1 PLOT OUTLINE: The Dove in the Eagle’s Nest (1866)
Christina Sorel, brought up by an uncle in the prosperous city of Ulm in late fifteenth-century Germany, is taken away by her father, a freelance soldier, to tend the sickly daughter of the noble Adlersteins, in whose service he is. Noble they may be, in terms of descent and family pride, for Adlerstein is a free barony; but — compared to the comfort and civilisation of bürgerlich life in Ulm — that at the towering castle (the name means Eagle’s Rock) is impoverished and primitive. These nobles live off what they can pillage from travellers, glorying in owing allegiance to no overlord. Christina (the ‘dove’) is terrified at the prospect, but duty and compassion render her resolute to endure. Although she nurses the sick girl tenderly, she cannot save her life. However, Christina and young Baron Eberhard fall in love and marry secretly. When he and his father are reported killed in a raid, the twin boys whom Christina bears become the hope of the family; and Christina’s haughty and ruthless mother-in-law tolerates the burgler girl for their sake. When the mother-in-law dies, Christina, as guardian of her two children, must rule and manage castle and vassals. She does so alone, refusing an offer of marriage from an eligible nobleman. She reduces the lawless feuding between Adlerstein and its equally wild and pugnacious neighbours of Schlangenwald (Snakes’ Wood); and she tries to check the raids upon travellers. Her two boys grow up agile, intrepid and devoted to their mother, who imbues them with Christian faith and old-style chivalry: young baron Eberhard (Ebbo) has the prouder temperament; Friedel is more peaceable and artistic. At the age of sixteen they encounter the outside world for the first time, when Christina takes them to visit Ulm. Modern knighthood — pageantry and accoutrements rather than dedication and courage — disgusts them. But Emperor Maximilian is their hero, and Ebbo decides that on attaining his majority he will renounce his Freiherr status and pledge allegiance to the emperor. Upon a hint that their father may be alive, Friedel wishes to seek him; but Ebbo is concerned to link Adlerstein with the outside world. The hostile Schlangenwalds attack; in the ensuing battle, Ebbo is wounded and Friedel killed, as is count Schlangenwald. Hence the feuding reduces, and Ebbo and Christina undertake reforms which mean the start of prosperous cooperation between Adlerstein and the cities and merchant guilds. Meanwhile Christina’s husband has been found by the Emperor’s agents and ransomed from slavery in a Moorish pirate galleys. Young Ebbo is eighteen and in full command of the barony by the time his father returns. The latter — aged and broken — readily cedes all authority to him, recognising that he himself cannot cope with so different a world. Moreover, he is changed and chastened by suffering: throughout his servitude in the galleys, he has clung to his Christianity, out of a mixture of obstinacy and respect for his wife’s faith. He lives out his remaining days as a returned pilgrim. The book ends with a vignette of Adlerstein at peace in 1531, but with forebodings of the religious wars to come.

2 The Dove in the Eagle’s Nest, ch. 10, p. 109
One regret their mother had, almost amounting to shame. Every virtuous person believed in the efficacy of the rod, and, maugre her own docility, she had been chastised with it almost as a religious duty; but her sons had never felt the weight of a blow, except once when their grandmother caught them carving a border of eagles and doves round the hall table, and then Ebbo had returned the blow with all his might. As to herself, if she ever worked herself up to attempt chastisement, the Baroness was sure to fall upon her for insulting the noble birth of her sons, and thus gave them a triumph far worse for them than impunity. In truth, the boys had their own way, or rather the Baron [Ebbo] had his way, and his way was Baron Friedmund’s. Poor, bare, and scanty as were all the surroundings of their life, everything was done to feed their arrogance, with only one influence to counteract their education in pride and violence—a mother’s influence, indeed, but her authority was studiously taken from her, and her position set at naught, with no power save what she might derive from their love and involuntary honour, and the sight of the pain caused her by their wrong-doings.

