


The Spectacles

BY OWEN OLIVER.



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I THINK when I come to the end of my life—and if God pleases that will be a long time yet, for I was only nineteen yesterday—I shall have to thank the Mother Superior last but two for any good that I have done. I was only eight years old when I was sent to the Convent School, and she used to take me on her knee and tell me stories that I remembered better than the lessons.

There was one about a sower who scattered seeds in a bare land, and, long after the sower had died it was a place green with grass and trees. We were all sowers, she told me, and the things that we said and did were the seeds. So we must be careful that they were good ones.

There was another story about the man who had two pairs of spectacles. One pair shut out all the good in the world, and he saw nothing but evil, and the other pair shut out all the evil, and he saw nothing but good. He wore the first pair for seven years, and he became unkind and selfish and loved nobody. Then an angel took them away while he was asleep, and put the others in their place, and so he saw only the goodness of the world, and he grew kind and unselfish, and loved everybody.

"It is not the world that makes us

good or bad, *petite Elise*," the dear Mother said, "but what we take from it. Try to see the goodness of everything, and when you have seen it, lift up your voice and tell it to the glory of God!"

And that is why I am telling this story.

I think I was sent to the Convent School because Satan changed my father's spectacles, and gave him the bad ones. My mother and I were in a ship that went down, and I was saved and mother was not. Father loved her very much, and wished that she had been saved instead of me; and so he did not want to see me any more. So he sent me to a Convent School in France, and I never saw him again. I was eighteen years and seven months old when he died and left me a great deal of money.

A lawyer came from England to tell me. My first ideas of him were not kind. I thought he was an ugly old gentleman, shrivelled like a ripe grena-dilla, and he spoke softly, and looked asleep, except his eyes. They were bright, like glass beads. But I tried to find the good in him, as the Mother Superior (last but two) had taught me

"I suppose," he said, "you have learnt nothing but prayers?"

"Pardon, m'sieu," I answered, "but

I have learnt many things ; history and geography, and arithmetic—but I am stupid at that—and a little Latin, and you hear that I speak English."

"You are an Englishwoman," he said. "It should be your mother tongue."

"Pardon, m'sieu," I answered. "It is only my father's tongue. My mother was French. My mother loved me, and my father—but I must not criticise my parent."

"Umph!" he said. He had a funny way of saying that. "Have you learnt anything else?"

"Much," I told him, not of vanity, which is a sin, but to speak for the good sisters who taught me, "music and painting—but that I do not well—and deportment; and this winter I was to go to a class to learn dancing, because the Mother Superior said it was necessary to fit me for my place in the world, though she liked it not."

"And of the world," he said, as if he spoke to himself, "you have learnt nothing."

"But, yes," I answered. "I know that it is a place of good and evil, m'sieu; and I must look always at the good in everything and everyone, and never at the evil, and then myself I shall be good." And then I told him about the spectacles.

"Umph" he said. "*Umph!* . . . Suppose you try the good spectacles on me, little lady?"

His voice sounded kinder when he said that, and I smiled at him.

"You are to trust, I think," I said; "and you are very wise, and so you will help me."

"Umph!" he said again. "I think you can trust me, and that is more than I can say for most people! Especially in money matters! You have a great deal of money, child, and, if you look at people through your good spectacles, I'm afraid a great many will deceive you about that. . . . Under your father's will there are four guardians till you are twenty-one—your Uncle William, your Uncle Charles, a Sister selected by the Mother Superior, with your agreement, and myself. . . . I, at any rate, am honest. The Sister

should have no motive to be otherwise, but—well, you cannot give your money to any religious institutions, even when you are of age. Your uncles—well, if they talk to you about money matters, refer them to me!" He shut his mouth with a snap. "Now I must see the Mother Superior. Good morning, Miss Venning."

"Please," I asked, "will you call me Elise?"

"Elise, then. . . . Good-bye, my dear!" He held out his hand. "I had a daughter," he said. "She died. . . . Yes. You can trust me."

He talked to the Mother Superior, and she talked to me the next morning, before I went. She was not like the dear Mother, last but two, and I was a little afraid of her; but I think she liked me.

"My child," she said, "you are going out into the world, and the world is full of dangers. The greatest danger to you is your money."

