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ONE OF OUR CONQUERORS

By George Meredith

1897

BOOK 3.

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CHAPTER XIX

TREATS OF NATURE AND CIRCUMSTANCE AND THE DISSENSION BETWEEN THEM AND OF A SATIRIST'S MALIGNITY IN THE DIRECTION OF HIS COUNTRY

There is at times in the hearts of all men of active life a vivid wild moment or two of dramatic dialogue between the veteran antagonists, Nature and Circumstance, when they, whose business it should be to be joyfully one, furiously split; and the Dame is up with her shrillest querulousness to inquire of her offspring, for the distinct original motive of his conduct. Why did he bring her to such a pass! And what is the gain? If he be not an alienated issue of the great Mother, he will strongly incline to her view, that he put himself into harness to join with a machine going the dead contrary way of her welfare; and thereby wrote himself donkey, for his present reading. Soldiers, heroes, even the braided, even the wearers of the gay cock's feathers, who get the honours and the pocket-pieces, know the moment of her electrical eloquence. They have no answer for her, save an index at the machine pushing them on yet farther under the enemy's line of fire, where they pluck the golden wreath or the livid, and in either case listen no more. They glorify her topping wisdom while on the march to confound it. She is wise in her way. But, it is asked by the disputant, If we had followed her exclusively, how far should we have travelled from our starting-point? We of the world and its prizes and duties must do her an injury to make her tongue musical to us, and her argument worthy of attention. So it seems. How to keep the proper balance between those two testy old wranglers, that rarely pull the right way together, is as much the task for men in the grip of the world, as for the wanton youthful fry under dominion of their instincts; and probably, when it is done, man will have attained the golden age of his retirement from service.

Why be scheming? Victor asked. Unlike the gallant soldiery, his question was raised in the blush of a success, from an examination of the quality of the thing won; although it had not changed since it was first coveted; it was demonstrably the same: and an astonishing dry stick he held, as a reward for perpetual agitations and perversions of his natural tastes. Here was a Dudley Sowerby, the direct issue of the conception of Lakelands; if indeed they were not conceived together in one; and the young gentleman had moral character, good citizen substance, and station, rank, prospect of a title; and the grasp of him was firm. Yet so far was it from hearty, that when hearing a professed satirist like Colney Durance remark on the decorous manner of Dudley's transparent courtship of the girl, under his look of an awakened approval of himself, that he appeared to be asking everybody:--Do you not think I bid fair for an excellent father of Philistines?--Victor had a nip of spite at the thought of Dudley's dragging him bodily to be the grandfather. Poor Fredi, too!--necessarily the mother: condemned by her hard fate to feel proud of Philistine babies! Though women soon get reconciled to it! Or do they? They did once. What if his Fredi turned out one of the modern young women, who have drunk of ideas? He caught himself speculating on that, as on a danger. The alliance with Dudley really seemed to set him facing backward.

Colney might not have been under prompting of Nataly when he derided Dudley; but Victor was at war with the picture of her, in her compression of a cruel laugh, while her eyelids were hard shut, as if to exclude the young patriarch of Philistines' ridiculous image.

He hearkened to the Nature interrogating him, why had he stepped on a path to put division between himself and his beloved?--the smallest of gaps; and still the very smallest between nuptial lovers is a division--and that may become a mortal wound to their one-life. Why had he roused a slumbering world? Glimpses of the world's nurse-like, old-fashioned, mother-nightcap benevolence to its kicking favourites; its long-suffering tolerance for the heroic breakers of its rough-cast laws, while the decent curtain continues dropped, or lifted only ankle-high; together with many scenes, lively suggestions, of the choice of ways he liked best, told of things, which were better things, incomprehensibly forfeited. So that the plain sense of value insisted on more than one weighing of the gain in hand: a dubious measure.

He was as little disposed to reject it as to stop his course at a goal of his aim. Nevertheless, a gain thus poorly estimated, could not command him to do a deed of humiliation on account of it. The speaking to this dry young Dudley was not imperative at present. A word would do in the day to come.

