THE TENTH DAY

FROM WIEK TO HIDDENSEE

THE island to which Charlotte had retired was the island of Hiddensee, a narrow strip of sand to the west of Rügen. Generally so wordy, the guide-book merely mentions it as a place to which it is possible for Rügen tourists to make excursions, and proffers with a certain timidity the information that pleasure may be had there in observing the life and habits of sea-birds.

To this place of sea-birds Charlotte had gone, as she wrote in a letter left with the landlady for me, because during the night she spent at Wiek a panic had seized her lest the Harvey-Brownes should by some chance appear there in their wanderings before I did. 'I daresay they will not dream of coming round this way at all,' she continued, 'but you never know.'

You certainly never know, I agreed, Mrs. Harvey-Browne being at that very moment in the room Charlotte had had the panic in; and I lay awake elaborating a most beautiful plan by which I intended at one stroke to reunite Charlotte

and her husband and free myself of both of them.

This plan came into my head during the evening while sitting sadly listening to something extremely like a scolding from the Professor. It seemed to me that I had done all in my power short of inhumanity to the horses to help him, and it was surely not my fault that Charlotte had not happened to stay anywhere long enough for us to catch her up. My intentions were so good. Far preferring to drive alone and stop where and when I pleased — at Vitt for instance, among the walnut trees — I had yet given up all my preferences so that I might help bring man and wife together. If anything, did not this conduct incline towards the noble?

'Your extreme simplicity amazes me,' remarked the wise relative when, arrived at this part of my story on my return home, I plaintively asked the above question. 'Under no circumstances is the meddler ever thanked.'

'Meddler? Helper, you mean. Apparently you would call every person who helps a meddler.'

'*Armes Kind*, proceed with the story.'

Well, the Professor, who had suffered much in the hood between Arkona and Wiek, and was more irritated by his disappointment on getting to Wiek than seemed consistent with the supposed serenity of the truly wise, was telling me for the tenth time that if I had brought him on at once from Glowe as he begged me to do we would not only have escaped the Harvey-Brownes but would

have caught his Charlotte by now, seeing that she had not left Wiek for Hiddensee till eight o'clock of this Saturday we had now got to, and I was drooping more and more under these reproaches when, with the suddenness of inspiration, the beautiful plan flooded my dejected brain with such a cheerful light that I lifted my head and laughed in the Professor's face.

'Now pray tell me,' he exclaimed, stopping short in his strides about the room, 'what thou seest to laugh at in my present condition?'

'Nothing in your present condition. It's the glories of your future one that made me laugh.'

'Surely that is not a subject on which one laughs. Nor will I discuss it with a woman. Nor is this the place or the moment. I refer thee'—and he swept round his arm as though to sweep me altogether out of sight,—'I refer thee to thy pastor.'

'Dearest Professor, don't be so dreadfully cross. The future state I was thinking of isn't further off than to-morrow. Sometimes there's a cunning about a woman's wit that you great artists in profundity don't possess. You can't, of course, because you are so busy being wise on a large scale. But it's quite useful to have some cunning when you have to work out petty schemes. And I tell you solemnly that at this moment I am full of it.'

He stopped again in his striding. The good landlady and her one handmaiden were laying the

table for supper. Mrs. Harvey-Browne had gone upstairs to put on those evening robes in which, it appeared, she had nightly astonished the ignorant tourists of Rügen. Brosy had not been seen at all since our arrival.

'What thou art full of is nothing but poking of fun at me, I fear,' said the Professor; but his kind old face began to smooth out a little.

'I'm not. I'm only full of artfulness, and anxious to put it all at your disposal. But you mustn't be quite so cross. Pray, am I no longer then your little and dear cousin?'

'When thou art good, yes.'

'Whom to pat is pleasant?'

'Yes, yes, it is pleasant, but if unreasonableness develops——'

'And with whom to sit under one umbrella is a joy?'

'Surely, surely—but thou hast been of a great obstinacy——'

'Well, come and sit here and let us be happy. We're very comfortable here, aren't we? Don't let us think any more about the wet, horrid, obstinate, disappointing day we've had. And as for to-morrow, I've got a plan.'

