

## THE FIFTH DAY — *Continued*

FROM SELLIN TO BINZ

SUPPOSE a being who should be neither man nor woman, a creature wholly removed from the temptations that beset either sex, a person who could look on with absolute indifference at all our various ways of wasting life, untouched by the ambitions of man, and unstirred by the longings of woman, what would such a being think of the popular notion against which other uneasy women besides Charlotte raise their voices, that the man should never be bothered by the cares of the house and the babies, but rather go his daily round of business or pleasure precisely as he did before he had his house and his babies? I love to have the details of life arranged with fastidious justice, all its little burdens distributed with an exact fairness among those who have to carry them; and I imagine that this being, who should be rather more than man and less than god, who should understand everything and care nothing, would call it wrong to allot a double weight to

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the strong merely because he is strong, and would call it right that he should have his exact share, and use the strength he has left over not in carrying the burden of some weak friend who, burdenless, is still of no account in life, but in praising God, going first, and showing the others the way.

Thus did I meditate, walking in silence by Charlotte's side in the beech forest of Sellin. Not for anything would I have put my meditations into words, well aware that though they might be nourishing to me they would poison Charlotte. The maiden aunt and the dinner together had given Charlotte a headache, which I respected by keeping silent; and for two hours we wandered and sat about among the beeches, sometimes on the grassy edge of the cliffs, our backs against tree trunks, looking out over the brilliant blue water with its brilliant green shallows, or lying in the grass watching the fine weather clouds floating past between the shining beech-leaves.

Those were glorious hours, for Charlotte dozed most of the time, and it was almost as quiet as though she had not been there at all. No bath-guests parted the branches to stare at us; they were sleeping till the cool of the day. No pedestrians with field-glasses came to look at the view and ask each other, with one attentive eye on us, if it were not colossal. No warm students walked along wiping their foreheads as they sang of love and beer. Nothing that had dined at a *table d'hôte* could possibly move in such heat.



And so it came about that Charlotte and I shared the forest only with birds and squirrels.

This forest is extremely beautiful. It stretches for miles along the coast, and is full of paths and roads that lead you to unexpected lovelinesses—sudden glimpses of the sea between huge beech trunks on grassy plateaus; deep ravines, their sides clothed with moss, with water trickling down over green stones to the sea out in the sun at the bottom; silent glades of bracken, silvery in the afternoon light, where fallow deer examine you for one brief moment of curiosity before they spring away, panic-stricken, into the deeper shadows of the beeches. In that sun-flecked place, so exquisite whichever way I looked, so spacious, and so quiet, how could I be seriously interested in stuffy indoor questions such as the equality of the sexes, in anything but the beauty of the world and the joy of living in it? I was not seriously interested; I doubt if I have ever been. Destiny having decided that I shall walk through life petticoated, weighed down by the entire range of disabilities connected with German petticoats, I will waste no time arguing. There it is, the inexorable fact, and there it will remain; and one gets used to the disabilities, and finds, on looking at them closer, that they exclude nothing that is really worth having.

I glanced at the dozing Charlotte, half inclined to wake her up to tell her this, and exhort her to do as the dragons in the glorious verse of Doctor Watts, who

Changed their fierce hissings into joyful songs,  
And praised their Maker with their forked tongues.

But I was afraid to stir her up lest her tongue should be too forked and split my arguments to pieces. So she dozed on undisturbed, and I enjoyed myself in silence, repeating gems from the pages of the immortal doctor, echoes of the days when I lisped in numbers that were not only infant but English at the knee of a pious nurse from the land of fogs.

