened that makes you want to go?” Clare asked. “Have you heard anything—have you had any letter—is it about—Gussy? I am the only one that has a right to know, Edgar; you might tell *me*.”

“Tell you what?”

“Why you are going to town: there must be some reason. I am sure it is not caprice. Edgar, don’t you know, I care for everything

that concerns you; but you speak as if your affairs were of no consequence, as if they were nothing to me.”

“I am not so ungrateful nor so silly,” said Edgar: “but look here. I can’t tell you why I’m going, Clare; and yet I am going for a good reason, which is quite satisfactory to myself. Can you allow me as much private judgment as that?”

“Of course, your private judgment is all in all,” said Clare, affronted. “How could any one attempt to dictate to you? But one might wish to know without thrusting in one’s opinion—— Tell me only this one thing, Edgar. Is it about Gussy Thornleigh?”

Edgar laughed in the fulness of his innocence. “No more about Gussy Thornleigh than about——”

“Me?” said Clare. “You are quite sure? If it is business, that is quite a different thing. I hope I am not so foolish as to think of interfering with business. But I do feel so concerned—so anxious, Edgar dear, about——”

“About what?” said Edgar, meeting her troubled look with his habitual smile.

“About your wife,” said Clare, solemnly. She only shook her head when he laughed, disturbing all the quiet echoes. “Ah, yes, you may laugh,” she said, “but it is of the greatest importance. I assure you our—cousin thinks so too.”

Edgar made a profane exclamation. “I am infinitely obliged to him, I am sure,” he said, after the objectionable words had escaped his lips. “Our cousin thinks so too!” What was “our cousin” between these two, who ought to be everything to each other? And then it occurred to him, with a softening sense of that comic

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

