

DEDICATED

TO MY TWELVE NEPHEWS,

WILLIAM, FRANCIS, STEPHEN, PHILIP, LEONARD,

GODFREY, AND DAVID SMITH;

REGINALD, NICHOLAS, AND IVOR GATTY;

ALEXANDER, AND CHARLES SCOTT GATTY.

J.H.E.

WE AND THE WORLD.

CHAPTER I.

“All these common features of English landscape evince a calm and settled security, and hereditary transmission of home-bred virtues and local attachments, that speak deeply and touchingly for the moral character of the nation.”—Washington Irving’s *Sketch Book*.

It was a great saying of my poor mother’s, especially if my father had been out of spirits about the crops, or the rise in wages, or our prospects, and had thought better of it again, and showed her the bright side of things, “Well, my dear, I’m sure we’ve much to be thankful for.”

Which they had, and especially, I often think, for the fact that I was not the eldest son. I gave them more trouble than I can think of with a comfortable conscience as it was; but they had Jem to tread in my father’s shoes, and he was a good son to them—God bless him for it!

I can remember hearing my father say—“It’s bad enough to have Jack with his nose in a book, and his head in the clouds, on a fine June day, with the hay all out, and the glass falling; but if Jem had been a lad of whims and fancies, I think it would have broken my poor old heart.”

I often wonder what made me bother my head with books, and where the perverse spirit came from that possessed me, and tore me, and drove me forth into the world. It did not come from my parents. My mother’s family were far from being literary or even enterprising, and my father’s people were a race of small yeomen squires, whose talk was of dogs and horses and cattle, and the price of hay. We were north-of-England people, but not of a commercial or adventurous class, though we were within easy reach of some of the great manufacturing centres. Quiet country folk we were; old-fashioned, and boastful of our old-fashionedness, albeit it meant little more than that our manners and customs were a generation behindhand of the more cultivated folk, who live nearer to London.

We were proud of our name too, which is written in the earliest registers and records of the parish, honourably connected with the land we lived on; but which may be searched for in vain in the lists of great or even learned Englishmen.

It never troubled dear old Jem that there had not been a man of mark among all the men who had handed on our name from generation to generation. He had no feverish ambitions, and as to books, I doubt if he ever opened a volume, if he could avoid it, after he wore out three horn-books and our mother's patience in learning his letters—not even the mottle-backed prayer-books which were handed round for family prayers, and out of which we said the psalms for the day, verse about with my father. I generally found the place, and Jem put his arm over my shoulder and read with me.

He was a yeoman born. I can just remember—when I was not three years old and he was barely four—the fright our mother got from his fearless familiarity with the beasts about the homestead. He and I were playing on the grass-plot before the house when Dolly, an ill-tempered dun cow we knew well by sight and name, got into the garden and drew near us. As I sat on the grass—my head at no higher level than the buttercups in the field beyond—Dolly loomed so large above me that I felt frightened and began to cry. But Jem, only conscious that she had no business there, picked up a stick nearly as big as himself, and trotted indignantly to drive her out. Our mother caught sight of him from an upper window, and knowing that the temper of the cow was not to be trusted, she called wildly to Jem, "Come in, dear, quick! Come in! Dolly's loose!"

"I drive her out!" was Master Jem's reply; and with his little straw hat well on the back of his head, he waddled bravely up to the cow, flourishing his stick. The process interested me, and I dried my tears and encouraged my brother; but Dolly looked sourly at him, and began to lower her horns.

"Shoo! shoo!" shouted Jem, waving his arms in farming-man fashion, and belabouring Dolly's neck with the stick. "Shoo! shoo!"

Dolly planted her forefeet, and dipped her head for a push, but catching another small whack on her face, and more authoritative "Shoos!" she changed her mind, and swinging heavily round, trot-

ted off towards the field, followed by Jem, waving, shouting, and victorious. My mother got out in time to help him to fasten the gate, which he was much too small to do by himself, though, with true squirely instincts, he was trying to secure it.