3 The Dove in the Eagle’s Nest, ch. 24, p. 277
... Sir Eberhard had travelled as far as Aosta with a party of Italian merchants; but no sooner had he parted with them than he was completely astray. His whole experience of life had been as a robber baron or as a slave, and he knew not how to take care of himself as a peaceful travellers; he suffered fresh extortions at every stage, and after a few days was plundered by his guides, beaten, and left devoid of all means of continuing the journey to which he could hardly hope for a cheerful end.
He did not expect to find his mother living, — far less that his unowned wife could have survived the perils in which he had involved her; and he believed that his ancestral home would, if not a ruin, be held by his foes, or at best by the rival branch of the family, whose welcome of the outlawed heir would probably be to a dungeon, if not a halter. Yet the only magnet on earth for the lonely wanderer was his native mountain, where from some old peasant he might learn how his fair young bride had perished, and perhaps the sins of his youth might be expiated by continual prayer in the hermitage chapel where his sister lay buried, and whence he could see the crags for which his eye and heart had craved so long with the home-sickness of a mountaineer.

And now, when his own Christina had welcomed him with all the overflow of her loving heart, unchanged save that hers had become a tenderer yet more dignified loveliness; when his gallant son, in all the bloom of young manhood, received him with dutiful submission; when the castle, in a state of defence, prosperity, and comfort of which he had never dreamt, was again his own; — still the old man was bewildered, and sometimes oppressed almost to distress. He had, as it were, fallen asleep in one age of the world, and wakened in another, and it seemed as if he really wished to defer his wakening, or else that repose was an absolute novelty to him; for he sat dozing in his chair in the sun the whole of the next day, and scarcely spoke.

Ebbo, who felt it a necessity to come to an understanding of the terms on which they were to stand, tried to refer matters to him, and to explain the past, but he was met sometimes by a shake of the head, sometimes by a nod — not of assent, but of sleep; and his mother advised him not to harass the weary traveller, but to leave him to himself at least for that day, and let him take his own time for exertion, letting things meantime go on as usual. Ebbo obeyed, but with a load at his heart, as he felt that all he was doing was but provisional, and that it would be his duty to resign all that he had planned, and partly executed, to this incompetent, ignorant rule. He could certainly, when not serving the Emperor, go and act for himself at Thekla’s dower castle of Felsenbach, and his mother might save things from going to utter ruin at Adlerstein; but no reflection or self-reproach could make it otherwise than a bitter pill to any Telemachus to have to resign to one so unlike Ulysses in all but the length of his wanderings, — one, also, who seemed only half to like, and not at all to comprehend, his Telemachus.

Meantime Ebbo attended to such matters as were sure to come each day before the Herr Freiherr. …

4 PLOT OUTLINE: The Clever Woman of the Family (1865)
The heroine, Rachel Curtis — the “clever woman” of the title — feels that at 25 (no longer a girl, and not looking for marriage) she can start deciding for herself instead of deferring to the conventionalities of her widowed mother and the society of their small seaside town. The place offers no scope for action nor even for the intelligent discussion which the forthright Rachel craves; and she feels complete — but misplaced — confidence in her own intellectual and organisational powers. The novel traces how she is brought to admit her own limitations, and comes to a recognition of the abilities and judgment of other people. To reform the lot of children toiling in small scale sweatshops at lacemaking is Rachel’s aim; but she is taken in by a plausible conman who defrauds her private charity. This revelation coincides with the death from abuse of one of the children whom Rachel wrongly believed she was helping to learn a new trade. Rachel’s behaviour at this crisis — for she undergoes a breakdown of both health and faith — is contrasted with that of various people whose outlook she had previously scorned and / or patronised as narrow and conventional. One of these is her widowed cousin Fanny Temple, who actually initiates decisive action in rescuing the abused lacemakers, shaming and confounding Rachel. But Rachel’s straightforward sincerity has nevertheless earned her some respect and love: from Ermine Williams, a wheelchair-bound writer; from Ermine’s long-lost fiancé Colonel Colin Keith; and from Alick Keith, a young officer on sick leave after heroic service in the Indian Mutiny.

