

# **FORGIVE AND FORGET**

BY EDWIN F. ROBERTS

FORGIVE AND FORGET

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"What you tell me is certainly very extraordinary," said a grave-looking gentlemanly man, to a pale agitated youth of about two-and-twenty: "but I have ceased to wonder at many things that have appeared to be still more strange."

"Ah! you speak with such unconcern, because you have not had your feelings insulted, your affections trifled with as I have. I will never forgive her father for it;" and he clenched his hand in a rage.

"You will regret your words, Philip," was the reply. "Forgive and forget."

"Never! Even if I did the one, I could not do the other;" and with the gesture of a man who had already made up his mind, in addition to having convinced himself that he has good reason to speak and feel in such wise, he added, "If I can, I may forgive, but I can never forget."

"Possibly not," retorted the other with a smile; "for it is not in our power to forget as we please; but there is a latitude of meaning to the latter portion of your sentence which you will remark at a future time."

The young man stared at him in surprise for a moment. His features were convulsed, his face flushed. "Do you think," said he, "I can alter my sentiments towards a man who has heaped every indignity upon me in the presence of the woman I loved? who has humiliated me till I feel as if my brow were branded with the remembrance of some disgraceful act? But, it is well," he added, abruptly: "his unprovoked aggression upon me will retaliate upon himself: he too, will feel; for Ellen cannot so soon forget " Here he broke off while a tear trembled upon his eye-lids.

The speaker was a young man, whose station and occupation could not at the first glance be distinctly told. He was well made, with a good-looking oval face, hazel eyes, brown hair, good strong teeth, limbs firmly set; and if there was anything to find fault with him personally, it was an expression of firmness that amounted to obstinacy in the strong clasp of the jaw and in the quickly-kindling eye.

His coat was of "town" cut, but his breeches, top-boots, and the riding-whip, spoke of the country. In fact, he was of that class known as a gentleman-farmer. His parents having been dead for some years, had left him to manage a compact, well-stocked establishment, situated in the heart of one of the most beautiful rural districts of Surrey.

Not far from where he dwelt was a neighbour's house, a handsome villa-residence in which Mr. Gilmour, a retired trader, his wife, and daughter, now about eighteen years of age, resided. A location of several years had caused a reciprocal kindly feeling to grow up into a warm friendship; and an almost constant intercourse between the young people had produced that very natural consequence they had fallen in love, they had plighted troth, their parents had sanctioned their engagement, and the young man, yet now a bachelor, was looking anxiously forward to the day that should make him a Benedict.

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In order to explain to the reader how the conversation arose, with which the story opens, we will in a few words explain the causes that led to such a result.

It was on a beautiful evening in the autumn, when the nights begin to grow long, and the twilight suddenly deepens into purple and then into darkness; when the winds begin to moan and the stars grow the more muffled; when you hear extraordinary sound in the chimneys, and the vane creaking upon the gables; when the fire sparkles up gaily; when the lamp is on the table and the table is before the fire; when people grow cozy and snug, and as "merry as crickets," while they draw their chairs closer; we say on such an evening there was a happy group assembled in Mr. Gilmour's back parlour.

Ellen Gilmour was seated on the sofa after having played and sung one or two of Philip's favourite ballads, knitting a purse, and Philip, his arm half-encircling her waist, was mischievously catching the threads and receiving an occasional scolding; but his joyous face, his radiant eyes showed that the more he was scolded the happier he grew, while Ellen now and then cast a side-long look of love upon him that was as expressive as anything could be of joy-creating power of love.

The old lady, with spectacles on nose, was superintending the servant who was engaged with the toast. As for Mr. Gilmour himself, he was unusually agitated. With his hands under his coat he now strode across the room, then stood in the space formed by the bow-window, cast a glance towards the two young lovers, which was more charged with electricity than ordinarily. If there was a storm brewing on Philip Harwood's lovely and rosy horizon, it was evident that it would not be long in breaking. The old man grew more fidgetty; and as he heard them both laugh, and Ellen scold, he turned round at last and in a somewhat sharp stern tone, said,

" Philip!"

" Sir!" was the startled reply, as Philip turned towards him, his eyes dilating to their widest.

" I saw your friend Mr. Squander to-day."

There was an unmistakable emphasis on the word.

Philip instantly started and coloured deeply, then bit his lip and said "Oh! indeed!"

