

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen
Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Defoe Abbot Stoker Wilde Carroll Christie Maupassant Byron Molière Grimm
Garnett Engels Schiller Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Goethe Dostoyevsky Kipling Doyle Hall
Baum Cotton Henry Flaubert Turgenev Balzac Willis
Leslie Dumas Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Whitman Twain
Darwin Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato
Potter Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen
Kant London Descartes Cervantes Burton Hesse Harte
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Hale James Hastings Shakespeare Chambers Irving
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Paul Faber, Surgeon

George MacDonald

Imprint

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PAUL FABER, SURGEON

BY GEORGE MACDONALD

1900

TO

W.C.T.

TUUM EST.

Clear-windowed temple of the God of grace,
From the loud wind to me a hiding-place!
Thou gird broad lands with genial motions rife,
But in thee dwells, high-throned, the Life of life
Thy test no stagnant moat half-filled with mud,
But living waters witnessing in flood!
Thy priestess, beauty-clad, and gospel-shod,
A fellow laborer in the earth with God!
Good will art thou, and goodness all thy arts —
Doves to their windows, and to thee fly hearts!
Take of the corn in thy dear shelter grown,
Which else the storm had all too rudely blown;
When to a higher temple thou shalt mount,
Thy earthly gifts in heavenly friends shall count;
Let these first-fruits enter thy lofty door,
And golden lie upon thy golden floor.

G.M.D.

PORTO FINO, *December, 1878.*

PAUL FABER.

CHAPTER I.

THE LANE.

The rector sat on the box of his carriage, driving his horses toward his church, the grand old abbey-church of Glaston. His wife was inside, and an old woman—he had stopped on the road to take her up—sat with her basket on the foot-board behind. His coachman sat beside him; he never took the reins when his master was there. Mr. Bevis drove like a gentleman, in an easy, informal, yet thoroughly business-like way. His horses were black—large, well-bred, and well-fed, but neither young nor showy, and the harness was just the least bit shabby. Indeed, the entire turnout, including his own hat and the coachman's, offered the beholder that aspect of indifference to show, which, by the suggestion of a nodding acquaintance with poverty, gave it the right clerical air of being not of this world. Mrs. Bevis had her basket on the seat before her, containing, beneath an upper stratum of flowers, some of the first rhubarb of the season and a pound or two of fresh butter for a poor relation in the town.

The rector was a man about sixty, with keen gray eyes, a good-humored mouth, a nose whose enlargement had not of late gone in the direction of its original design, and a face more than inclining to the rubicund, suggestive of good living as well as open air. Altogether he had the look of a man who knew what he was about, and was on tolerable terms with himself, and on still better with his neighbor. The heart under his ribs was larger even than indicated by the benevolence of his countenance and the humor hovering over his mouth. Upon the countenance of his wife rested a placidity

sinking almost into fatuity. Its features were rather indications than completions, but there was a consciousness of comfort about the mouth, and the eyes were alive.

They were passing at a good speed through a varying country—now a thicket of hazel, now great patches of furze upon open common, and anon well-kept farm-hedges, and clumps of pine, the remnants of ancient forest, when, halfway through a lane so narrow that the rector felt every yard toward the other end a gain, his horses started, threw up their heads, and looked for a moment wild as youth. Just in front of them, in the air, over a high hedge, scarce touching the topmost twigs with his hoofs, appeared a great red horse. Down he came into the road, bringing with him a rather tall, certainly handsome, and even at first sight, attractive rider. A dark brown mustache upon a somewhat smooth sunburned face, and a stern settling of the strong yet delicately finished features gave him a military look; but the sparkle of his blue eyes contradicted his otherwise cold expression. He drew up close to the hedge to make room for the carriage, but as he neared him Mr. Bevis slackened his speed, and during the following talk they were moving gently along with just room for the rider to keep clear of the off fore wheel.

"Heigh, Faber," said the clergyman, "you'll break your neck some day! You should think of your patients, man. That wasn't a jump for any man in his senses to take."