"Could I not give it to good works?" I asked.

"Not till you are twenty-one," she told me, "and even then—no, I don't think you must throw the responsibility of your inheritance on others. It is your duty to use it on good works yourself. . . . Perhaps you will marry." She drew a long, long breath. I had heard the sisters whisper that once she was a great lady, and that she took the veil because her lover died. "Your husband would help you then. . . . Anyhow, the money is in charge of your guardians now, and—do not agree to anything about money without consulting the Sister who will go with you. Your uncles are men who—well, they are poor; and one can never trust a lawyer."

I wanted to say that I trusted the lawyer, but, of course, I could not contradict the Mother Superior. So I only asked who the Sister was to be.

"We have to agree upon that, Elise," she said. "I propose Sister Honora."

Sister Honora was one of the sub-abbesses—a tall, dark, haughty lady. They said that she had a title before she entered the holy life. They must

have thought my money very important to spare her to look after it!

"I hoped it would be Sister Mercy," I owned. Sister Mercy was always so very, very sweet to me; and next to the dear Mother, last but not two, I loved her best.

"I can understand that you love Sister Mercy," the Mother Superior said; "but she is not—not quite fitted to go out into the world. The trial would be too great for her. No, my child. It must not be Sister Mercy, for her own sake. Besides, she is not at all fitted to counsel you, or to guard your money . . . Sister Honora is clever and brave. . . . You will find her a good and true friend, Elise. She and I were friends once. . . . We all love you more than you think, my child. . . . Shall it be Sister Honora?"

"Yes, Mother," I agreed; and then she kissed my forehead.

"God watches over His children, Elise," she told me. "Do not fear . . . and never agree to anything about money without consulting Sister Honora."

So I left the Convent that day with Mr. McAndrew—that was the lawyer's name—and Sister Honora; and I made up my mind to look at everything with the good spectacles, except things about money. I was not sure if the Good God watched over them. The Mother Superior spoke as if He did not; but I thought myself that He must know better than Mr. McAndrew and Sister Honora.

I did not see any evil in the world till after lunch, only pretty little villages and churches, and funny streets full of people with carriages that ran along by themselves (Mr. McAndrew said they were electric tramways), and a lot of men. I thought before that the world was principally women. Mr. McAndrew laughed when I said that, and Sister Honora counted her beads.

I found the first evil when we crossed the Channel in the steamer. I think the Evil One himself is in the sea. I was very ill; but I tried to find some good in my trouble, and I found it in the kindness of Sister Honora; and

that was when I began to love her. And when we had journeyed in the train, and came to Roystead (nearly all the village belonged to me, Mr. McAndrew said), and the people came out and bowed to me, and the children brought me flowers, I thought the world was very good. I got out of the carriage and walked, and I kissed many of the children, especially the babies; and when I said my prayers that night I prayed to do good to them all, and make them love me. I thought it would be such a nice world, if there was no sea or money in it!

The money especially seemed to be a great evil. Mr. McAndrew warned me again, before my uncles came the next morning, not to trust them about it.

"Your Uncle William," he said—"I speak in confidence, Elise—has always been a trouble to the family. He is—I won't say disreputable, but—dissipated. He squanders every penny that comes into his hands. His father—your grandfather—left him five hundred a year, tied up; and your father left him the same. He is very sore that it wasn't more, and if he can get hold of your property he will. At present he can't. I'll see to that! But he will try to obtain an influence over you, so as to get his hand in your pocket when you are of age. You must be very careful with him."

"Yes," I promised. I did mean to be careful; but I meant to try to find the good in Uncle William, and not the bad.

"Your Uncle Charles," Mr. McAndrew continued, "is dangerous in a different way. He means well; but he is weak-minded, and improvident, and he has a large family. He'd mean to advise you for the best; but if he managed your affairs you'd be worse off than if you trusted them to your Uncle William—which God forbid!"

"Oh!" I said. "Then the Lord *does* look after my money, too! I am glad of that, because I can leave it to Him, and not worry about it."

Mr. McAndrew looked at me in a funny way, and coughed.