" Yes: and I was very much surprised at what he told me," continued Mr. Gilmour, getting excited.

" Is it anything that interests me, sir?" demanded Philip in a cold and collected voice, which appeared to be hardily assumed.

" It concerns you very much indeed, sir;" and the tones of the old man grew more distant and threatening.

" Well, my dear sir," answered the other in a tone half of insolence, half of irritability, "if it concerns me only, let it remain as it is: I will look into those matters myself."

Ellen herself all this time was in a most distressing position. She felt that there was something unpleasant about to happen. She was half-frightened at her father's tone, and she felt not a little astonished at the off-hand manner in which the young man behaved. The good old lady, Mrs. Gilmour, was also evidently surprised at this sudden change in the aspect of things.

" I have to tell you sir," said Mr. Gilmour, standing before Philip, and speaking with some asperity, "that I have seen this man who calls himself your friend, and whom I do not respect, and he has told me "

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" Ah!" interrupted Philip, "you do not respect him, and yet you listen to him when he speaks of me; but still it strikes me that this is my affair alone."

" Young man," retorted Mr. Gilmour, "if I, or any other member of my family, were not also interested in it, you would not have found me either anxious or willing to listen to anything that this man in particular has to say; but as it does concern my child's welfare, I judged it right to hear that which was voluntarily delivered."

" Proceed, sir," said Philip, coldly; but his lips trembled: "it seems to me that I am to be catechised."

" Philip!" exclaimed Ellen, in a reproachful tone, accompanying it with an appealing gesture.

" I was told that you were in London last week, when we understood that you had gone to buy horses at " he named a place celebrated at the time, for the splendid assortment of cattle to be purchased there.

" Exactly," said Philip; and he here withdrew his arm from around Ellen.

" That you lost also at the gaming-table three hundred pounds, a sum I knew you had laid aside for making further improvements on your farm and increasing your stock."

" The money was my own, sir;" and Philip was cold, and his cheeks bloodless as marble. " I am not aware that I should be at any time held accountable to you."

But Mr. Gilmour continued without heeding him, "That not a week ago you put up for sale, three small houses left you by your father, which brought you in at least, two hundred and fifty pounds a-year, and that you also paid the greater part of the purchase-money away for some betting losses you sustained at the last Newmarket races."

" But, sir," retorted the other, in a tone of the coldest irony, mingled with chagrin and bitterness, "this does not justify any man's prying into my affairs. My money was my own, I repeat."

" Unquestionably, sir it was," assented Mr. Gilmour, with distant dignity.

" Philip," again said Ellen, timidly touching his arm, as if to restrain his violent temper, "do not answer my father thus he means well."

" If hearing all the idle tales that are circulated regarding a man be proof of it But," added Philip, suddenly breaking off, "supposing all this to be true, what is to be inferred from it?"

" Simply this sir," replied Mr. Gilmour, sternly: "that I shall decline to trust my daughter's welfare and happiness in the hands of one whose new career of dissipation threatens to beggar him who spends three hundred pounds in one night at a gaming-table, and who disposes of his property like a wasteful prodigal in paying losses upon horse-racing, and in other infamies that are unknown."

Pale as death, with eyes flashing, and with a furious gesture, Philip almost leaped towards him, and in a hoarse voice said, "Do you dare to speak to me in this manner, sir?"

" It would seem so as you have heard me," was the reply. "I must confess that anxiety for my child has made me bold enough to brave your anger, great as it may be."

" Then in proving to you that I am either ruined or on the road to ruin, this man has at the same time made his own solvency quite apparent;" and Philip spoke all this with execrable coldness.

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Mr. Gilmour stared. He could not understand what Philip Harwood meant to say. The other did not leave him in suspense, however, for he added,

"Has he, in case of my rejection, proposed for your daughter?"

"Sir," replied the old man, trembling with passion, "this heartless insult in fact, your insolence through-out only confirms the opinion I have been forced to hold of your worthlessness. There is the door, sir!"

"Ellen!" exclaimed Philip, casting an appealing look towards her.

"I repeat my father's words, sir you have insulted his gray hairs, you have insulted me. Go! let us meet no more;" and she pointed to the door.

"But, hear me!" he cried, as if he would have explained that which it had now become too late. The hasty word had been spoken the ill-blood moved.