The Professor, who had begun to calm, sat down beside me on the sofa. The landlord, deft and noiseless, was giving a finishing touch of roses and fruit and candles to the supper table. He had been a butler in a good family, and was of the most beautiful dignity and solemnity. We were sitting in a very queer old room, used in past years

for balls to which the quality drove in from their distant estates and danced through winter nights. There was a gallery for the fiddlers, and the chairs and benches ranged round the walls were still covered with a festive-looking faded red stuff. In the middle of this room the landlord had put a table for us to sup at, and had arranged it in a way I had not seen since leaving home. No one else was in the house but ourselves. No one, hardly, of the tourist class comes to Wiek; and yet, or because of it, this inn of all the inns I had stayed at was in every way quite excellent.

'Tell me then thy plan, little one,' said the Professor, settling himself comfortably into the sofa corner.

'Oh, it's quite simple. You and I to-morrow morning will go to Hiddensee.'

'Go! Yes, but how? It is Sunday, and even if it were not, no steamers seem to go to what appears to be a spot of great desolation.'

'We'll hire a fishing-smack.'

'And if there is no wind?'

'We'll pray for wind.'

'And I shall spend an entire day within the cramped limits of a vessel in the company of the English female bishop? I tell thee it is not to be accomplished.'

'No, no — of course they mustn't come too.'

'Come? She will come if she wishes to. Never did I meet a more commanding woman.'

'No, no, we must circumvent the Harvey-Brownes.'

'Do thou stay here then, and circumvent. Then shall I proceed in safety on my way.'

'Oh no,' I exclaimed in some consternation; the success of my plan, which was by no means to be explained in its entirety to the Professor, wholly depended on my going too. 'I — I want to see Charlotte again. You know I'm — fond of Charlotte. And besides, long before you got to Hiddensee you would have sunk into another abstraction and begun to fish or something, and you'd come back here in the evening with no Charlotte and only fishes.'

'Tut, tut — well do I now know what is the object I have in view.'

'Don't be so proud. Remember Pilatus.'

'Tut, tut. Thou art beginning to be like a conscience to me, rebuking and urging onwards the poor old man in bewildering alternations. But I tell thee there is no hope of setting sail without the English madam unless thou remainest here while I secretly slip away.'

'I won't remain here. I'm coming too. Leave the arrangements to me, dearest Professor, and you'll see we'll secretly slip away together.'

Mrs. Harvey-Browne sweeping in at that moment in impressive garments that trailed, our conversation had to end abruptly. The landlord lit the candles; the landlady brought in the soup; Brosy appeared dressed as one dresses in civilised regions. 'Cheer up,' I whispered to the Professor as I got up from the sofa; and he cheered up so immediately and so excessively that before I could

stop him, before I could realise what he was going to do, he had actually chucked me under the chin.

We spent a constrained evening. The one remark Mrs. Harvey-Browne addressed to me during the hours that followed this chin-chucking was: 'I am altogether at a loss to understand Frau Nieberlein's having retired, without her husband, to yet another island. Why this regrettable multiplicity of islands?'

To which I could only answer that I did not know.

The next day being Sunday, a small boy went up into the wooden belfry of the church, which was just opposite my window, and began to toll two bells. The belfry is built separate from the church, and commands a view into the room of the inn that was my bedroom. I could see the small boy walking leisurely from bell to bell, giving each a pull, and then refreshing himself by leaning out and staring hard at me. I got my opera-glasses and examined him with equal care, trying to stare him out of countenance; but though a small he was also a bold boy and not to be abashed, and as I would not give in either we stared at each other steadily between the tolls till nine o'clock, when the bell-ringing ceased, service began, and he reluctantly went down into the church, where I suppose he had to join in the singing of the tune to which in England the hymn beginning 'All glory, laud, and honour,' is sung, for it presently floated out into the quiet little market-place, filling it with the feeling of Sunday.

While I lingered at the window listening to this, I saw Mrs. Harvey-Browne emerge from the inn door in her Sunday toque, and, crossing the market-place followed by Brosy, go into the church. In an instant I had whisked into my hat, and hurrying downstairs to the Professor who was strolling up and down a rose-bordered path in the garden at the back of the house, informed him breathlessly that the Harvey-Brownes might now be looked upon as circumvented.