"He looks after your money," he

explained, "through the instrumentality of your family solicitor. So you had better consult me."

on. "I've nothing to say against Sister Honora. She was a lady before she became a nun; and she comes of



"He was handsome, and young, and when he looked at me my heart began thumping."

"Yes," I said. "I see now!"
 "There's another thing," he went

an honourable family. But a woman who marries the Church is apt to think

too much about the interests of her husband. You mustn't listen to any of them."

"No," I said. "I will tell them that I do not arrange about money, but the Lord, through the—I forget the long word—the family solicitor."

Something made Mr. McAndrew laugh then—he said it was a story that he remembered—and he and I did not talk about money any more; but Sister Honora did. She too warned me against my uncles, and then she warned me against Mr. McAndrew.

"No doubt," she said, "he is a highly respectable man; but my father always said that a lawyer was a good servant and a bad master. We had a lot of property." She sighed as if she remembered something. "Father always went over the accounts every month. I think you should have monthly accounts from Mr. McAndrew. You and I could go over them together and watch them."

"Don't you think the Lord will watch the accounts, Sister Honora?" I asked; and she made a strange noise in her throat.

"I think He expects us to do a little for ourselves, Elise," she said; "but perhaps we had better wait a few weeks and see how things go on."

I thought so too. I did not want to hurt Mr. McAndrew's feelings by asking for accounts.

Uncle William came to see me just then. He was very tall and very handsome, like the picture of my father, only his face was rather too red. He was stern at first.

"As I accept your father's legacy," he said, "such as it is, I must accept the responsibility of a share in your guardianship. You cannot expect me to like your father's will."

"I did not think about that," I told him, "but I wanted you to like me . . . I have never really had a father or a mother, Uncle William. Couldn't you try to love me a little?"

He laughed—and then he looked quite different—and picked me up, just as if I had been a tiny child—and kissed me.

"We'll have to be friends," he said,

"little niece. . . . You're very like your mother. If she had lived your father would have been a different man. . . . Now get one thing into your pretty head. People will tell you that I'm a rascal, and not to be trusted. In a general way they're fairly correct; but you can trust me. I've made ducks and drakes of my own affairs; but I wouldn't do it with yours. Don't do anything in money matters without consulting me; and when you are of age, I'll look after things for you. Your Uncle Charles doesn't understand finance at all; and McAndrew understands it too well; and nuns have no conscience where the Church is concerned. There is really no one else to manage your affairs."

"There is the Good Lord," I told him.

He seemed rather surprised.

"Er—yes," he said; "but you'd better regard me as His earthly instrument."

Uncle Charles came to see me afterwards. He was a dear old gentleman. He was a rector, and he looked older than Uncle William, though he was younger really. He kissed me at once, and stroked my hair.

"Well, my dear," he said, "I am a little disappointed in your father's will, but we mustn't blame you. I am sure we shall all love you." He talked to me very nicely, and I liked him very much. I hoped he wasn't going to say anything about my money; but he did.

"You have a large fortune, Elise," he said; "and there is just one word that I want to say about it. Don't agree to any important matter without consulting me. Your other guardians all mean well, I am sure. Your Uncle William is strictly honourable, but—but rash, and inclined to speculation. Mr. McAndrew also is a most upright man, but—but lawyers have a somewhat prejudiced way of looking at monetary investments. It is the same with nuns. I have the highest esteem for Sister Honora; but a lady is not skilled in financial affairs. You had better leave them to me, my dear!"

"Can't I leave them to the Good Lord?" I asked.

"Certainly," he agreed. "Certainly. I named myself merely as His humble instrument."

"I see," I said. "Thank you, uncle."

I don't know if that was a story. I didn't really see at all about the instrument. I rather thought that, when I was of age, I had better divide my money into five parts, and let Mr. McAndrew and my uncles and Sister Honora each be an instrument for one part; and I thought I'd be my own instrument for the part that was left!

The money was a dreadful worry to me. If I had not made up my mind to wear the good spectacles, and not see harm in anybody, I do believe I should have come to suspect them all. Whenever there was a meeting about my affairs they all quarrelled, and became red in the face and angry; and they all talked to me about the others when they got me alone. They all appealed to me to trust them—and I did; but they all seemed to think that if I trusted them I must mistrust the others—and I couldn't.

