

THE ORDEAL OF
RICHARD FEVEREL

BY
GEORGE MEREDITH

THE MODERN LIBRARY
PUBLISHERS :: NEW YORK

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE PILGRIM'S SCRIP	1
II. A GLIMPSE BEHIND THE MASK	13
III. MRS. MALEDICTION	21
IV. THE INMATES OF RAYNHAM ABBEY	26
V. SHOWING HOW THE FATES SELECTED THE FOURTEENTH BIRTHDAY TO TRY THE STRENGTH OF THE SYSTEM	41
VI. THE MAGIAN CONFLICT	53
VII. ARSON	58
VIII. ADRIAN PLIES HIS HOOK	70
IX. JUVENILE STRATAGEMS	75
X. DAPHNE'S BOWER	83
XI. THE BITTER CUP	89
XII. A FINE DISTINCTION	98
XIII. RICHARD PASSES THROUGH HIS PRELIM- INARY ORDEAL, AND IS THE OCCASION OF AN APHORISM	104
XIV. IN WHICH THE LAST ACT OF THE BAKE- WELL COMEDY IS CLOSED IN A LETTER	112
XV. THE BLOSSOMING SEASON	119
XVI. THE MAGNETIC AGE	132
XVII. AN ATTRACTION	142
XVIII. FERDINAND AND MIRANDA	149
XIX. UNMASKING OF MASTER RIPTON THOMP- SON	160

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XX. GOOD WINE AND GOOD BLOOD	170
XXI. THE SYSTEM ENCOUNTERS THE WILD OATS SPECIAL PLEA	177
XXII. A SHADOWY VIEW OF CŒLEBS PATER GOING ABOUT WITH A GLASS-SLIPPER	181
XXIII. A DIVERSION PLAYED ON A PENNY-WHISTLE	192
XXIV. CELEBRATES THE TIME-HONOURED TREAT- MENT OF A DRAGON BY THE HERO	196
XXV. RICHARD IS SUMMONED TO TOWN TO HEAR A SERMON	218
XXVI. INDICATES THE APPROACHES OF FEVER	229
XXVII. CRISIS IN THE APPLE-DISEASE	245
XXVIII. OF THE SPRING PRIMROSE AND THE AU- TUMNAL	262
XXIX. IN WHICH THE HERO TAKES A STEP	268
XXX. RECORDS THE RAPID DEVELOPMENT OF THE HERO	290
XXXI. CONTAINS AN INTERCESSION FOR THE HEROINE	306
XXXII. RELATES HOW PREPARATIONS FOR ACTION WERE CONDUCTED UNDER THE APRIL OF LOVERS	310
XXXIII. IN WHICH THE LAST ACT OF A COMEDY TAKES THE PLACE OF THE FIRST	330
XXXIV. CELEBRATES THE BREAKFAST	344
XXXV. THE PHILOSOPHER APPEARS IN PERSON	357
XXXVI. PROCESSION OF THE CAKE	367
XXXVII. NURSING THE DEVIL	387
XXXVIII. CONQUEST OF AN EPICURE	399

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	vii PAGE
XXXIX. CLARE'S MARRIAGE	422
XL. A DINNER PARTY AT RICHMOND	439
XLI. MRS. BERRY ON MATRIMONY	457
XLII. AN ENCHANTRESS	471
XLIII. THE LITTLE BIRD AND THE FALCON: A BERRY TO THE RESCUE!	497
XLIV. CLARE'S DIARY	517
XLV. AUSTIN RETURNS	535
XLVI. NATURE SPEAKS	548
XLVII. AGAIN THE MAGIAN CONFLICT	558
XLVIII. THE LAST SCENE	568
XLIX. LADY BLANDISH TO AUSTIN WENTWORTH	587