The subplot concerns Ermine Williams, who, when crippled in a terrible accident, had felt it right to break off an engagement with Colin Keith that was in any case disapproved of by both families. In the course of twelve years, they have lost contact and she believes him dead. His military career has now been ended by ill-health; once he rediscovers her, his continued intention still to marry her is thwarted until nearly the end of the novel by various family circumstances. One of these is the disgrace accruing to her brother, suspected of embezzlement his firm’s money. The real embezzler proves to be the same conman who has taken in Rachel; his arrest and conviction mean that Ermine and her colonel can marry at last.

The other chief military character is Alick Keith — perceived first through Rachel’s prejudiced eyes as a mere military idler — who turns out to have earned the Victoria Cross for saving many lives. He admires Rachel’s truthful directness — a commendable contrast with the manipulative charm of his own sister. His long convalescence has given him insight into suffering and rendered him a sensitive and caring nurturer for the shattered Rachel. He woos and wins her: a honeymoon visit to his vicar uncle (pretty well a portrait of John Keble) gives her the opportunity to engage in an examination of the foundations of Christianity that will help restore her faltering faith.
The Clever Woman of the Family, ch. 6, p. 80-82 M. = 146-149 B.

'The boys have gone to their favourite cove under the plantation. They have a fort there, and Hubert told me he was to be a hero, and [their governess] a she-ro.'

'I would not encourage that description of sport,' said Rachel, willing to fight a battle in order to avert maternal anecdotes of boyish sayings.

'They like it so much,' said Fanny, 'and they learn so much now that they act all the battles they read about.'

'That is what I object to,' said Rachel; 'it is accustomed them to confound heroism with pugnacity.'

'No, but Rachel dear, they do quarrel and fight among themselves much less now that this is all in play and good humour,' pleaded Fanny.

'Yes, that may be, but you are cultivating the dangerous instinct, although for a moment giving it a better direction.'

'Dangerous? Oh, Alick! do you think it can be?' said Fanny, less easily borne down with a supporter beside her.

'According to the Peace Society,' he answered, with a quiet air of courteous deference; 'perhaps you belong to it?'

'No, indeed,' answered Rachel, rather indignantly, 'I think war the great purifier and ennobler of nations, when it is for a good and great cause; but I think education ought to protest against confounding mere love of combat with heroism.'

'Query, the true meaning of the word?' he said, leaning back.

'Heros, yes from the same root as the German herr,' readily responded Rachel, 'meaning no more than lord and master; but there can be no doubt that the progress of ideas has linked with it a much nobler association.'

'Progress! What, since the heroes were half divine!'

'Half divine in the esteem of a people who thought brute courage godlike. To us the word maintains its semi-divinity, and it should be our effort to associate it only with that which veritably has the god-like stamp.'

'And that is — ?'

'Doing more than one's duty,' exclaimed Rachel, with a glistening eye.

'Very uncomfortable and superfluous, and not at all easy,' he said, half shutting his already heavy eyes.

'Easy, no, that's the beauty and the glory — ' ... 'No words have been more basely misused than hero and heroine. The one is the mere fighting animal whose strength or fortune have borne him through some more than ordinary danger, the other is only the subject of an adventure, perfectly irrespective of her conduct in it.'

'Bathos attends all high words,' he said, as she paused, chiefly to see whether he was awake ...

'This is not their natural bathos but their misuse. They ought to be reserved for those who in any department have passed the limits to which the necessity of their position constrained them, and done acts of self-devotion for the good of others. I will give you an instance, and from your own profession, that you may see I am not prejudiced, besides, the hero of it is past praise or blame.' Encouraged by seeing a little more of his eyes, she went on. 'It was in the course of the siege of Delhi, a shell came into a tent where some sick and wounded were lying. There was one young officer among them who could move enough to have had a chance of escaping the explosion, but instead of that he took the shell up, its fuse burning as it was, and ran with it out of the tent, then hurled it to a distance. It exploded, and of course was his death, but the rest were saved, and I call that a deed of heroism far greater than mounting a breach or leading a forlorn hope.'