"Ellen, leave the room," said her father; then addressing Philip, "If you decline to go, sir, we shall be compelled to leave you alone in it;" and with a dignified air, Mr. Gilmour took Ellen's hand, and was leading her away.

"You refuse to hear me?" said Philip, his countenance darkening in wrath. "It is well, sir, and you too, Ellen, you also abet this what shall I call it an unwarrantable attack upon my freedom of will, upon my independence, to act and to do as I think proper. Who is to restrain me?" he added, with flashing eyes: "who is to dictate to me what to do, if I will to the contrary?"

There passed over Ellen's charming face such an expression of dismay, despair, and terror, that the impetuosity of Philip was stayed at once. He would have given all that he had the whole world his life, to have recalled back his words; but they had gone forth, there was no turning back for him therefore. How often have light, vain, angry, or hasty expressions dissevered friends, broken the most binding ties, sown dissension between lovers, destroyed human happiness and been as productive of evil as if the plague itself had stricken the circle where such unforeseen occurrences arise!

"Ellen! for the love of God! a word!" cried Phillip, making one more attempt.

"Go, sir: I have nothing more to say;" and with a haughty wave of the hand, she drew from him.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "is it indeed so? Well, you will live to repent of this both of you; you will regret this, because it is a paltry means of exchanging the old lover for the new, because your good father's worldly prudence sees in my present embarrassments, a failure as regards the establishment he had concluded you should keep, because you also agree with him "

It was at these black, ignoble words, at this accusation which bore improbability upon its very face, that Ellen, with a shriek, fainted in her father's arms, while Philip hastily rushed forth from the house.

It was this unhappy difference, therefore, that threatened to wreck for ever the happiness of two who in every other respect seemed formed for each other. Mr. Gilmour might have been too precipitate might have chosen his time better; but when a father has his child's happiness at stake, it must be forgiven him if, in his anxiety, he does not precisely study etiquette.

And, on the other hand, what was it that had come over Philip Harwood, once so ingenuous and candid, once so ingenuous and so tractable? It had for some time past been remarked, that his visits were irregular, that he made apologies for his absence in a tone that began to grow sharp, querulous, and abrupt, that at last he was not

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questioned; and as he was the accepted lover, as his marriage with Ellen was a settled thing, his absence or his presence was not to be wondered at.

But he was moody, falling at times into reveries, out of which he would start like a man upon whom some unwelcome train of awakening thought forces itself. Rumours, too, of his wild flights of dissipation, of disreputable companionship, of strange visitors at his snug little farm, of horse-racing, and many other things that may induce a man, whose mind vacillates from any cause, to enter into with avidity, were amplified with a hundred tongues.

In detailing to his friend (at the opening of our story), the causes of the new and fierce passion that almost supplanted all old feelings, he did not give any reasons as springing from himself he could not, or would not see that he alone it was who was the blameable party in the matter; he merely spoke as his irritated feelings prompted him, and the prevailing sentiment was vindictiveness.

His temper after this grew still worse, when he returned at any time to his comfortable but solitary home, where an old housekeeper, and one or two female domestics, together with a few farm-servants, made up a tolerable household; but with whom he of course could have no communion, when with his brain on fire, anger, conscience, ruin, each by turns, goading him on when he reflected upon the great treasure he lost in Ellen upon the wide and wordless desolation that began to fill his own heart at the prospect of losing her; besides, the bitter reflection that he had by such a show of temper totally alienated her father; and, as an almost natural consequence of his violent, his insolent rudeness herself from him. When he thought upon all this he was ready to go mad.

"Be it so," he would mutter, recklessly: "then she is lost through him through her father's purse-proud insolence, who thinks more of his paltry hundred or two than he does of his child's happiness. She loves me it shall be the stepping stone to revenge. I will neither forget it, nor forgive it!"

It was with a mingled sentiment of disgust, horror, and hate that he looked upon the letters which were daily lying on his table he knew who they were from; but he was involved so frightfully, so meshed, as it were, that to draw back appeared to be ruin, to go forward would be to trust to the luck, ever so fluctuating, of a gambler. He cursed the hour that had first placed him in that perilous condition; he cursed the wine that had blinded him, the friends, apparently so frank, candid, but convivial, that was the word, who had tempted him; and the cards that begun the horse-racing and the betting that had finally plunged him into this horrible state. Yet even with all these, had it not been for Mr. Gilmour's severity for the sudden change in Ellen's nature, that of all unexpected things was the most unexpected, had it not been for all this, things were not so bad but they might, at desperate sacrifices, have been remedied. It was not altogether his fault. His nature had been imposed upon, and he had been robbed, so he thought.