But from our earliest days we both lived on intimate terms with all the live stock. "Laddie," an old black cart-horse, was one of our chief friends. Jem and I used to sit, one behind the other, on his broad back, when our little legs could barely straddle across, and to "grip" with our knees in orthodox fashion was a matter of principle, but impossible in practice. Laddie's pace was always discreet, however, and I do not think we should have found a saddle any improvement, even as to safety, upon his warm, satin-smooth back. We steered him more by shouts and smacks than by the one short end of a dirty rope which was our apology for reins; that is, if we had any hand in guiding his course. I am now disposed to think that Laddie guided himself.

But our beast friends were many. The yellow yard-dog always slobbered joyfully at our approach; partly moved, I fancy, by love for us, and partly by the exciting hope of being let off his chain. When we went into the farmyard the fowls came running to our feet for corn, the pigeons fluttered down over our heads for peas, and the pigs humped themselves against the wall of the sty as tightly as they could lean, in hopes of having their backs scratched. The long sweet faces of the plough horses, as they turned in the furrows, were as familiar to us as the faces of any other labourers in our father's fields, and we got fond of the lambs and ducks and chickens, and got used to their being killed and eaten when our acquaintance reached a certain date, like other farm-bred folk, which is one amongst the many proofs of the adaptability of human nature.

So far so good, on my part as well as Jem's. That I should like the animals "on the place"—the domesticated animals, the workable animals, the eatable animals—this was right and natural, and befitting my father's son. But my far greater fancy for wild, queer, useless, mischievous, and even disgusting creatures often got me into trouble. Want of sympathy became absolute annoyance as I grew older, and wandered farther, and adopted a perfect menagerie of odd beasts in whom my friends could see no good qualities: such as

the snake I kept warm in my trousers-pocket; the stickleback that I am convinced I tamed in its own waters; the toad for whom I built a red house of broken drainpipes at the back of the strawberry bed, where I used to go and tickle his head on the sly; and the long-whiskered rat in the barn, who knew me well, and whose death nearly broke my heart, though I had seen generations of unoffending ducklings pass to the kitchen without a tear.

I think it must have been the beasts that made me take to reading: I was so fond of Buffon's *Natural History*, of which there was an English abridgment on the dining-room bookshelves.

But my happiest reading days began after the bookseller's agent came round, and teased my father into taking in the *Penny Cyclopædia*; and those numbers in which there was a beast, bird, fish, or reptile were the numbers for me!

I must, however, confess that if a love for reading had been the only way in which I had gone astray from the family habits and traditions, I don't think I should have had much to complain of in the way of blame.

My father "pish"ed and "pshaw"ed when he caught me "poking over" books, but my dear mother was inclined to regard me as a genius, whose learning might bring renown of a new kind into the family. In a quiet way of her own, as she went gently about household matters, or knitted my father's stockings, she was a great day-dreamer—one of the most unselfish kind, however; a builder of air-castles, for those she loved to dwell in; planned, fitted, and furnished according to the measure of her affections.

It was perhaps because my father always began by disparaging her suggestions that (by the balancing action of some instinctive sense of justice) he almost always ended by adopting them, whether they were wise or foolish. He came at last to listen very tolerantly when she dilated on my future greatness.

"And if he isn't quite so good a farmer as Jem, it's not as if he were the eldest, you know, my dear. I'm sure we've much to be thankful for that dear Jem takes after you as he does. But if Jack turns out a genius, which please God we may live to see and be proud of, he'll make plenty of money, and he must live with Jem

when we're gone, and let Jem manage it for him, for clever people are never any good at taking care of what they get. And when their families get too big for the old house, love, Jack must build, as he'll be well able to afford to do, and Jem must let him have the land. The Ladycroft would be as good as anywhere, and a pretty name for the house. It would be a good thing to have some one at that end of the property too, and then the boys would always be together."

Poor dear mother! The kernel of her speech lay in the end of it—"The boys would always be together." I am sure in her tender heart she blessed my bookish genius, which was to make wealth as well as fame, and so keep me "about the place," and the home birds for ever in the nest.

I knew nothing of it then, of course; but at this time she used to turn my father's footsteps towards the Ladycroft every Sunday, between the services, and never wearied of planning my house.

She was standing one day, her smooth brow knitted in perplexity, before the big pink thorn, and had stood so long absorbed in this brown study, that my father said, with a sly smile,

"Well, love, and where are you now?"