"It is but fair to give my patients a chance now and then," returned the surgeon, who never met the rector but there was a merry passage between them.

"Upon my word," said Mr. Bevis, "when you came over the hedge there, I took you for Death in the Revelations, that had tired out his own and changed horses with t'other one."

As he spoke, he glanced back with a queer look, for he found himself guilty of a little irreverence, and his conscience sat behind him in the person of his wife. But that conscience was a very easy one, being almost as incapable of seeing a joke as of refusing a request.

"—How many have you bagged this week?" concluded the rector.

"I haven't counted up yet," answered the surgeon. "— *You've* got one behind, I see," he added, signing with his whip over his shoulder.

"Poor old thing!" said the rector, as if excusing himself, "she's got a heavy basket, and we all need a lift sometimes—eh, doctor?—into the world and out again, at all events."

There was more of the reflective in this utterance than the parson was in the habit of displaying; but he liked the doctor, and, although as well as every one else he knew him to be no friend to the church, or to Christianity, or even to religious belief of any sort, his liking, coupled with a vague sense of duty, had urged him to this most unassuming attempt to cast the friendly arm of faith around the unbeliever.

"I plead guilty to the former," answered Faber, "but somehow I have never practiced the euthanasia. The instincts of my profession, I suppose are against it. Besides, that ought to be your business."

"Not altogether," said the rector, with a kindly look from his box, which, however, only fell on the top of the doctor's hat.

Faber seemed to feel the influence of it notwithstanding, for he returned,

"If all clergymen were as liberal as you, Mr. Bevis, there would be more danger of some of us giving in."

The word *liberal* seemed to rouse the rector to the fact that his coachman sat on the box, yet another conscience, beside him. *Sub divo* one must not be *too* liberal. There was a freedom that came out better over a bottle of wine than over the backs of horses. With a word he quickened the pace of his cleric steeds, and the doctor was dropped parallel with the carriage window. There, catching sight of Mrs. Bevis, of whose possible presence he had not thought once, he paid his compliments, and made his apologies, then trotted his gaunt Ruber again beside the wheel, and resumed talk, but not the same talk, with the rector. For a few minutes it turned upon the state of this and that ailing parishioner; for, while the rector left all the duties of public service to his curate, he ministered to the ailing and poor upon and immediately around his own little property, which was in that corner of his parish furthest from the town; but

ere long, as all talk was sure to do between the parson and any body who owned but a donkey, it veered round in a certain direction.

"You don't seem to feed that horse of yours upon beans, Faber," he said.

"I don't seem, I grant," returned the doctor; "but you should see him feed! He eats enough for two, but he *can't* make fat: all goes to muscle and pluck."

"Well, I must allow the less fat he has to carry the better, if you're in the way of heaving him over such hedges on to the hard road. In my best days I should never have faced a jump like that in cold blood," said the rector.

"I've got no little belongings of wife or child to make a prudent man of me, you see," returned the surgeon. "At worst it's but a knock on the head and a longish snooze."

The rector fancied he felt his wife's shudder shake the carriage, but the sensation was of his own producing. The careless defiant words wrought in him an unaccountable kind of terror: it seemed almost as if they had rushed of themselves from his own lips.

"Take care, my dear sir," he said solemnly. "There may be something to believe, though you don't believe it."

"I must take the chance," replied Faber. "I will do my best to make calamity of long life, by keeping the rheumatic and epileptic and phthisical alive, while I know how. Where nothing *can* be known, I prefer not to intrude."

A pause followed. At length said the rector,

"You are so good a fellow, Faber, I wish you were better. When will you come and dine with me?"

"Soon, I hope," answered the surgeon, "but I am too busy at present. For all her sweet ways and looks, the spring is not friendly to man, and my work is to wage war with nature."

A second pause followed. The rector would gladly have said something, but nothing would come.

"By the by," he said at length, "I thought I saw you pass the gate—let me see—on Monday: why did you not look in?"