"I will be revenged," he muttered: "it matters not at whose cost at whose sacrifice, most likely my own. She is so bound and mingled up in my nature that I cannot forget her, and I can never speak or see her more: that is cause enough for ruin on one hand. Can she so lightly cast away from her remembrance of me? can she forget me? can she," he would cry in agony, "can she tear the cherished image from her heart? But why do I question myself thus? What a man sows that also shall he reap."

Within a week, to Mr. Gilmour's dismay, for though he fully intended to act up to his word, still he felt a deep, a fatherly interest in Philip's fate; and had the young man expressed proper contrition, his act of folly might have been cancelled, and his headlong progress stayed, to the terror of Ellen and the surprise of every one, Philip Harwood had sold off all that he had, the farm, the furniture, the stock, everything was broken up, and the servants dismissed. The place was shut up, no one knew who had bought it; and in the front of the pleasant house which, at one time, used to be the pride of the country for tulips, June flowers, dahlias, and a thousand others; for, in fact, the Flora of Philip Harwood's garden was very choice and very beautiful; now grass began to grow, and the gravel paths were unswept, weeds choked up the flowers, all things grew rank. The windows were closed,

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and an air of desolation reigned over all. Philip himself had disappeared, and nothing was seen of him. It was conjectured that he had at once and unhesitatingly plunged into vices from whence it was now hopeless to reclaim him, or that he had emigrated in a sudden fit of disgust.

The effect of all this upon Ellen was frightful enough. Roused by every sentiment that could suggest to her a sense of duty; indignant at the outrage which had been made upon her parent; feeling keenly the insult which had been offered to herself; the loving girl, with a sad brow, a pale cheek, an apathetic ear, and an altogether languid and relaxed movement, bore up, while she could, against her misery. She had returned to Philip all his presents (he had never received them however), and had no memento of him left, save that of association, habit, and feeling, if, indeed, these be not the all in all. At home, by tacit consent, the name of Philip was banished no lips spoke it; and though Ellen thought that this was carrying harshness to an extreme, still she was resolved not to be the first to break the implied vow: the consequence of all this was a severe prostrating illness, that laid her upon a sick bed, from which it was a great chance if she should ever rise up again. If to inflict a deadly wound in the parents' bosom was Philip's mode of vengeance, he was likely to do it.

The conclusions Mr. Gilmour came to, with regard to Philip, were not, however, strictly just. He was culpable, but not criminal. Acting upon impulse, smarting under a sentiment of false shame, the young man had thought to repair his losses by the same means which had been used to entrap him. He was, as a natural consequence, the victim to a still more serious extent; the evil had been precipitated, too, by the rupture which occasioned his parting from Ellen; and the wanderer, husbanding the little money let him, having paid all and shunning all, was gloomily traversing the land, having, with a morbid self-satisfaction, determined to wait till Ellen died, and then go and kill himself upon her grave; and, indeed, it seemed as if he should not have to wait very long for such a consummation.

In the meantime, for some reason or other (perhaps he thought a time might come when all would be well who knows), Mr. Gilmour, after six months had elapsed, re-purchased Philip Harwood's farm, furniture, and stock, and reinstated the housekeeper and the servants, so that the establishment soon began to wear its old orderly and quiet air. The cattle browsed in the meadows, the teams were a-field, the dairy sent its produce to the market, and the garden looked as beautiful as ever; but in the old man's house one flower was evidently drooping to death.

Ellen was dreadfully altered she was thin, and pale as a statue of marble, and her own glossy hair hung dank and matted on her neck. She was so weakened with grief that she appeared to crawl listlessly about by mere muscular volition than by effort of will, and it was evident that the heart-broken girl was rapidly descending into the tomb that she was soon to be snatched away from her parents unless indeed providence would interpose in her behalf, in some unexpected way.