'What, already? Thou art truly a wonderful ally!' he exclaimed in great glee.

'Oh *that's* nothing,' I replied modestly; as indeed it was.

'Let us start at once then,' he cried briskly; and we accordingly started, slipping out of the house and round the corner down to the quay.

The sun was shining, the ground was drying, there was a slight breeze from the east which ought, the landlord said, to blow us gently to Hiddensee if it kept up in about four hours. All my arrangements had been made the night before with the aid of August and Gertrud, and the brig *Bertha*, quite an imposing-looking craft that plied on week-days, weather permitting, between Wiek and Stralsund, had been hired for the day at a cost of fifteen marks, including a skipper with one eye and four able seamen. The brig *Bertha* seemed to me very cheap. She was to be at my disposal from dawn till as far into the night as I wanted her. All the time the bell-boy and I were exchanging increasingly sarcastic stares she was lying at the quay

ready to start at any moment. She had been chartered in my name, and for that one day she, her skipper, and her four able seamen, belonged entirely to me.

Gertrud was waiting on board, and had arranged a sort of nest of rugs and cushions for me. The landlady and her servant were also there, with a basket of home-made cakes, and cherries out of the inn garden. This landlady, by the way, was quite ideal. Her one aim seemed to be to do things like baking cakes for her visitors and not putting them in the bill. I met nothing else at all like her or her husband on my journey round Rügen or anywhere else. Their simple kindness shall not go unsung; and therefore do I pause here, with one foot on the quay and the other on the brig *Bertha*, to sing it. But indeed the traveller who does not yearn for waiters and has no prejudices against crawling up a staircase so steep that it is practically a ladder when he wants to go to bed, who loves quiet, is not insensible to the charms of good cooking, and thinks bathing and sailing agreeable pastimes, could be extremely happy at a very small cost at Wiek. And when all other pleasures are exhausted he can hire the *Bertha* and go to Hiddensee and study sea-birds.

'Thou takest the excellent but unprepossessing Gertrud with thee?' inquired the Professor in a slightly displeased voice, seeing her immovable and the sails being hoisted.

'Yes. I don't like being sick without her.'

'Sick! There will hardly be a sufficiency of wind for the needs of the vessel — how wilt thou be sick in a calm?'

'How can I tell till I have tried?'

Oh gay voyage down the Wieker Bodden, over the little dancing waves, under the serene summer sky! Oh blessed change from the creaking of a carriage through dust to rippling silence and freshness! The Professor was in such spirits that he could hardly be kept from doing what he called manning the yards, and had to be fetched down when he began to clamber by the alarmed skipper. Gertrud sat watching for the first glimpse of our destination with the intentness of a second Brangäne. The wind could hardly be said to blow us along, it was so very gentle, but it did waft us along smoothly and steadily, and Wiek slipped into distance and its bells into silence, and the occasional solitary farms on the flat shores slid away one after the other, and the farthest point ahead came to meet us, dropped astern, became the farthest point behind, and we were far on our way while we were thinking we could hardly be moving. The reader who looks at the map will see the course we took, and how with that gentle wind it came to be nearly twelve before we rounded the corner of the Wieker Bodden, passed a sandbank crowded with hundreds of sea-gulls, and headed for the northern end of Hiddensee.

Hiddensee lay stretched out from north to south, long and narrow, like a lizard lying in the sun. It is absolutely flat, a mere sandbank, except at the northern end where it swells up

into hills and a lighthouse. There are only two villages on it with inns, the one called Vitte, built on a strip of sand so low, so level with the sea that it looks as if an extra big wave, or indeed any wave, must wash right over it and clean it off the face of the earth; and the other called Kloster, where Charlotte was.

I observe that on the map Kloster is printed in large letters, as though it were a place of some importance. It is a very pretty, very small, handful of fishermen's cottages, one little line of them in a green nest of rushes and willows along the water's edge, with a hill at the back, and some way up the hill a small, dilapidated church, forlorn and spireless, in a churchyard bare of trees.