"In the dairy, my dear," she answered quite gravely. "The window is to the north of course, and I'm afraid the thorn must come down."

My father laughed heartily. He had some sense of humour, but my mother had none. She was one of the sweetest-tempered women that ever lived, and never dreamed that any one was laughing at her. I have heard my father say she lay awake that night, and when he asked her why she could not sleep he found she was fretting about the pink thorn.

"It looked so pretty to-day, my dear; and thorns are so bad to move!"

My father knew her too well to hope to console her by joking about it. He said gravely: "There's plenty of time yet, love. The boys are only just in trousers; and we may think of some way to spare it before we come to bricks and mortar."

"I've thought of it every way, my dear, I'm afraid," said my mother with a sigh. But she had full confidence in my father—a trouble shared with him was half cured, and she soon fell asleep.

She certainly had a vivid imagination, though it never was cultivated to literary ends. Perhaps, after all, I inherited that idle fancy, those unsatisfied yearnings of my restless heart, from her! Mental peculiarities are said to come from one's mother.

It was Jem who inherited her sweet temper.

Dear old Jem! He and I were the best of good friends always, and that sweet temper of his had no doubt much to do with it. He was very much led by me, though I was the younger, and whatever mischief we got into it was always my fault.

It was I who persuaded him to run away from school, under the, as it proved, insufficient disguise of walnut-juice on our faces and hands. It was I who began to dig the hole which was to take us through from the kitchen-garden to the other side of the world. (Jem helped me to fill it up again, when the gardener made a fuss about our having chosen the asparagus-bed as the point of departure, which we did because the earth was soft there.) In desert islands or castles, balloons or boats, my hand was first and foremost, and mischief or amusement of every kind, by earth, air, or water, was planned for us by me.

Now and then, however, Jem could crow over me. How he did deride me when I asked our mother the foolish question—"Have bees whiskers?"

The bee who betrayed me into this folly was a bumble of the utmost beauty. The bars of his coat "burned" as "brightly" as those of the tiger in Wombwell's menagerie, and his fur was softer than my mother's black velvet mantle. I knew, for I had kissed him lightly as he sat on the window-frame. I had seen him brushing first one side and then the other side of his head, with an action so exactly that of my father brushing his whiskers on Sunday morning, that I thought the bee might be trimming his; not knowing that he was sweeping the flower-dust off his antennæ with his legs, and putting it into his waistcoat pocket to make bee bread of.

It was the liberty I took in kissing him that made him not sit still any more, and hindered me from examining his cheeks for myself. He began to dance all over the window, humming his own tune, and before he got tired of dancing he found a chink open at the top sash, and sailed away like a spot of plush upon the air.

I had thus no opportunity of becoming intimate with him, but he was the cause of a more lasting friendship—my friendship with Isaac Irvine, the bee-keeper. For when I asked that silly question, my mother said, “Not that I ever saw, love;” and my father said, “If he wants to know about bees, he should go to old Isaac. He’ll tell him plenty of queer stories about them.”

The first time I saw the beekeeper was in church, on Catechism Sunday, in circumstances which led to my disgracing myself in a manner that must have been very annoying to my mother, who had taken infinite pains in teaching us.

The provoking part of it was that I had not had a fear of breaking down. With poor Jem it was very different. He took twice as much pains as I did, but he could not get things into his head, and even if they did stick there he found it almost harder to say them properly. We began to learn the Catechism when we were three years old, and we went on till long after we were in trousers; and I am sure Jem never got the three words “and an inheritor” tidily off the tip of his tongue within my remembrance. And I have seen both him and my mother crying over them on a hot Sunday afternoon. He was always in a fright when we had to say the Catechism in church, and that day, I remember, he shook so that I could hardly stand straight myself, and Bob Furniss, the blacksmith’s son, who stood on the other side of him, whispered quite loud, “Eh! see thee, how Master Jem *dodders!*” for which Jem gave him an eye as black as his father’s shop afterwards, for Jem could use his fists if he could not learn by heart.