"My little lassie," Mr. McAndrew would say, "you're like my own to me. Tell them that you wish it left to me." And I was so fond of Mr. McAndrew.

"I may be a bad lot, Little Innocence," Uncle William would say, "but I think I'd cut my throat if my best niece didn't trust me." And I did so love Uncle William.

"You *know*, Elise, that my only thought is for your interest," Uncle Charles would tell me; and I *couldn't* doubt him. He was so very good and kind.

"O my little lamb!" Sister Honora used to say, and hug me till it hurt, "I have only you to love now; and I was made for loving, Elise. You must listen to me, and not to them." She used to cry sometimes. My dear, dear Sister Honora! She was like a mother to me.

Two days before my birthday (the one that made me nineteen) they had a worse quarrel than ever. It was about some property. Mr. McAndrew

wanted to spend money to improve it, and Uncle William didn't; and Uncle Charles wanted to sell it, and Sister Honora wanted to sell part and keep part. They said dreadful things about one another, and every one declared that the other three were no better than thieves, and wanted my money, and didn't care anything about me. I was so upset that I ran away to my room and cried. But presently I remembered what the dear Mother (last but two) used to say to me.

"Tears are better than anger, Elise; but prayers are better than either. The dear Lord loves His children, and He understands things so easily. Tell Him your troubles, little one, and He will help you."

So I said my prayers, and told the Lord about things, and asked Him to help me; and perhaps, I prayed He would send someone to help me on earth too. Then I wiped my eyes and went out for a walk alone. By the stile in Bell Lane I met someone, and I knew directly that he had been sent to my assistance.

He was handsome, and he was young—about four years older than I—and when he looked at me my heart began thumping, and it thumped more than ever when he spoke to me.

"Have I the honour of addressing Miss Venning?" he asked.

"I am Elise Venning," I answered; and he told me that he was Arthur Nornton, the son of Lord Nornton, who lived close by; and he said that if I had been brought up at home we should have known each other, and have been great friends by now; and he would like to begin as if we had always been friends.

I said that I wanted a friend very much, and I told him about my money and my guardians, and how they quarrelled, and about the prayer that I had prayed.

"And I think the Good Lord has sent you to help me," I said.

He had been smiling before, but then he looked very grave, and he took my hand and bent his head down and kissed it.

"You are like—like the flowers and

the Spring," he said. "I did not think there was anyone in the world so fresh and sweet. . . . God make me your true knight, dear Elise, and do by me as I do by you."

I gave him my other hand then, because I thought that the Lord had sent him, and I knew that always I must love him.

"Sometimes I do not right," I confessed; "but I shall like to try. And will you look at me always with the good spectacles, as I shall look at you?"

"The good spectacles?" he said, as if he did not understand. So I told him the dear Mother's story. But he said that he did not need any spectacles to look at me, because there was nothing but good to see.

"I am not," I owned. "Sometimes I am disagreeable—not *very* disagreeable; and sometimes I am vain—but not *very* vain; and quite often I do not want to do the things that I ought to do. But now you will show me because you are my friend."

"Sweet Elise," he said, "it is you who will show me how to be good. You wonderful girl! Hasn't anyone ever told you how dear and innocent you are?"

"But, of course," I said, "I am innocent. To others, perhaps, I am not dear."

He looked at me, and touched my hand.

"Oh, Elise," he said, "how lovely you are!"

"Oh, no!" I cried. "I must not think so. It would be vain. You may think so if you like, because——"

"Because," he said, and then he took both my hands, "because God has sent *you* to *me*, to make me . . . as good a man as it is in me to be. . . . I'll try. . . . Elise, dear, some day you will love me."

"Yes," I said, "I think so. . . . Yes."

"Now?" he asked quickly.

"Now," I said.

I did, and I always shall.

I told Sister Honora when I went in how good God had been to me, and she screamed. She said it was

wrong and unmaidenly to accept a man when I had only known him ten minutes; but I contradicted her. (I had never done that before.)

"I love him," I said, "and he loves me, and when I am old enough I shall marry him. Nothing that anybody says can alter that; *and nothing shall.*"

"But if I prove to you that he is unsuitable——"

"You cannot," I told her.