"I hadn't a moment's time. I was sent for to a patient in the village."

"Yes, I know; I heard of that. I wish you would give me your impression of the lady. She is a stranger here. — John, that gate is swinging across the road. Get down and shut it. — Who and what is she?"

"That I should be glad to learn from you. All I know is that she is a lady. There can not be two opinions as to that."

"They tell me she is a beauty," said the parson.

The doctor nodded his head emphatically.

"Haven't you seen her?" he said.

"Scarcely — only her back. She walks well. Do you know nothing about her?"

Who has she with her?"

"Nobody."

"Then Mrs. Bevis shall call upon her."

"I think at present she had better not. Mrs. Puckridge is a good old soul, and pays her every attention."

"What is the matter with her? Nothing infectious?"

"Oh, no! She has caught a chill. I was afraid of pneumonia yesterday."

"Then she is better?"

"I confess I am a little anxious about her. But I ought not to be dawdling like this, with half my patients to see. I must bid you good morning. — Good morning, Mrs. Bevis."

As he spoke, Faber drew rein, and let the carriage pass; then turned his horse's head to the other side of the way, scrambled up the steep bank to the field above, and galloped toward Glaston, whose great church rose high in sight. Over hedge and ditch he rode straight for its tower.

"The young fool!" said the rector, looking after him admiringly, and pulling up his horses that he might more conveniently see him ride.

"Jolly old fellow!" said the surgeon at his second jump. "I wonder how much he believes now of all the rot! Enough to humbug himself with—not a hair more. He has no passion for humbugging other people. There's that curate of his now believes every thing, and would humbug the whole world if he could! How any man can come to fool himself so thoroughly as that man does, is a mystery to me!—I wonder what the rector's driving into Glaston for on a Saturday."

Paul Faber was a man who had espoused the cause of science with all the energy of a suppressed poetic nature. He had such a horror of all kinds of intellectual deception or mistake, that he would rather run the risk of rejecting any number of truths than of accepting one error. In this spirit he had concluded that, as no immediate communication had ever reached his eye, or ear, or hand from any creator of men, he had no ground for believing in the existence of such a creator; while a thousand unfitnesses evident in the world, rendered the existence of one perfectly wise and good and powerful, absolutely impossible. If one said to him that he believed thousands of things he had never himself known, he answered he did so upon testimony. If one rejoined that here too we have testimony, he replied it was not credible testimony, but founded on such experiences as he was justified in considering imaginary, seeing they were like none he had ever had himself. When he was asked whether, while he yet believed there was such a being as his mother told him of, he had ever set himself to act upon that belief, he asserted himself fortunate in the omission of what might have riveted on him the fetters of a degrading faith. For years he had turned his face toward all speculation favoring the non-existence of a creating Will, his back toward all tending to show that such a one might be. Argument on the latter side he set down as born of prejudice, and appealing to weakness; on the other, as springing from courage, and appealing to honesty. He had never put it to himself which would be the worse deception—to believe there was a God when there was none; or to believe there was no God when there was one.

He had, however, a large share of the lower but equally indispensable half of religion—that, namely, which has respect to one's fellows. Not a man in Glaston was readier, by day or by night, to

run to the help of another, and that not merely in his professional capacity, but as a neighbor, whatever the sort of help was needed.

Thomas Wingfold, the curate, had a great respect for him. Having himself passed through many phases of serious, and therefore painful doubt, he was not as much shocked by the surgeon's unbelief as some whose real faith was even less than Faber's; but he seldom laid himself out to answer his objections. He sought rather, but as yet apparently in vain, to cause the roots of those very objections to strike into, and thus disclose to the man himself, the deeper strata of his being. This might indeed at first only render him the more earnest in his denials, but at length it would probably rouse in him that spiritual nature to which alone such questions really belong, and which alone is capable of coping with them. The first notable result, however, of the surgeon's intercourse with the curate was, that, whereas he had till then kept his opinions to himself in the presence of those who did not sympathize with them, he now uttered his disbelief with such plainness as I have shown him using toward the rector. This did not come of aggravated antagonism, but of admiration of the curate's openness in the presentment of truths which must be unacceptable to the majority of his congregation.

