news from nowhere: 
or, 
a
epoch 
of rest

being some chapters from a utopian romance
chap. xiv. (continued)—up the thames: the second day

however, that mattered little to us; the nights were light, for the moon was shining in her third quarter, and it was all one to dick whether he sculled or sat quiet in the boat: so we went away a great pace. the evening sun shone bright on the remains of the old buildings needed to be pulled down: we got a modicum of money from the building which dick told us was a very pleasant house; and there were houses of position on the wide meadows opposite, under the hill; and the whole thing had been done by people to build and live in a good deal. the sun very low down showed us Henry little altered in outward aspect from what I remembered it. actual daylight failed us as we passed through the lovely reaches of Wargrave and Shiplake; but the moon rose before us presently. i should like to have seen with my eyes what success the new order of things had in getting rid of the splashing of moss with which commercialism had littered the banks of the wide stream about Reading and Caversham: certainly everything smelled too delicate in the early night for there to be any of the old careless sordidness of so-called manufactures; and in answer to my question as to what sort of man the next time round when we were in the country, i said:

"a, a nice town enough in its way; mostly rebuilt within the last hundred years; and there are a good many houses, as you can see by the lights just down under the hills yonder. in fact, it is well named Reading; or rather here. keep up your spirits, guest! we are close to our journey's end for the night. i ought to ask your pardon for not stopping at one of the houses here or having done anything for you in the way of living quarters. the maple-durham meads particularly wanted me and Clara to come and see him on our way up thames; and i thought you wouldn't mind this bit of night travelling."

he had not been adjured to keep up my spirits, which were as high as possible; though the strangeness and excitement of the happy and quiet life which i saw everywhere around me, was, it is true, a little wearing off. but the deep content, as different as possible from languid acquiescence, was taking its place, and i was, as it were, really new-born.

we landed presently just where i remembered the river making an elbow to turn towards the ancient house of the blunts; with the wide meadows spreading on the right-hand side, and on the left the long line of beautiful old trees overhanging the water. as we got out of the boat, i said:

"is it the old house we are going to?"

"no," he said, "though that is standing still in green old age, and is well inhabited. i see, by the way, that you know your thames well. but my friend Weller has a very good story about the man who sold his father out of this house, not very big, which has been built here lately, because these meadows are so much liked, especially in summer, that there was getting to be rather too much of trotting on the open field; so the parties here about, who rather objected to it, built three houses between this and Caversham, and quite a large one at Basildon, a little higher up. look, yonder are the lights of WALTER allen's house!"

so we walked my way, by the moonlight, and not very long, and soon came to the house, which was low and built round a quadrangle big enough to get plenty of sunshine in it. Walter allen, Dick's father, sitting against the jamb of the doorway waiting for us, and took us into the hall without overspilling of words. there were not many people in it, as some of the dwellers there were away at the haymaking in the neighbourhood, and some, as Walter told us, were wandering about the meadow enjoying the beautiful moonlight night. Dick's friend looked to be a man of about forty; tall, black-haired, very kind-looking and thoughtful; but rather to my surprise there was a shade of melancholy on his face, and he seemed a little abstracted and inattentive to our chat, in spite of obvious efforts to listen. Dick looked at him from time to time, and seemed troubled; and at last he said: "i say, old fellow, if there is anything the matter which we didn't know of when we were in London, don't you think we had better tell us about it at once i or else we shall think we have come here at an unlucky time and are not quite wanted."

Walter turned red, and seemed to have some difficulty in restraining his tears. of course everybody here is very glad to see you, Dick, and your friends; but it is true that we are not at our best, in spite of the fine weather and the glorious hay-crop. we have had too many troubles here.

said Dick: "Well, you should get over that, neighbour: such things must be.""

"yes," Walter said, "but this was a death by violence, and it seems like a man who was not in his right mind. but somehow it makes us feel rather shy of one another; and to say the truth, that is one reason why there are so few of us present to-night."

"tell us the story," said Walter; "Dick; "perhaps telling it will help you to shake off your sadness."

"said Walter: "Well, i will, and i will make it short enough, though i scarce it might be spun out into a long one, as used to be done in such subjects in the old novels. there is a very charming girl here whom we all like, and whom some of us do more than like; and she very naturally liked one of us better than anybody else. and another of us (I won't name him) got fairly bitten with love; and used to go down to the church and pray as much as he could for his own expenses, of course; so that the girl, who liked him well enough at first, though she didn't love him, began fairly to dislike him. Of course, those of us who knew him best—myself amongst others— advised him to make himself known, as he was a good lad, and had been for himself every day. Well, he wouldn't take our advice (that also, I suppose, was a matter of course), so we had to tell him that he must go, or the inevitable sending to Coventry would follow; for his ill fortune had so overmastered me that we felt so much to go if he did not."

"he took that better than we expected, when something or other—an interview with the girl, i think, and something with the successful lover following close upon it, threw him quite off his balance; and he got hold of an axe and fell upon his rival when there was no one by; and in the struggle that followed, he killed the poor fellow. and now the slayer in his turn is so upset that he is like to kill himself; and if he does, the girl will do as much, i fear. and all this we could no more help than the earth-quake."

"it is very unhappy," said Dick; "but since the man is dead, and cannot be brought to life again, and since the slayer had no malice in him, i cannot for the life of me see why he shouldn't get over before. why should a man brood over a mere accident for ever? and the girl?"

"as to her," said Walter, "the whole thing seems to have inspired her with horror. What are you going to do, about the man who was killed or it should be; but then, you see, the excitement and jealousy that was the prelude to this tragedy had made an evil and feverish element round about him, from which he does not seem to have quite escaped. in fact, to cross the seas; but he is in a state that i do not think he can go unless someone takes him, and i think it will fall to my lot to do so; which is scarcely a fair or equal obligation."

"O, you will find a certain kind of interest in it," said Dick. "And of course he must soon look upon the affair from a reasonable point of view sooner or later."

"Yes, at any rate," quoth Walter, "now that I have eased my mind by making you uncomfortable, let us have an end of the subject for the present. Are you going to take your guest to Oxford?"

"Woh, of course we must pass through it," said Dick, smiling, "as we are going into the upper waters; but i thought that we wouldn't stop there, or we shall be belated as to the haymaking up our way. so Oxford and my learned lecture on it, all got at second-hand by my old kinsman, must wait till we come down the water a fortnight hence."

i listened to all this story with much surprise, and could not help wishing that, at first the man who had slain the other had not been put in custody till it could be proved that he had killed his rival in self-defence only. however, the more i thought of it, the plainer it grew to me that no amount of examination of witnesses, who had wished to see nothing but the lad who had killed his rival, and who had done anything to clear up the case. i could not help thinking, also, that the remorse of this homicide gave point to what old Hammond had said to me about the folly of which the people dealt with the "sacredness of human life" was likely to suffer amongst my friends from the absence of gallows and prison.

william morgan.

to be continued.

(this story began in no. 209, january 11, 1890. a few sets of back numbers can still be had.)

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Take a few copies of the Commonweal and pamphlets weekly, and distribute them where you think they will do most good. Leaflets, too, are useful, and if you can get your other papers at another shop where they are sold, you might get a few leaflets or copies to, and get him to show a bill by a little "gentle persuasion."

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Remember it is the ignorance of the workers that alone postpones the day of the Social Revolution.