THE ORDEAL OF RICHARD FEVEREL

CHAPTER I

THE PILGRIM'S SCRIP

SOME years ago was printed, and published anonymously, dedicated to the author's enemies, a small book of original Aphorisms, under the heading, *THE PILGRIM'S SCRIP*. The book was noticeable for its quaint earnestness, and a perversity of view regarding Women, whom the writer seldom extolled, and appeared with all conscience to rank as creatures still doing service to the Serpent: bound to their instincts, and happily subordinate in public affairs, though but too powerful in their own walk. Modern Aphorists are accustomed to make their phrases a play of wit, flashing antithetical brilliancies, rather than condensing profound truths. This one, if he did not always say things new, evidently spoke from reflection, feeling, and experience: the Triad which gives a healthy utterance to Wisdom: and omitting one of which, or with the three not in proper equipoise and junction, admirable sentences may survive as curiosities, and aptly quoted may clinch a debate, but are as Dead Sea Apples to a thirsting mind, and to men at large incomprehensible juggleries usurping dominion of their understandings without seal of authority. His thoughts were sad enough; occasionally dark; here and there comical in their oddness: nevertheless there ran through the volume a fire of Hope; and they did him injustice who said he lacked Charity.

Thus he wrote :

'I am happy when I know my neighbour's vice.'

And it was set down as the word of a cynic ; when rightly weighed, it was a plea for tolerance.

He said again :

'Life is a tedious process of learning we are Fools.'

And this also is open to mild interpretation, if we do not take special umbrage at the epithet. For, as he observes, by way of comment : 'When we know ourselves Fools, we are already something better.'

He made no pretension to Novelty. 'Our new thoughts have thrilled dead bosoms,' he wrote ; by which avowal may be seen that Youth had manifestly gone from him, since he had ceased to be jealous of the ancients, his forefathers. There was a half sigh floating through his pages for those days of intellectual coxcombry, when Ideas come to us affecting the embraces of Virgins, and swear to us, they are ours alone, and no one else have they ever visited : and we believe them.

On the subject of Women, certainly, the Aphorist seemed to lose his main virtue. He was not splenetic : nay, he proved in the offending volume he could be civil, courteous, chivalrous, towards them : yet, by reason of a twist in his mental perceptions, it was clear he looked on them as domesticated Wild Cats, ready, like the lady in the fable, to resume their natural habits when there was a little mouse to tear, and, after they had done so, not to be allowed to reappear as the seraphs we thought them when they had a silly male mortal to lure : in fact, to be stamped Wild Cats, to the dissipation of Illusion.

He gravely declared, as one whose postulate was accepted universally :

'I expect that Woman will be the last thing civilized by Man.'

And from this tremendous impertinence, he stalked on like a Colossus to treat of other matters, worldly and spirit-

ual, with the calm of a superior being who has avowed a most hopeful opinion: as indeed it was. He conceived that the Wild Cats would some day be actually tamed. At present it was best to know what they were.

Singular to say, the one dangerous and objectionable feature in this little volume, preserved it from limbo. Men read, and tossed it aside, amused, or weary. They set the author down as a Sentimentalist jilted; commonly known to be a savagely vindictive wretch, who deserves to be listened to solely when he dresses a gay shaft, and that for the fun. They were angry at his ponderous intentness. They, let us suppose, were Sentimentalists not yet jilted.

By the ladies, however, who took the Dedication to themselves, he was welcomed otherwise. These extraordinary creatures, whose moves it is impossible to predict, and who will, now and then, love, or affect to love, their enemies better than their friends, cherished his book, and asked for him. He had fortunately not put his name to the title-page. In the place of a signature of authorship, stood a Griffin between Two Wheatsheaves. It became a question, then, whether this might be symbolic, or a family crest. Several ladies detected symbolism in the aspect of the Griffin, which had a snarling hostile air to them, and seemed to mean that the author was a double-animal, and could do without them, being well fortified by Life's Wherewithal to right and left. Other ladies, arguing from the latent vanity in man, would insist upon the Crest. Bodies of ladies made application to the publisher, who maintained the good repute of his craft in keeping his secret, and was not to be seduced, and increased the mystery.

'Thou that thinkest thyself adored,' says THE PILGRIM'S SCRIP, 'O Fool! it is not Thou she loveth, but the Difficulty.'

To manifest the truth in which, one adventurous fair one betook herself to the Herald's College, and there, after immense labour, ascertained that a Griffin between Two Wheat-sheaves formed the crest of Sir Austin Absworthy Bearne

Feverel, Baronet, of Raynham Abbey, in a certain Western County folding Thames: a man of wealth, and honour, and a somewhat lamentable history.