"And that it is wrong."

"Even then," I said, "I shall marry him."

I suppose that was wicked, but I meant it, and it is best to tell the truth.

She grew very stern when I had said it.

"He is a needy younger son," she told me, "and he is imposing on your innocence to get your money."

I do not like to put down what I said then, because I fell into the sin of anger, and was rude to a very good and honourable lady; but I will tell the truth.

"It is a lie!" I cried, and walked out of the room.

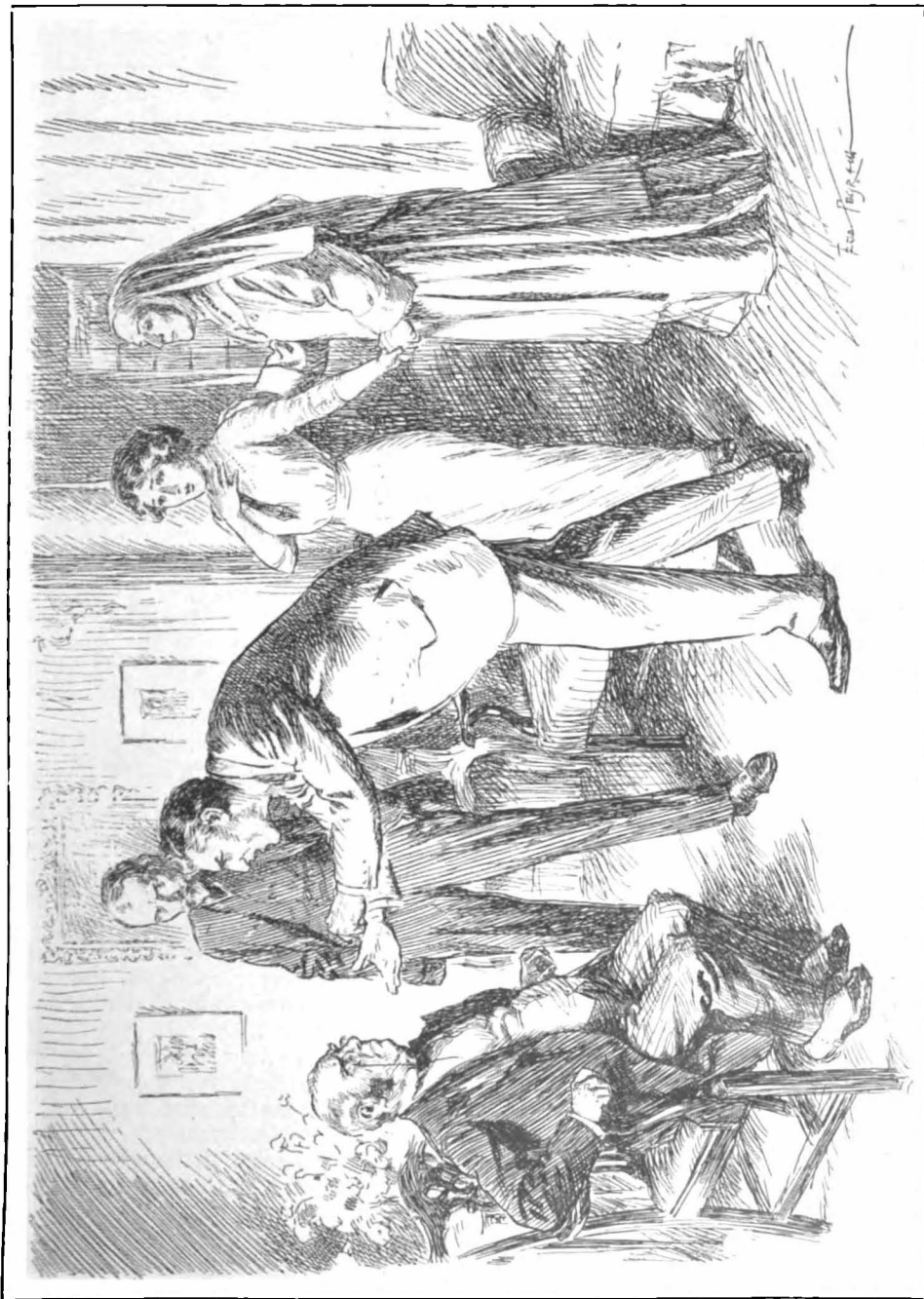
She wrote to Mr. McAndrew and to my uncles, and they came over the next day. My uncles were very angry, and they said cruel things of Arthur (that is his name, and I think the great king must have been like him). I was angry with them, and they were angry with me, except Sister Honora. She wasn't angry, but she cried.