But at the time he could not even compose himself enough to count down the line of boys and calculate what question would come to him. I did, and when he found he had only got the First Commandment, he was more at ease, and though the second, which fell to me, is much longer, I was not in the least afraid of forgetting

it, for I could have done the whole of my duty to my neighbour if it had been necessary.

Jem got through very well, and I could hear my mother blessing him over the top of the pew behind our backs; but just as he finished, no less than three bees, who had been hovering over the heads of the workhouse boys opposite, all settled down together on Isaac Irvine's bare hand.

At the public catechising, which came once a year, and after the second lesson at evening prayer, the grown-up members of the congregation used to draw near to the end of their pews to see and hear how we acquitted ourselves, and, as it happened on this particular occasion, Master Isaac was standing exactly opposite to me. As he leaned forward, his hands crossed on the pew-top before him, I had been a good deal fascinated by his face, which was a very noble one in its rugged way, with snow-white hair and intense, keenly observing eyes, and when I saw the three bees settle on him without his seeming to notice it, I cried, "They'll sting you!" before I thought of what I was doing; for I had been severely stung that week myself, and knew what it felt like, and how little good powder-blue does.

With attending to the bees I had not heard the parson say, "Second Commandment?" and as he was rather deaf he did not hear what I said. But of course he knew it was not long enough for the right answer, and he said, "Speak up, my boy," and Jem tried to start me by whispering, "Thou shalt not make to thyself" – but the three bees went on sitting on Master Isaac's hand, and though I began the Second Commandment, I could not take my eyes off them, and when Master Isaac saw this he smiled and nodded his white head, and said, "Never you mind me, sir. They won't sting the old beekeeper." This assertion so completely turned my head that every other idea went out of it, and after saying "or in the earth beneath" three times, and getting no further, the parson called out, "Third Commandment?" and I was passed over – "out of respect to the family," as I was reminded for a twelvemonth afterwards – and Jem pinched my leg to comfort me, and my mother sank down on the seat, and did not take her face out of her pocket-handkerchief till the workhouse boys were saying "the sacraments."

My mother was our only teacher till Jem was nine and I was eight years old. We had a thin, soft-backed reading book, bound in black cloth, on the cover of which in gold letters was its name, *Chick-seed without Chick-weed*; and in this book she wrote our names, and the date at the end of each lesson we conned fairly through. I had got into Part II., which was "in words of four letters," and had the chapter about the Ship in it, before Jem's name figured at the end of the chapter about the Dog in Part I.

My mother was very glad that this chapter seemed to please Jem, and that he learned to read it quickly, for, good-natured as he was, Jem was too fond of fighting and laying about him: and though it was only "in words of three letters," this brief chapter contained a terrible story, and an excellent moral, which I remember well even now.

It was called "The Dog."

"Why do you cry? The Dog has bit my leg. Why did he do so? I had my bat and I hit him as he lay on the mat, so he ran at me and bit my leg. Ah, you may not use the bat if you hit the Dog. It is a hot day, and the Dog may go mad. One day a Dog bit a boy in the arm, and the boy had his arm cut off, for the Dog was mad. And did the boy die? Yes, he did die in a day or two. It is not fit to hit a Dog if he lie on the mat and is not a bad Dog. Do not hit a Dog, or a cat, or a boy."

Jem not only got through this lesson much better than usual, but he lingered at my mother's knees, to point with his own little stumpy forefinger to each recurrence of the words "hit a Dog," and read them all by himself.

"*Very good boy,*" said Mother, who was much pleased. "And now read this last sentence once more, and very nicely."

"Do-not-hit-a-dog-or-a-cat-or-a-boy," read Jem in a high sing-song, and with a face of blank indifference, and then with a hasty dog's-ear he turned back to the previous page, and spelled out, "I had my bat and I hit him as he lay on the mat" so well, that my mother caught him to her bosom and covered him with kisses.

“He’ll be as good a scholar as Jack yet!” she exclaimed. “But don’t forget, my darling, that my Jem must never ‘hit a dog, or a cat, or a boy.’ Now, love, you may put the book away.”