The discovery of a Secret implies no obligation to retain it; and the lady in question treated her capture as a prisoner of war, whom, like Tamerlane, she exhibited in a cage to her friends: that is, it was shared with them, and was presumed to belong to her: but they, considering a Secret to be of so rich an essence that it can only be enjoyed diluted, had also their confidences, and the Secret soon broke through its solemn bars and evaporated in soft whispers, by which in the end Sir Austin Feverel, much to his amazement, became famous as The Griffin, and learnt what it was to give Woman a clue.

The Baronet became famous, and tasted the fruits of celebrity. His breakfast-table grew odoriferous with dainty notes from fair correspondents, deploring their non-intimacy, and begging the favour of a Copy of his Beautiful Book, while remonstrating humbly against the severity of his judgment pronounced on a sex, which, whatever its shortcomings, could, and did, reverence a Sage. Showers of the enthusiastic rose-pink descended on Raynham. One lady addressed the Aphorist as England's Christian La Rochefoucauld. One went so far as to propose herself to him as An Uncorrupted Eve: and there is no knowing what a disinherison of Posterity may have sprung from his persistent evasion of their pointed flatteries. For he was a soured Adam whom not even an uncorrupted Eve might tempt.

"We live and learn," said the Baronet to young Adrian Harley, his nephew and intimate; "but it is odd that, when we whip her, Madam should love us the more."

"You have propounded it frequently, Sir," replied that clever youth, "in the GREAT SHADDOCK DOGMA." (For so, on account of its constant and ungenerous citation of the primal slip in Paradise, Adrian chose to entitle THE PILGRIM'S SCRIP). "You say:

"Woman when she wrestles for supremacy with every one she encounters, is but seeking her Master."

"She's a Tyrant till she's reduced to bondage, and a rebel till she's well beaten. She worships strength, whether of the physic or of the intellect, and likes to feel it. Poet, Philosopher, or Athlete, come not amiss to her; and could she get the three in one—"

"Ay, then," Sir Austin took him up, "farewell Duty! Women are born Pagans, ever on the look-out for material Gods!"

"Whom, if they can't discover, they create!" added Adrian. "Witness many a gentle joy of an Ass. To be distinguished by Woman is to wear Bully Bottom's Garland."

"Preserve me from that!" exclaimed the Baronet, shuddering devoutly.

His own written enunciations were adverse to his chances of escape, and Adrian capitulated them:

"Man is the speculative animal: Woman the practical."

"Wherefore:

"Tempt her not to swear to her soul she will have thee—thou art lost!"

But he had written a book; he had made himself an object: Miss Blewins was in the field; the lean, the long-nosed, the accomplished, the literary: Miss Joy Blewins, sister to the aforesaid, was in the field; the half-man, who cut her hair short, and parted it on the left side: Lady Blandish was in the field; the fairest sweetest sensible widow ever seen, a dead shot with her eyes, when she used them: The Hon. Mrs. Breakyeline was in the field; who had in her time plunged through countless ethical hedges and ditches, without apparent discomfiture to her muslin. A dozen emulous young persons in, or just out of, pinafores, swift-runners, had taken the field. Half the number of habituated old ones were there, formidable with experience and wigs. Poetesses, authoresses, heiresses, were there. In the field, too, was Mrs. M'Murphy, an Irish Giantess, who made a point of asking

directly of men whatever she wanted; terrible to deal with! Mrs. Cashentire, a banker's wife, who behaved as if she had been his relict: Lady Attenbury, who followed the fashion. Lastly, Camilla Duvergey, the fastest young woman of the day. All these female harriers were in the field prepared to give chase to the Griffin.

Miss Blewins said, he must be converted to a nobler conception of the Dignity of Woman, and her Mission.

Mrs. M'Murphy averred, "she should be dis'pinted if she didn't marr' him," and, hearing that he was already married, shrieked "Ow;" for which the Hon. Mrs. Break-yeline sneered at her, and scandalously declared he was still to be had: but Lady Blandish, and Lady Attenbury, were neighbours of his, and knew that the game was scarce tractable.