We dropped anchor in the glassy bay about two o'clock, the last bit of the Vitter Bodden having been slow, almost windless work, and were rowed ashore in a dinghy, there not being enough water within a hundred yards to float so majestic a craft as the *Bertha*. The skipper leaned over the side of his brig watching us go and wishing us *viel Vergnügen*. The dinghy and the two rowers were to wait at the little landing-stage till such time as we should want them again. Gertrud came with us, carrying the landlady's basket of food.

'Once more thou takest the excellent but unprepossessing Gertrud with thee?' inquired the Professor with increased displeasure.

'Yes. To carry the cakes.'

'Tut, tut.' And he muttered something that

sounded irritable about the *lieber Gott* having strewn the world with so many plain women.

'*This* isn't the time to bother about plain women,' I said. 'Don't you feel in every fibre that you are within a stone's throw of your Charlotte? I am sure we have caught her this time.'

For a moment he had forgotten Charlotte, and all his face grew radiant at the reminder. With the alacrity of eighteen he leapt ashore, and we hurried along a narrow rushy path at the water's edge to the one inn, a small cottage of the simplest sort, overlooking green fields and placid water. A trim servant in Sunday raiment was clearing away coffee cups from a table in the tiny front garden, and of her we asked, with some trembling after our many disappointments, whether Frau Nieberlein were there.

Yes, she was staying there, but had gone up on to the downs after dinner. In which direction? Past the church, up the lighthouse way.

The Professor darted off before she had done. I hastened after him. Gertrud waited at the inn. With my own eyes I wished to see that he actually did meet Charlotte, for the least thing would make him forget what he had come for; and so nimble was he, so winged with love, that I had to make desperate and panting efforts to get up to the top of the hill as soon as he did. Up we sped in silence past the bleak churchyard on to what turned out to be the most glorious downs. On the top the Professor stopped a moment to wipe

his forehead, and looking back for the first time I was absolutely startled by the loveliness of the view. The shining Bodden with its bays and little islands lay beneath us, to the north was the sea, to the west the sea, to the east, right away on the other side of distant Rügen, the sea; far in the south rose the towers of Stralsund; close behind us a forest of young pines filled the air with warm waves of fragrance; at our feet the turf was thick with flowers, — oh, wide and splendid world! How good it is to look sometimes across great spaces, to lift one's eyes from narrowness, to feel the large silence that rests on lonely hills! Motionless we stood before this sudden unrolling of the beauty of God's earth. The place seemed full of a serene and mighty Presence. Far up near the clouds a solitary lark was singing its joys. There was no other sound.

I believe if I had not been with him the Professor would again have forgotten Charlotte, and lying down on the flowery turf with his eyes on that most beautiful of views have given himself over to abstractions. But I stopped him at the very moment when he was preparing to sink to the ground. 'No, no,' I besought, 'don't sit down.'

'Not sit? And why, then, shall not a warm old man sit?'

'First let us find Charlotte.' At the bare mention of the name he began to run.

The inn servant had said Charlotte had gone

up to the lighthouse. From where we were we could not see it, but hurrying through a corner of the pine-wood we came out on the north end of Hiddensee, and there it was on the edge of the cliff. Then my heart began to beat with mingled feelings — exultation that I should be on the verge of doing so much good, fear lest my plan by some fatal mishap should be spoilt, or, if it succeeded, my actions be misjudged. 'Wait a moment,' I murmured faintly, laying a trembling hand on the Professor's arm. 'Dear Professor, wait a moment — Charlotte must be quite close now — I don't want to intrude on you both at first, so please, will you give her this letter' — and I pulled it with great difficulty, it being fat and my fingers shaky, out of my pocket, the eloquent letter I had written in the dawn at Stubbenkammer, and pressed it into his hand, — 'give it to her with my love — with my very dear love.'

'Yes, yes,' said the Professor, impatient of these speeches, and only desirous of getting on. He crushed the letter unquestioningly into his pocket and we resumed our hurried walking. The footpath led us across a flowery slope ending in a cliff that dropped down on the sunset side of the island to the sea. We had not gone many yards before we saw a single figure sitting on this slope, its back to us, its slightly dejected head and shoulders appearing above the crowd of wild-flowers — scabious, harebells, and cow-parsley, through whose frail loveliness flashed the shimmering sea. It was Charlotte.