Nataly was busy with her purchases of furniture, and the practise for the great August Concert. He dealt her liberal encouragements, up to the verge of Dr. Themison's latest hummed words touching Mrs. Burman, from which he jumped in alarm lest he should paralyze her again: the dear soul's dreaded aspect of an earthy pallor was a spectre behind her cheeks, ready to rush forth. Fenellan brought Carling to dine with him; and Themison was confirmed by Carting, with incidents in proof; Caning by Jarniman, also with incidents; one very odd one--or so it seemed, in the fury of the first savour of it:--she informed Jarniman, Skepsey said his friend Jarniman said, that she had dreamed of making her appearance to him on the night of the 23rd August, and of setting the date on the calendar over his desk, when she entered his room: 'Sitting-room, not bedroom; she was always quite the lady,' Skepsey reported his Jarniman. Mrs. Burman, as a ghost, would respect herself; she would keep to her character. Jarniman quite expected the dream to be verified; she was a woman of her word: he believed she had received a revelation of the approaching fact: he was preparing for the scene.

Victor had to keep silent and discourse of general prosperity. His happy vivaciousness assisted him to feel it by day. Nataly heard him at night, on a moan: 'Poor soul!' and loudly once while performing an abrupt demi-vault from back to side: 'Perhaps now!' in a voice through doors. She schooled herself to breathe equably.

Not being allowed to impart the distressing dose of comfort he was charged with, he swallowed it himself; and these were the consequences. And an uneasy sleep was traditionally a matter for grave debate in the Radnor family. The Duvidney ladies, Dorothea and Virginia, would have cited ancestral names, showing it to be the worst of intimations. At

night, lying on his back beneath a weight of darkness, one heavily craped figure, distinguishable through the gloom, as a blot on a black pad, accused the answering darkness within him, until his mind was dragged to go through the whole case by morning light; and the compassionate man appealed to common sense, to stamp and pass his delectable sophistries; as, that it was his intense humaneness, which exposed him to an accusation of inhumanity; his prayer for the truly best to happen, which anticipated Mrs. Burman's expiry. They were simple sophistries, fabricated to suit his needs, readily taking and bearing the imprimatur of common sense. They refreshed him, as a chemical scent a crowded room.

All because he could not open his breast to Nataly, by reason of her feebleness; or feel enthusiasm in the possession of young Dudley! A dry stick indeed beside him on the walk Westward. Good quality wood, no doubt, but dry, varnished for conventional uses. Poor dear Fredi would have to crown it like the May-day posy of the urchins of Craye Farm and Creckholt!

Dudley wished the great City-merchant to appreciate him as a diligent student of commercial matters: rivalries of Banks; Foreign and Municipal Loans, American Rails, and Argentine; new Companies of wholesome appearance or sinister; or starting with a dram in the stomach, or born to bleat prostrate, like sheep on their backs in a ditch; Trusts and Founders; Breweries bursting vats upon the markets, and England prone along the gutters, gobbling, drunk for shares, and sober in the possession of certain of them. But when, as Colney says, a grateful England has conferred the Lordship on her Brewer, he gratefully hands-over the establishment to his country; and both may disregard the howls of a Salvation Army of shareholders.--Beaten by the Germans in Brewery, too! Dr. Schlesien has his right to crow. We were ahead of them, and they came and studied us, and they studied Chemistry as well; while we went on down our happy-go-lucky old road; and then had to hire their young Professors, and then to import their beer.