In pursuance of their resolve, the hardiest of these terrible persecutors announced their intention of coming down to Raynham to sit at Gamaliel's feet and drink of wisdom from its source.

"What am I to do?" cried the unhappy Griffin, when the news reached him.

"Hire a Boy and a Mantle, Sir. I see nothing else for it," said Adrian.

The Baronet stroked his brow, as if he already felt Bully Bottom's Garland.

"But when they have read my opinion of them," he exclaimed fretfully, "what do they want with me?"

"That's it," Adrian remarked. "They want to change it. Sheba once made a far journey!"

Solomon shook his head.

The ladies were true to their threat. Miss Blewins, the long-nosed, the literary, was the first to arrive. Her followed the short-haired Joy, the half-man. Then came Mrs. Cashentire, succeeded by the bony big Celt, and the swift Camilla, and nameless worshippers, who all introduced themselves, and

claimed admittance on the strength of their admiration of THE PILGRIM'S SCRIP.

Sir Austin did his best to receive them graciously, and his sister, Mrs. Doria Forey, the female Head of his house, kept her eyes in wakeful watch on them. They came, and did not go. They formed a Court about him; listening to him eagerly, and sighing at his inveterate conclusions: hoping higher things of Woman, and meekly combating till they fell. A Tournament was held nightly.

Miss Blewins, the long-nosed, the literary, elected herself spokeswoman, and held the post in spite of vehement obstructions from Mrs. M'Murphy.

"Oh, Sir Austin," she ejaculated, "it is surely our Education which causes us to shine at such a disadvantage! You make dolls of us! puppets! Are we not something—something more?"

"Aren't we yer mothers?" shouts the M'Murphy.

"Are we not delegated to a higher office in conjunction with Man?" continued the Maiden, heedless of the vulgar interruption. "Is it only for our beauty you take us?" And she lifted her length of nose pathetically.

"You compel us," stammered Miss Joy, who knew the sequence.

"You compel us," Miss Blewins caught her by the skirt, "you compel us to lean on our acquirements utterly, and you wonder that Woman deprived of inner life, is found wanting in moral self-support!"

This was not going to the root of the matter. The Baronet would smile in pity, and put a case to her.

"A woman, Madam, the sole representative of her sex! Suppose her upon an Island peopled by nothing but men.—"

"Horrut!" the M'Murphy howls, and the exclamation was repeated in English by the whole Court.

"I ask you," he calmly resumed, "to accord me your candid opinion how that woman would be treated, even though the men were hinds—all but savages?"

The Court mutely consulted, and Miss Blewins was approved in observing, that she really did honestly think that the single representative of her sex would—shocking as her situation must be deemed—be treated with due respect, and esteem, if not with reverence, nay, worship!

Then the ladies, warming to the notion, cried out with one voice, that it would be delightful! that she would be a Queen, a Priestess among them. Numbers pined for such a fate. The swift Camilla vowed she never should be happy till she reigned in that blissful Island.

“Good!” said Sir Austin. “And now reverse the case. Conceive an Island peopled by Women, and but one Man in their Society: tossed there, say, by shipwreck.—Hem!” and the Aphorist looked arch. “What course of treatment might that one Man anticipate at their hands?”

Silence, and abashed blushes, and smothered silver laughter, received this second Supposition. How indeed would he be treated? To which of the ladies would he belong? A shipwrecked mariner is not easily made a Priest of; and if they crowned him King, the prime consideration still remained at issue—to whom would he belong? He must belong to some one of them! The Court was split. A few ladies faintly maintained that he would be prudently impounded till such time as they could make suitable use of him, and despatch him in safety, sound of limb, from the Isle. Lady Blandish, too, suggested the present instance of an Aphorist, and a hostile one, alone in their company, and undamaged, she hoped: and Miss Blewins desperately attempted to claim the triumph of the illusion for Woman; inasmuch as it was admitted, that Woman would leaven the male mass by her presence, whereas a feminine community, hitherto smiling and uncorrupt, was, by the inauspicious sea-gift of one of the opposite sex, depraved. It was barely necessary that Sir Austin should expose her as a sophist, to stride victorious through the field. A Majority of the ladies, headed by Mrs. M'Murphy, who was very outspoken about

the claims she should put forth to the Man, let it be seen that in their gentle bosoms they believed that unfortunate male would fare sadly, if he did not ultimately suffer the fate of a celebrated mythic Singer. Torn in pieces! was the all but unanimous Verdict on the Wretch. There was no Chivalry in Woman. So these ladies confessed. Her spirit of appropriation was too strong!