There had arisen therefore betwixt the doctor and the curate a certain sort of intimacy, which had at length come to the rector's ears. He had, no doubt, before this heard many complaints against the latter, but he had laughed them aside. No theologian himself, he had found the questions hitherto raised in respect of Wingfold's teaching, altogether beyond the pale of his interest. He could not comprehend why people should not content themselves with being good Christians, minding their own affairs, going to church, and so feeling safe for the next world. What did opinion matter as long as they were good Christians? He did not exactly know what he believed himself, but he hoped he was none the less of a Christian for that! Was it not enough to hold fast whatever lay in the apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian creed, without splitting metaphysical hairs with your neighbor? But was it decent that his curate should be hand and glove with one who denied the existence of God? He did not for a moment doubt the faith of Wingfold; but a man must have some respect for appearances: appearances were facts as well as realities were facts. An honest man must not keep

company with a thief, if he would escape the judgment of being of thievish kind. Something must be done; probably something said would be enough, and the rector was now on his way to say it.

CHAPTER II.

THE MINISTER'S DOOR.

Every body knew Mr. Faber, whether he rode Ruber or Niger—Ruber and Nigger, his groom called them—and many were the greetings that met him as he passed along Pine Street, for, despite the brand of his atheism, he was popular. The few ladies out shopping bowed graciously, for both his manners and person were pleasing, and his professional attentions were unexceptionable. When he dropped into a quick walk, to let Ruber cool a little ere he reached his stall, he was several times accosted and detained. The last who addressed him was Mr. Drew, the principal draper of the town. He had been standing for some time in his shop-door, but as Faber was about to turn the corner, he stepped out on the pavement, and the doctor checked his horse in the gutter.

"I wish you would look in upon Mr. Drake, sir," he said. "I am quite uneasy about him. Indeed I am sure he must be in a bad way, though he won't allow it. He's not an easy man to do any thing for, but just you let me know what *can* be done for him—and we'll contrive. A *nod*, you know, doctor, etc."

"I don't well see how I can," returned Faber. "To call now without being sent for, when I never called before!—No, Mr. Drew, I don't think I could."

It was a lovely spring noon. The rain that had fallen heavily during the night lay in flashing pools that filled the street with suns. Here and there were little gardens before the houses, and the bushes in them were hung with bright drops, so bright that the rain seemed to have fallen from the sun himself, not from the clouds.

"Why, goodness gracious!" cried the draper, "here's your excuse come direct!"

Under the very nose of the doctor's great horse stood a little woman-child, staring straight up at the huge red head above her. Now Ruber was not quite gentle, and it was with some dismay that his master, although the animal showed no offense at the glowering little thing, pulled him back a step or two with the curb, the thought darting through him how easily with one pash of his mighty hoof the horse could annihilate a mirrored universe.

"Where from?" he asked, by what he would himself have called a half-conscious cerebration.

"From somewhere they say you don't believe in, doctor," answered the draper. "It's little Amanda, the minister's own darling—Naughty little dear!" he continued, his round good-humored face wrinkled all over with smiles, as he caught up the truant, "what ever do you mean by splashing through every gutter between home and here, making a little drab of yourself? Why your frock is as wet as a dish-clout!—*and* your shoes! My gracious!"

The little one answered only by patting his cheeks, which in shape much resembled her own, with her little fat puds, as if she had been beating a drum, while Faber looked down amused and interested.

"Here, doctor!" the draper went on, "you take the little mischief on the saddle before you, and carry her home: that will be your excuse."

As he spoke he held up the child to him. Faber took her, and sitting as far back in the saddle as he could, set her upon the pommel. She screwed up her eyes, and grinned with delight, spreading her mouth wide, and showing an incredible number of daintiest little teeth. When Ruber began to move she shrieked in her ecstasy.