I seized the Professor's hand. 'Look — there she is,' I whispered in great excitement, holding him back for one instant. 'Give me time to get out of sight — don't forget the letter — let me get into the wood first, and then go to her. Now, all blessings be with thee, dearest Professor — good luck to you both! You'll see how happy you both are going to be!' And wringing his hand with a fervour that evidently surprised him, I turned and fled.

Oh, how I fled! Never have I run so fast, with such a nightmare feeling of covering no ground. Back through the wood, out on the other side, straight as an arrow down the hill towards the Bodden, taking the shortest cut over the turf to Kloster — oh, how I ran! It makes me breathless now to think of it. As if pursued by demons I ran, not daring to look back, not daring to stop and gasp, away I flew, past the church, past the parson, who I remember stared at me aghast over his garden wall, past the willows, past the rushes, down to the landing-stage and Gertrud. Everything was ready. I had given the strictest private instructions; and dropping speechless into the dinghy, a palpitating mixture of heat, anxiety, and rapture, was rowed as fast as two strong men could row me to the brig and the waiting skipper.

The wind was terribly light, the water terribly glassy. At first I lay in a quivering heap on the cushions, hardly daring to think we were not moving, hardly daring to remember how I had

seen a small boat tied to a stake in front of the inn, and that if the *Bertha* did not get away soon ——

Then Fortune smiled on the doer of good, a gentle puff filled the sails, there was a distinct rippling across the bows, it increased to a gurgle, and Kloster with its willows, its downs, its one inn, and its impossibility of being got out of, silently withdrew into shadows.

Then did I stretch myself out on my rugs with a deep sigh of relief and allow Gertrud to fuss over me. Never have I felt so nice, so kind, so exactly like a ministering angel. How grateful the dear old Professor would be! And Charlotte too, when she had read my letter and listened to all he had to say; she would have to listen, she wouldn't be able to help herself, and there would be heaps of time. I laughed aloud for joy at the success of my plan. There they were on that tiny island, and there they would have to stay at least till to-morrow, probably longer. Perhaps they would get so fond of it that they would stay on there indefinitely. Anyhow I had certainly reunited them — reunited them and freed myself. Emphatically this was one of those good actions that blesses him who acts and him who is acted upon; and never did well-doer glow with a warmer consciousness of having done well than I glowed as I lay on the deck of the *Bertha* watching the sea-gulls in great comfort, and eating not only my own cherries but the Professor's as well.

All the way up the Wieker Bodden we had to

tack. Hour after hour we tacked, and seemed to get no nearer home. The afternoon wore on, the evening came, and still we tacked. The sun set gloriously, the moon came up, the sea was a deep violet, the clouds in the eastern sky about the moon shone with a pearly whiteness, the clouds in the west were gorgeous past belief, flaming across in marvellous colours even to us, the light reflected from them transfiguring our sails, our men, our whole boat into a spirit ship of an unearthly radiance, bound for Elysium, manned by immortal gods.

> Look now how Colour, the Soul's bridegroom, makes
> The house of Heaven splendid for the bride. . . .

I quoted awestruck, watching this vast plain of light with clasped hands and rapt spirit.

It was a solemn and magnificent close to my journey.

THE ELEVENTH DAY

FROM WIEK HOME

The traveller in whose interests I began this book and who has so frequently been forgotten during the writing of it, might very well protest here that I have not yet been all round Rügen, and should not, therefore, talk of closes to my journey. But nothing that the traveller can say will keep me from going home in this chapter. I did go home on the morning of the eleventh day, driving from Wiek to Bergen, and taking the train from there; and the red line on the map will show that, except for one dull corner in the south-east, I had practically carried out my original plan and really had driven all round the island.

Reaching the inn at Wiek at ten o'clock on the Sunday night I went straight and very softly to bed; and leaving the inn at Wiek at eight o'clock on the Monday morning I might have got away without ever seeing Mrs. Harvey-Browne again if the remembrance of Brosy's unvarying kindness had not stirred me to send Gertrud up with a farewell message.