At five o'clock, when I felt that a gentle shaking of Charlotte was no longer avoidable if we were to reach Binz that evening, and was preparing to apply it with cousinly gingerliness, an obliging bumble-bee who had been swinging deliciously for some minutes past in the purple flower of a foxglove on the very edge of the cliff, backed out of it and blundered so near Charlotte's face that he brushed it with his wings. Charlotte instantly sat up, opened her eyes, and stared hard at me. Such is the suspiciousness of cousins that though I was lying half a dozen yards away she was manifestly of opinion that I had tickled her. This annoyed me, for Charlotte was the last person in the world I would think of tickling. There was something about her that would make it impossible, however sportively disposed I might be; and besides, you must be very great friends before you begin to tickle. Charlotte and I were cousins, but we were as yet nowhere near being very great friends. I got up, put on my hat, and said rather stiffly, for she still sat staring, that it was time to go. We walked back



in silence, each feeling resentful, and keeping along the cliff passed, just before we came to Sellin, a little restaurant of coloured glass, a round building of an atrocious ugliness, which we discovered was one of the prides of Sellin; for afterwards, driving through the forest to Binz, all the sign-posts had fingers pointing in its direction, and bore the inscription *Glas Pavilion, schönste Aussicht Sellins*. The *schöne Aussicht* was indisputable, but to choose the loveliest spot and blot its beauty with a coloured glass restaurant so close to a place full of restaurants is surely unusually profane. There it is, however, and all day long it industriously scents the forest round it with the smell of soup. People were beginning to gather about its tables, the people we had seen dining and who had slept since, and some of them were already drinking coffee and eating slabs of cherry cake with a pile of whipped cream on each slab, for all the world as though they had had nothing since breakfast. Conspicuous at one table sat the maiden aunt, still rosy from her sleep. She too had ordered cherry cake, and the waiter put it down before her as we came by, and she sat for a moment fondly regarding it, turning the plate round and round so as to take in all its beauties, and if ever a woman looked happy it was that one. 'Poor dumb, half-conscious remnant' — I murmured under my breath. Charlotte seemed to read my thoughts, for she turned her head impatiently away from the cake and the lady, and said once again and defiantly, 'The principle is the same, of course.'

'Of course,' said I.

The drive from Sellin to Binz was by far the most beautiful I had had. Up to that point no drive had been uninterruptedly beautiful, but this one was lovely from end to end. It took about an hour and a half, and we were the whole time in the glorious mixed forest belonging to Prince Putbus and called the Granitz. As we neared Binz the road runs down close to the sea, and through the overhanging branches we could see that we had rounded another headland and were in another bay. Also, after having met nothing but shy troops of deer, we began to pass increasing numbers of bath-guests, walking slowly, taking the gentlest of exercise before their evening meal. Charlotte had been fairly quiet. Her head, apparently, still ached; but suddenly she started and exclaimed 'There are the Harvey-Brownes.'

'And who, pray, are the Harvey-Brownes?' I inquired, following the direction of her eyes.

It was easy enough to see which of the groups of tourists were the Harvey-Brownes. They were going in the same direction as ourselves, a tall couple in clothes of surpassing simplicity and excellence. Immediately afterwards we drove past them; Charlotte bowed coldly; the Harvey-Brownes bowed cordially, and I saw that the young man was my philosophic friend of the afternoon at Vilm.

'And who, pray, are the Harvey-Brownes?' I asked again.

'The English people I told you about who had



got on to my nerves. I thought they'd have left by now.'

'And why were they on your nerves?'

'Oh she's a bishop's wife, and is about the narrowest person I have met, so we're not likely to be anywhere but on each other's nerves. But she adores that son of hers and would do anything in the world that pleases him, and he pursues me.'

'Pursues you?' I cried, with an incredulosity that I immediately perceived was rude. I hastened to correct it by shaking my head in gentle reproof and saying: 'Dear me, Charlotte—dear, dear me.' Simultaneously I was conscious of feeling disappointed in young Harvey-Browne.

'What do you suppose he pursues me for?' Charlotte asked, turning her head and looking at me.

'I can't think,' I was going to say, but stopped in time.

'The most absurd reason. He torments me with attentions because I am Bernhard's wife. He is a hero-worshipper, and he says Bernhard is the greatest man living.'