Jem stuck out his lips and looked down, and hesitated. He seemed almost disposed to go on with his lessons. But he changed his mind, and shutting the book with a bang, he scampered off. As he passed the ottoman near the door, he saw Kitty, our old tortoise-shell puss, lying on it, and (moved perhaps by the occurrence of the word *cat* in the last sentence of the lesson) he gave her such a whack with the flat side of *Chick-seed* that she bounced up into the air like a sky-rocket, Jem crying out as he did so, “I had my bat, and I hit him as he lay on the mat.”

It was seldom enough that Jem got anything by heart, but he had certainly learned this; for when an hour later I went to look for him in the garden, I found him panting with the exertion of having laid my nice, thick, fresh green crop of mustard and cress flat with the back of the coal-shovel, which he could barely lift, but with which he was still battering my salad-bed, chanting triumphantly at every stroke, “I had my bat, and I hit him as he lay on the mat.” He was quite out of breath, and I had not much difficulty in pummelling him as he deserved.

Which shows how true it is, as my dear mother said, that “you never know what to do for the best in bringing up boys.”

Just about the time that we outgrew *Chick-seed*, and that it was allowed on all hands that even for quiet country-folk with no learned notions it was high time we were sent to school, our parents were spared the trouble of looking out for a school for us by the fact that a school came to us instead, and nothing less than an “Academy” was opened within three-quarters of a mile of my father’s gate.

Walnut-tree Farm was an old house that stood some little way from the road in our favourite lane—a lane full of wild roses and speedwell, with a tiny footpath of disjointed flags like an old pack-horse track. Grass and milfoil grew thickly between the stones, and the turf stretched half-way over the road from each side, for there was little traffic in the lane, beyond the yearly rumble of the harvesting waggons; and few foot-passengers, except a labourer now and then, a pair or two of rustic lovers at sundown, a few knots of

children in the blackberry season, and the cows coming home to milking.

Jem and I played there a good deal, but then we lived close by.

We were very fond of the old place and there were two good reasons for the charm it had in our eyes. In the first place, the old man who lived alone in it (for it had ceased to be the dwelling-house of a real farm) was an eccentric old miser, the chief object of whose existence seemed to be to thwart any attempt to pry into the daily details of it. What manner of stimulus this was to boyish curiosity needs no explanation, much as it needs excuse.

In the second place, Walnut-tree Farm was so utterly different from the house which was our home, that everything about it was attractive from mere unaccustomedness.

Our house had been rebuilt from the foundations by my father. It was square-built and very ugly, but it was in such excellent repair that one could never indulge a more lawless fancy towards any chink or cranny about it than a desire to "point" the same with a bit of mortar.

Why it was that my ancestor, who built the old house, and who was not a bit better educated or farther-travelled than my father, had built a pretty one, whilst my father built an ugly one, is one of the many things I do not know, and wish I did.

From the old sketches of it which my grandfather painted on the parlour handscreens, I think it must have been like a larger edition of the farm; that is, with long mullioned windows, a broad and gracefully proportioned doorway with several shallow steps and quaintly-ornamented lintel; bits of fine work and ornamentation about the woodwork here and there, put in as if they had been done, not for the look of the thing, but for the love of it, and white-wash over the house-front, and over the apple-trees in the orchard.

That was what our ancestor's home was like; and it was the sort of house that became Walnut-tree Academy, where Jem and I went to school.

CHAPTER II.

Sable:—"Ha, you! A little more upon the dismal (*forming their countenances*); this fellow has a good mortal look, place him near the corpse; that wainscoat face must be o' top of the stairs; that fellow's almost in a fright (that looks as if he were full of some strange misery) at the end of the hall. So—but I'll fix you all myself. Let's have no laughing now on any provocation." — *The Funeral*, Steele.

At one time I really hoped to make the acquaintance of the old miser of Walnut-tree Farm. It was when we saved the life of his cat.

He was very fond of that cat, I think, and it was, to say the least of it, as eccentric-looking as its master. One eye was yellow and the other was blue, which gave it a strange, uncanny expression, and its rust-coloured fur was not common either as to tint or markings.

How dear old Jem did belabour the boy we found torturing it! He was much older and bigger than we were, but we were two to one, which we reckoned fair enough, considering his size, and that the cat had to be saved somehow. The poor thing's forepaws were so much hurt that it could not walk, so we carried it to the farm, and I stood on the shallow doorsteps, and under the dial, on which was written—

"Tempora mutantur!" —

and the old miser came out, and we told him about the cat, and he took it and said we were good boys, and I hoped he would have asked us to go in, but he did not, though we lingered a little; he only put his hand into his pocket, and very slowly brought out sixpence.