"I suppose," I told them, "you want my money yourselves. Three of you say that each of the others does. . . . You can have it for all I care. He will marry me and work for me, and I will work for him."

Then Mr. McAndrew groaned.

"My poor child!" he said, "he won't marry you. There isn't any money! I've put it all in the Gold-rash and Deep Reef Mines. I thought I'd make you a millionaire, and——"

I never dreamed of such an evil scene. The good spectacles were no use to look at it, and I won't write about it. They all abused Mr. McAndrew as if he had stolen my money; and he abused them all, and said that



"They all abused him as if he had stolen my money. I never dreamed of such a scene."

they only cared because they had expected to get my money themselves. At last they let me speak.

"I don't believe one of you," I told them. "You have all put on the bad spectacles. Put on the good ones, just to please me. . . . Now look: . . . Mr. McAndrew loves me; and he's lost all his own money, and he doesn't mind that nearly as much as losing mine. And Uncle William loves me; and he *didn't* want my money for himself, only to make more of it for me. Uncle Charles is just the same; and dear Sister Honora doesn't care anything about money, and she has been so good to me. . . . Forgive me for being rude yesterday, dearest Honora."

She flung her arms round me and kissed me.

"My darling child!" she cried. "My darling child! . . . You shall not be penniless. When I took the veil my father put my portion aside, and said that I could dispose of it at any time. I have given most to the Church, but there is a little left. It shall be yours, Elise darling!"

"Not at all," said Uncle William, "not at all. I'm an old reprobate, and not fit to take charge of this angel girl, but I'll settle half of my thousand a year on her, d—dashed if I don't!"

"Anyhow," Uncle Charles said, "you must come to live with us, Elise. We're all so fond of you. You won't have the luxuries you've had here, but you'll have *love* from us. . . . We've been wickedly suspicious of one another, absurdly suspicious. Isn't it easy enough to believe that we all loved this little girl for herself?"

"Yes!" they all said at once.

"Then," I told them, "believe it of Arthur. He does too."

"We shall see," said Mr. McAndrew. "I've sent for him."

He came that very minute, and they told him about my fortune.

"Then," he said, "I'm not rich, but I have fifteen hundred a year. Let me marry Elise at once, and care for her. . . . It will be rather jolly to economise,

and make sensible people of us. I expect."

He smiled at me, and I smiled at him.

"Of course," I said, "some day I shall marry you, Arthur, but, you see, Mr. McAndrew has lost every penny; and he looked upon me as a daughter. Don't you think you could wait for me just a little while, if I went and kept his house for him?"

"But——" Uncle William began, and stopped.

"You see——" Uncle Charles began, and he stopped too.

"I think——" Sister Honora began, and she did not go on either. I suppose they all looked at Mr. McAndrew with the bad spectacles still, and suspected him.

Arthur looked at me, and then he looked at Mr. McAndrew, and then he drew a deep breath.

"Elise's spectacles!" he said. "Let's all wear them!"

Mr. McAndrew gave a great shout. I don't remember exactly what he said, but it came to this—he hadn't lost a penny of my money, and he only said it to test the others.

"I thought it would show them to be what I thought them," he owned; "but I wore the wrong kind of spectacles. . . . I was a fool. There's plenty of evil in the world, but none to touch this little Elise of ours."

I think if people know that you believe them good it makes them try to be. I know that it is so with me. I feel it is very responsible that my dear ones trust me so much, and I must never deceive them. I pray every night that I may be good to my guardians. "And, dear Lord," I say, "You *know* that I shall be good to Arthur. For him I thank You."

I am more grateful than I can ever say to the dear Mother, last but not two, for teaching me to wear the spectacles that see the goodness of the world, that makes me good; and, because I have seen it, I tell this story, as she bade me, to the glory of God!