That some great things are done without design, and that certain wonderful victories may be found more costly than a defeat, it were loss of time to insist upon. The ladies who formed the Court at Raynham had doubtless no conspiracy to succumb to the insult of the SHADDOCK DOGMA, thereby to ensnare and make foolish its pronouncer; and the Baronet assuredly entertained no idea that an uninterrupted career of logical conquest endangered his stability. He thought, naturally, that the more he overthrew her in argument, the safer his position. Nevertheless, he was melting to Woman. Woman appreciated his Aphorisms, and Man did not. That was possibly a reason. When the inferior creature appreciates us, we cease to despise her. When the inferior creature acknowledges her fault, she is already rising in the scale. She exhibits Intelligence; she gives proof of Humility; two excellent bases for the building of a better hope for her. The change was insensible in Sir Austin; a work of months and years. He was surrounded by an admiring circle of sweet women, and against the charm of their society what Shaddock Dogmatist, however soured and reluctant, can hold out lastingly? It is an opposite extreme of the peril of entire abstraction from them, which has ruined renowned Saints, who had trusted that way to solve man's problem. Sir Austin's state was nearly as precarious as Saint Anthony's. The vision of a single young woman is said to have overcome the inflammable Monk: twenty of these were now besetting our fire-proof Baronet. The fact of a Shaddock Dogmatist resisting them to any extent, may account for his being so pertinaciously pursued. Be it

said, for the honour of the sex, Women esteem not easy game. Adonis is wished for his beauty, and Lovelace for his naughty character: but Beauty and Wickedness, though desirable, are small deer. It is the rank misogynist, who flees them, whom they hunt down as far as he will go. Him they regard as the noble stag of the forest, and to catch him they disencumber themselves of many garments retained in a common chase.

From THE PILGRIM'S SCRIP, it was clear that Sir Austin knew them mighty hunters: as thus:

'The Amazon cut off a breast to battle: How will not Woman disfigure and unsex herself to gain her end?'

And further, mournfully:

'To withstand them, must we first annihilate our Mothers within us: die half!'

The poor gentleman, seriously believing Woman to be a Mistake, had long been trying to do so. Had he succeeded, he would have died his best half, for his mother was strong in him. The very acridity of the Aphorisms, the GREAT SHADDOCK DOGMA itself, sprang from wounded softness, not from hardness. It may be that the unerring scent of the hounds in pursuit told them this. One who really despised them had left them in peace.

Beyond dispute, Sir Austin must have fallen a prey to them, and they were to have added a Griffin to their Zoological Garden of tributaries: the greater his æsthetic, the more positive their earthy, triumphs: and he might say, 'If I fall, I fall perforce of spiritual superiority, for they can but tempt my baser nature, and were they to rise to me, there would be no jeopardy.' He must have been ultimately betrayed by his softness, but, as often happens, he was fully armed at his weakest point; namely, the heart. He had a son, and his heart was filled by him. He had a son, and he was incubating a System.

To the Son, and to the System, the stranger ladies of the Court were introduced. In the former, they beheld a hand-

some, graceful, boy, not unlike other boys, but looking the pick of them. The latter was a puzzle.

Sir Austin explained it in his Aphoristic fashion.

"Sin is an alien element in our blood. 'Tis the Apple-Disease with which Nature has striven since Adam. To treat Youth as naturally sinful, is, therefore, false, and bad; as it is bad, and false, to esteem it radically pure. We must consider that we have forfeited Paradise, but were yet grown there.

"Belonging, then, by birth to Paradise, our tendency should even be towards it: allowing no lower standard than its Perfection.