"No, thank you," said I, rather indignantly. "We don't want anything for saving the poor cat."

"I am very fond of it," he said apologetically, and putting the sixpence carefully back; but I believe he alluded to the cat.

I felt more and more strongly that he ought to invite us into the parlour—if there was a parlour—and I took advantage of a backward movement on his part to move one shallow step nearer, and said, in an easy conversational tone, "Your cat has very curious eyes."

He came out again, and his own eyes glared in the evening light as he touched me with one of his fingers in a way that made me shiver, and said, "If I had been an old woman, and that cat had lived with me in the days when this house was built, I should have been hanged, or burned as a witch. Twelve men would have done it—twelve reasonable and respectable men!" He paused, looking over my head at the sky, and then added, "But in all good conscience—mind, in all good conscience!"

And after another pause he touched me again (this time my teeth chattered), and whispered loudly in my ear, "Never serve on a jury." After which he banged the door in our faces, and Jem caught hold of my jacket and cried, "Oh! he's quite mad, he'll murder us!" and we took each other by the hand and ran home as fast as our feet would carry us.

We never saw the old miser again, for he died some months afterwards, and, strange to relate, Jem and I were invited to the funeral.

It was a funeral not to be forgotten. The old man had left the money for it, and a memorandum, with the minutest directions, in the hands of his lawyer. If he had wished to be more popular after his death than he had been in his lifetime, he could not have hit upon any better plan to conciliate in a lump the approbation of his neighbours than that of providing for what undertakers call "a first-class funeral." The good custom of honouring the departed, and committing their bodies to the earth with care and respect, was carried, in our old-fashioned neighbourhood, to a point at which what began in reverence ended in what was barely decent, and what was meant to be most melancholy became absolutely comical. But a sense of the congruous and the incongruous was not cultivated amongst us, whereas solid value (in size, quantity and expense) was perhaps over-estimated. So our furniture, our festivities, and our funerals bore witness.

No one had ever seen the old miser's furniture, and he gave no festivities; but he made up for it in his funeral.

Children, like other uneducated classes, enjoy domestic details, and going over the ins and outs of other people's affairs behind their backs; especially when the interest is heightened by a touch of

gloom, or perfected by the addition of some personal importance in the matter. Jem and I were always fond of funerals, but this funeral, and the fuss that it made in the parish, we were never likely to forget.

Even our own household was so demoralized by the grim gossip of the occasion that Jem and I were accused of being unable to amuse ourselves, and of listening to our elders. It was perhaps fortunate for us that a favourite puppy died the day before the funeral, and gave us the opportunity of burying him.

“As if our whole vocation
Were endless imitation—”

Jem and I had already laid our gardens waste, and built a rude wall of broken bricks round them to make a churchyard; and I can clearly remember that we had so far profited by what we had overheard among our elders, that I had caught up some phrases which I was rather proud of displaying, and that I quite overawed Jem by the air with which I spoke of “the melancholy occasion”—the “wishes of deceased”—and the “feelings of survivors” when we buried the puppy.

It was understood that I could not attend the puppy’s funeral in my proper person, because I wished to be the undertaker; but the happy thought struck me of putting my wheelbarrow alongside of the brick wall with a note inside it to the effect that I had “sent my carriage as a mark of respect.”

In one point we could not emulate the real funeral: that was carried out “regardless of expense.” The old miser had left a long list of the names of the people who were to be invited to it and to its attendant feast, in which was not only my father’s name, but Jem’s and mine. Three yards was the correct length of the black silk scarves which it was the custom in the neighbourhood to send to dead people’s friends; but the old miser’s funeral-scarves were a whole yard longer, and of such stiffly ribbed silk that Mr. Soot, the mourning draper, assured my mother that “it would stand of itself.” The black gloves cost six shillings a pair, and the sponge-cakes, which used to be sent with the gloves and scarves, were on this occasion ornamented with weeping willows in white sugar.