By the physician's advice she was removed to the sea-coast, more in the hope of distracting her thoughts from too great a contemplation of that grief, which "like a worm i' the bud fed on her damask cheek," than from any hope they had in her restoration to health. Her mother, untiring and unmurmuring, with the most patient resignation the most assiduous fondness, attended her night and day. She endeavoured to stifle her own bitterness in order not to give poor Ellen more cause for grief if possible, while silent and wan her father, though almost plunged into despair, kept his sorrow to himself.

On one fine day when the sky was blue, and the breeze bland and calm, Ellen, tottering more than walking, was led along by her parents to the noble esplanade formed by the hand of nature, under the swarded downs of . Their walk was solitary, as the place was deserted by all the visitors, in fact, as it extended for the best part of a mile, it might be considered as sufficiently long a walk to appal any but those healthy pedestrians who laugh at a dozen miles, and who think "one" to be merely a "five minutes stroll"

The (word not printed) was bright and undulating like the waves in those (word not printed) mornings" by Claude or Turner; and there was a kin of subdued moan, which arose from its mighty breast, as if it had been falling into



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slumber; and the whole aspect of nature grand, expansive, and vast as it was, had a beauty that is indescribable; but all was imbued with the sentiment of vitality with "life," Ellen only, ghostly and almost ghastly, moving about like one risen from the dead.

They sat down, as she felt wearied, upon a seat placed there for the accommodation of the passers-by. With a questioning glance her parents looked in her face, and her reply was a sad, sickly smile, and a slight pressure of the hand.

"Do you feel better, my child?" asked her mother.

"Not not much, dear mother; but I shall be soon," was the reply. her voice had the resignation of despair in it.

The lips of the poor mother began to tremble, while looking into the thin, white face of her child, and the hands of the father shook as he dashed them across his own dim eyes. There was such voiceless heart-breaking anguish in that momentary silence; and the three drew closer together upon the bench whereon they sat, as if to take one last fond embrace before parting for ever in this world.

"Mother! father!" she said at last, in a faint tone: "it may be wicked in me it may be disobedient; but I cannot help thinking of poor Philip: who knows where he is now? I knew his nature well: it was stern and unbending; but he has paid the penalty of his conduct I know. From the day that he quitted us, he has been an unhappy and unsmiling man. Do you think, father, that he was so bad so wild so nearly ruined as you were told?"

"The former I do not the latter I do," was his reply. It was without harshness. He did not reproach her with speaking of the lost man. He would have given much to behold him even at that moment.

"I should die happy if I could but see him, if I could but touch his hand, and bless him. I feel by my own heart that he loved me that in spite of his cruel words he has ever loved me that feeling may have saved him; but heaven's will be done!" and she cast her meek eyes towards that heaven whose flat she bowed to.

While thus engaged, they were not aware of the presence of a road-beaten, dust-covered man, who approached them with a slow and measured step. His cheeks were haggard and sunken, and his hair hung in wild elf-lock around his brows. His visage altogether had that woe-begone, desolate, and miserable expression that belongs to men who have sustained a calamity which has swept everything from them, that has desolated and destroyed literally everything in life fruit, blossom, and plant. His dress was good, his appearance striking; but it was a living monument of ruin walking and moving, yet day by day losing all impression of life all thought and idea of that which is external.

When he came up to the group he started and stopped, and then, as if he had suddenly become conscious of the presence of others, he stared fixedly first at one then at the other. He recognised Ellen.

It was a shocking sight to behold these two miserable wrecks of life and happiness gaze one upon the other. What a tide of feelings and recollections swept over their souls in that short period of time.

It was broken by the voice of Philip Harwood, for it was he himself, uttering a cry that rang with a cadence almost supernatural.

"Ellen!" he exclaimed, and fell upon his knees at the feet of the poor girl, whose physical powers were broken in this last great struggle. With a smile of light, stretching out her hands to him, she said, "Phillip—bless you. My father my mother bless" and fell forward.

Philip received her in his arms: she was dead!

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"I came to ask her forgiveness," he said, in hoarse and broken tones; "I came to forgive all to bless, and behold she is dead!

Philip Harwood had forgiven, but he never never, to his dying day, could forget! These light words, uttered with such ease, should convey a great moral lesson; for to forgive is one of those grand and ennobling sentiments which a man should cherish next to religion; while to forget injuries is to be magnanimous, and to approach for the moment to the loftiest dignity in a man, as a moral agent may attain to.