'Well, but isn't he?'

'He can't get hold of him, so he hovers round me, and talks Bernhard to me for hours together. That's why I went to Thiessow. He was sending me mad.'

'He hasn't an idea, poor innocent, that you don't—that you no longer—'

'I have as much courage as other people, but I

don't think there's enough of it for explaining things to the mother. You see, she's the wife of a bishop.'

Not being so well acquainted as Charlotte with the characteristics of the wives of bishops I did not see; but she seemed to think it explained everything.

'Doesn't she know about your writings?' I inquired.

'Oh yes, and she came to a lecture I gave at Oxford—the boy is at Balliol—and she read some of the pamphlets. He made her.'

'Well?'

'Oh she made a few conventional remarks that showed me her limitations, and then she began about Bernhard. To these people I have no individuality, no separate existence, no brains of my own, no opinions worth listening to—I am solely of interest as the wife of Bernhard. Oh, it's maddening! The boy has put I don't know what ideas into his mother's head. She has actually tried to read one of Bernhard's works, and she pretends she thought it sublime. She quotes it. I won't stay at Binz. Let us go on somewhere else to-morrow.'

'But I think Binz looks as if it were a lovely place, and the Harvey-Brownes look very nice. I am not at all sure that I want to go on somewhere else to-morrow.'

'Then I'll go on alone, and wait for you at Sassnitz.'

'Oh, don't wait. I mightn't come to Sassnitz.'



'Oh well, I'll be sure to pick you up again somewhere. It isn't a very big island, and you are a conspicuous object, driving round it.'

This was true. So long as I was on that island I could not hope to escape Charlotte. I entered Binz in a state of moody acquiescence.

Every hotel was full, and every room in the villas was taken. It was the Göhren experience over again. At last we found shelter by the merest chance in the prettiest house in the place—we had not dared inquire there, certain that its rooms would be taken first of all—a little house on the sands, overhung at the back by beech-woods, its windows garnished with bright yellow damask curtains, its roof very red, and its walls very white. A most cheerful, trim little house, with a nice tiled path up to the door, and pots of geraniums on its sills. A cleanly person of the usual decent widow type welcomed us with a cordiality contrasting pleasantly with the indifference of those widows whose rooms had been all engaged. The entire lower floor, she said, was at our disposal. We each had a bedroom opening on to a verandah that seemed to hang right over the sea; and there was a dining-room, and a beautiful blue-and-white kitchen if we wanted to cook, and a spacious chamber for Gertrud. The price was low. Even when I said that we should probably only stay one or two nights it did not go up. The widow explained that the rooms were engaged for the entire season, but that the Berlin gentleman who had taken them

was unavoidably prevented coming, which was the reason why we might have them, for it was not her habit to take in the passing stranger.

I asked whether it were likely that the Berlin gentleman might yet appear and turn us out. She stared at me a moment as though struck by my question, and then shook her head. 'No, no,' she said decidedly; 'he will not appear.'

A very pretty little maidservant who was bringing in our luggage was so much perturbed by my innocent inquiry that she let the things drop.

'Hedwig, do not be a fool,' said the widow sternly. 'The gentleman,' she went on, turning to me, 'cannot come, because he is dead.'

'Oh,' I said, silenced by the excellence of the reason.

Charlotte, being readier of speech, said 'Indeed.'

The reason was a good one; but when I heard it it seemed as if the pleasant rooms with the beds all ready and everything set out for the expected one took on a look of awfulness. It is true it was now past eight o'clock, and the sun had gone, and across the bay the dusk was creeping. I went out through the long windows to the little verandah. It had white pillars of great apparent massiveness, which looked as though they were meant to support vast weights of masonry; and through them I watched the water rippling in slow, steely ripples along the sand just beneath me, and the ripples had the peculiar lonely sound that slight waves have in the evening when they lick a deserted shore.