"The Triumph of man's intellect, the proof of his power, is to make the Serpent who inhabits us fight against himself, till he is destroyed.

"My son possesses Pride, say. Human Pride is a well-adjusted mixture of Good and Evil. Well; it tempts him to conceive that he is more than his fellows. Let it, as it can, lift him to *be* more than his fellows, and at once he will cease to conceive it: the fight will have been fought: the Devil will be dead.

"For this is our divine consolation: that Evil may be separated from Good: but Good cannot be separated from Evil: the Devil may, the Angel will not, be driven out from us. A truly good man is possible upon Earth: a thoroughly bad man is not possible. This you admit?"

The poor ladies murmured, that they admitted it. Man! Man! they began to feel in their souls a dreadful antagonism to Man.

"Well!" and the Baronet sententiously pursued.

He did right to preach to women: men would not have listened to him. As it was, Miss Joy Blewins, and Mrs. M'Murphy, were restive.

The gist of the System set forth: That a Golden Age, or something near it, might yet be established on our sphere, when fathers accepted their solemn responsibility, and

studied human nature with a Scientific eye, knowing what a high Science it is, to live: and that, by hedging round the Youth from corruptness, and at the same time promoting his animal health, by helping him to grow, as he would, like a Tree of Eden; by advancing him to a certain moral fortitude ere the Apple-Disease was spontaneously developed, there would be seen something approaching to a perfect Man, as the Baronet trusted to make this one Son of his, after a receipt of his own.

What he exactly meant by the Apple-Disease, he did not explain: nor did the ladies ask for an explanation. Intuitively they felt hot when it was mentioned.

Miss Blewins said the idea was very original.

"A gigantic task!" said Mrs. Cashentire.

"It's more than ye'll do though. Take my word for it," said the M'Murphy, and the Hon. Mrs. Breakyeline vowed, "She liked a man to be a man." She was evidently not the Uncorrupted Eve.

But whatever folly there was in the System, it saved its author for awhile, at least, and cleansed his Court of such ladies as had come there for a lower motive than the Adoration of Wisdom. The swift Camilla wished she could have waited for the youth. She could not, she declared, and retired, followed in her secession by the M'Murphy, who plainly told Sir Austin, that, now young men had got the taste for Apples, they would bite at them. Others departed to combat the GREAT SHADDOCK DOGMA in books, and justify it by their acts. The System was left with a few occasionally-visiting old Maids, and eccentric wives, and the neighbouring fair Widow Blandish, to work itself out, and then was peace again at Raynham Abbey.

CHAPTER II

A GLIMPSE BEHIND THE MASK

FAME, the chief retainer of distinguished families, has first sounded the origin of the Feverels where their line of Ancestry blossoms with a Baronet; and Rumour, the profane vagabond, who will not take service in any respectable household, whispers that he was a Villain. At all events, for this proud race, behind his dazzling appearance sits Darkness and democratic Adam, and they cling to him as an ark of pure aristocracy. Sir Pylcher Feverel, they will tell you, assuming a Norman air to deliver it, spelt his name (or meant to spell it) Fiervarelle; a name hearing which you seem to hear a trumpet blown remote, from the Conqueror's ranks, in the morning, in the mists, over Pevensey: youthful Feverels of the latest generation have been known to challenge the Saxon towards the same hour, by announcing themselves as formidably. This luminous Knight (still to follow the traditions of the family, for the sake of avoiding a challenge), having quarters on the Welsh frontier, mixed his blood with the royal blood ap Gruffudh: from whose fair Princess the Welsh estates were inherited, and who must at the same time have endowed them with that Cymric tinge to their habits and mental cast observable in the fortunes of the race. At what period they quitted Cheshire and settled upon Thames is a matter of family controversy, and History, unable to decide, has declined to speak on the point. They were great on their pedigree, and held that an old Baronetcy is worth any new Dukedom, and that good blood is Heaven's first-gift. Occasionally in its downward course the blood branched into many channels: and again it shrunk into one. Sir Caradoc Feverel, the predecessor of Sir Austin, was an only son; twice, it was said, on the verge of death before he had a successor, and then they came in