'Killed, you say?' inquired Mr. Keith, still in the same lethargic manner.

'Oh yes, mortally wounded: carried back to die among the men he had saved.'

'Jessie Cameron singing his dirge,' mumbled this provoking individual, with something about the form of his cheek that being taken by Rachel for a derisive smile, made her exclain vehemently, 'You do not mean to undervalue an action like that in comparison with mere animal pugnacity in an advance.'

'More than one's duty was your test,' he said.

'And was not this more than duty? Ah! I see yours is a spirit of depreciation, and I can only say I pity you.'

The Clever Woman of the Family, ch. 7, p. 100-101 M. = 174-176 B.

Colonel Keith's tone was different. He was argumentative where his young cousin was sarcastic. He was reading some of the books over which Rachel had strained her capacities without finding any one with whom to discuss them, since all her friends regarded them as poisonous; and even Ermine Williams, without being shaken in her steadfast trust, was so haunted and distressed in her lonely and unvaried life by the echo of these shocks to the faith of others, that absolutely as a medical precaution she abstained from dwelling on them. On the other hand Colin Keith liked to talk and argue out his impressions, and found in Rachel the only person with whom the subject could be safely broached, and thus she for the first time heard the subjects fairly handled. Hitherto she had never thought that justice was done to the argument except by a portion of the press, that drew conclusions which terrified while they allured her, whereas she appreciated the candour that weighed each argument, distinguishing principle from prejudice, and religious faith from conventional construction, and in this
measurement of minds she felt the strength, and acuteness of powers superior to her own. He was not one of the men who prefer unintellectual women. Perhaps clever men, of a profession not necessarily requiring constant brain work, are not so much inclined to rest the mind with feminine empty chatter, as are those whose intellect is more on the strain.

7 The Clever Woman of the Family, ch. 14, p. 178-179 M. = 283-284 B.

‘Ah! your sister said you had the greatest dislike to hero worship.’

‘A natural sense of humbug,’ he said. ‘I don’t know why they gave me this,’ he added, touching his [Victoria] cross, ‘unless it was that one of the party in the bungalow had a turn for glorifying whatever happened to himself. Plenty of more really gallant things happened every day, and were never heard of, and I, who absolutely saw next to nothing of the campaign, have little right to be decorated.’

‘Ah!’ said Rachel, thoughtfully, ‘I have always wondered whether one would be happier for having accomplished an act of heroism.’

‘I do not know,’ said Alick, thoughtfully; then, as Rachel looked up with a smile of amazement, ‘Oh, you mean this; but it was mere self-preservation. I could hardly even have bolted, for I was laid up with fever, and was very shaky on my legs.’

‘I suppose, however,’ said Rachel, ‘that the vision of one’s life in entering the army would be to win that sort of distinction, and so young.’

‘Win it as some have done,’ said Alick, ‘and deserve what is far better worth than distinction. That may be the dream, but, after all, it is the discipline and constant duty that make the soldier, and are far more really valuable than exceptional doings.’

‘People must always be ready for them, though,’ said Rachel

‘And they are,’ said Alick, with grave exultation in his tone.

8 The Clever Woman of the Family, ch. 26, p. 322 M. = 485 B.

‘I don’t know! I had no power to read or think for a long time, and now, since I have been here, I hope it has not been hypocrisy, for going on in your way and his has been very sweet to me, and made me feel as I usually did, that, as I was a young girl, with only an ugly dream between. I don’t like to look at it, and yet that dream was my real life that I made for myself.’

‘Dear child, I have little doubt that Alick knew it would come to this.’ [said Mr. Clare].

Rachel paused. ‘What, you and he think a woman’s doubts so vague and shallow as to be always mastered by a husband’s influence?’ Mr. Clare was embarrassed. If he had thought so he had not expected her to make the inference.

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