Holding his horse to a walk, the doctor crossed the main street and went down a side one toward the river, whence again he entered a narrow lane. There with the handle of his whip he managed to ring the door-bell of a little old-fashioned house which rose immediately from the lane without even a footpath between. The door was opened by a lady-like young woman, with smooth soft brown hair, a white forehead, and serious, rather troubled eyes.

"Aunty! aunty!" cried the child, "Ducky 'iding!"

Miss Drake looked a little surprised. The doctor lifted his hat. She gravely returned his greeting and stretched up her arms to take the child. But she drew back, nestling against Faber.

"Amanda! come, dear," said Miss Drake. "How kind of Dr. Faber to bring you home! I'm afraid you've been a naughty child again—running out into the street."

"Such a g'eat 'ide!" cried Amanda, heedless of reproof. "A yeal 'osy—big! big!"

She spread her arms wide, in indication of the vastness of the up-bearing body whereon she sat. But still she leaned back against the doctor, and he awaited the result in amused silence. Again her aunt raised her hands to take her.

"Mo' 'yide!" cried the child, looking up backward, to find Faber's eyes.

But her aunt caught her by the feet, and amid struggling and laughter drew her down, and held her in her arms.

"I hope your father is pretty well, Miss Drake," said the doctor, wasting no time in needless explanation.

"Ducky," said the girl, setting down the child, "go and tell grand-papa how kind Dr. Faber has been to you. Tell him he is at the door." Then turning to Faber, "I am sorry to say he does not seem at all well," she answered him. "He has had a good deal of annoyance lately, and at his age that sort of thing tells."

As she spoke she looked up at the doctor, full in his face, but with a curious quaver in her eyes. Nor was it any wonder she should look at him strangely, for she felt toward him very strangely: to her he was as it were the apostle of a kakangel, the prophet of a doctrine that was evil, yet perhaps was a truth. Terrible doubts had for some time been assailing her—doubts which she could in part trace to him, and as he sat there on Ruber, he looked like a beautiful evil angel, who *knew* there was no God—an evil angel whom the curate, by his bold speech, had raised, and could not banish.

The surgeon had scarcely begun a reply, when the old minister made his appearance. He was a tall, well-built man, with strong features, rather handsome than otherwise; but his hat hung on his

occiput, gave his head a look of weakness and oddity that by nature did not belong to it, while baggy, ill-made clothes and big shoes manifested a reaction from the over-trimness of earlier years. He greeted the doctor with a severe smile.

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Faber," he said, "for bringing me home my little runaway. Where did you find her?"

"Under my horse's head, like the temple between the paws of the Sphinx," answered Faber, speaking a parable without knowing it.

"She is a fearless little damsel," said the minister, in a husky voice that had once rung clear as a bell over crowded congregations—"too fearless at times. But the very ignorance of danger seems the panny of childhood. And indeed who knows in the midst of what evils we all walk that never touch us!"

"A Solon of platitudes!" said the doctor to himself.

"She has been in the river once, and almost twice," Mr. Drake went on. "—I shall have to tie you with a string, pussie! Come away from the horse. What if he should take to stroking you? I am afraid you would find his hands both hard and heavy."

"How do you stand this trying spring weather, Mr. Drake? I don't hear the best accounts of you," said the surgeon, drawing Ruber a pace back from the door.

"I am as well as at my age I can perhaps expect to be," answered the minister. "I am getting old—and—and—we all have our troubles, and, I trust, our God also, to set them right for us," he added, with a suggesting look in the face of the doctor.

"By Jove!" said Faber to himself, "the spring weather has roused the worshiping instinct! The clergy are awake to-day! I had better look out, or it will soon be too hot for me."

"I can't look you in the face, doctor," resumed the old man after a pause, "and believe what people say of you. It can't be that you don't even believe there *is* a God?"

Faber would rather have said nothing; but his integrity he must keep fast hold of, or perish in his own esteem.