Have the Germans more brains than we English? Victor's blood up to the dome of his cranium knocked the patriotic negative. But, as old Colney says (and bother him, for constantly intruding!), the comfortably successful have the habit of sitting, and that dulls the brain yet more than it eases the person: hence are we outpaced; we have now to know we are racing. Victor scored a mark for one of his projects. A well-conducted Journal of the sharpest pens in the land might, at a sacrifice of money grandly sunk, expose to his English how and to what degree their sports, and their fierce feastings, and their opposition to ideas, and their timidity in regard to change, and their execration of criticism applied to themselves, and their unanimous adoption of it for a weapon against others, are signs of a prolonged indulgence in the cushioned seat. Victor saw it. But would the people he loved? He agreed with Colney, forgetting the satirist's venom: to-wit; that the journalists should be close under their editor's rod to put it in sound bold English;--no metaphors, no similes, nor flowery insubstantiality: but honest Saxon manger stuff: and put it repeatedly, in contempt of the disgust of iteration; hammering so a soft place on the Anglican skull, which is rubbed in consequence, and taught at last through soreness to

reflect.--A Journal?--with Colney Durance for Editor?--and called conformably THE WHIPPING-TOP? Why not, if it exactly hits the signification of the Journal and that which it would have the country do to itself, to keep it going and truly topping? For there is no vulgarity in a title strongly signifying the intent. Victor wrote it at night, naming Colney for Editor, with a sum of his money to be devoted to the publication, in a form of memorandum; and threw it among the papers in his desk.

Young Dudley had a funny inquisitiveness about Dartrey Fenellan; owing to Fredi's reproduction or imitation of her mother's romantic sentiment for Dartrey, doubtless: a bit of jealousy, indicating that the dry fellow had his feelings. Victor touched--off an outline of Dartrey's history and character:--the half-brother of Simeon, considerably younger, and totally different. 'Dartrey's mother was Lady Charlotte Kiltorne, one of the Clanconans; better mother than wife, perhaps; and no reproach on her, not a shadow; only she made the General's Bank-notes fly black paper. And--if you 're for heredity--the queer point is, that Simeon, whose mother was a sober-minded woman, has always been the spendthrift. Dartrey married one of the Hennen women, all an odd lot, all handsome. I met her once. Colney said, she came up here with a special commission from the Prince of Darkness. There are women who stir the unholy in men--whether they mean it or not, you know.'

Dudley pursed to remark, that he could not say he did know. And good for Fredi if he did not know, and had his objections to the knowledge! But he was like the men who escape colds by wrapping in comforters instead of trusting to the spin of the blood.

'She played poor Dartrey pranks before he buried--he, behaved well to her; and that says much for him; he has: a devil of a temper. I 've seen the blood in his veins, mount to cracking. But there's the man: because she was a woman, he never let it break out with her. And, by heaven, he had cause. She couldn't be left. She tricked him, and she loved him--passionately, I believe. You don't understand women loving the husband they drag through the mire?'

Dudley did not. He sharpened his mouth.

'Buried, you said, sir?--a widower?'

'I've no positive information; we shall hear when he: comes back,' Victor replied hurriedly. 'He got a drenching of all the damns in the British service from his. Generalissimo one day at a Review, for a trooper's negligence--button or stock missing, or something; and off goes Dartrey to his hut, and breaks his sword, and sends in his resignation. Good soldier lost. And I can't complain; he has been a right-hand man to me over in Africa. But a man ought to have some control of his temper, especially a soldier.'

Dudley put emphasis into his acquiescence.

'Worse than that temper of Dartrey's, he can't forgive an injury. He

bears a grudge against his country. You've heard Colney Durance abuse old England. It's three parts factitious-literary exercise. It 's milk beside the contempt of Dartrey's shrug. He thinks we're a dead people, if a people; "subsisting on our fat," as Colney says.'

'I am not of opinion that we show it,' observed Dudley.

'We don't,' Victor agreed. He disrelished his companion's mincing tone of a monumental security, and yearned for Dartrey or Simeon or Colney to be at his elbow rather than this most commendable of orderly citizens, who little imagined the treacherous revolt from him in the bosom of the gentleman cordially signifying full agreement. But Dudley was not gifted to read behind words and looks.

They were in the Park of the dwindling press of carriages, and here was this young Dudley saying, quite commendably: 'It's a pity we seem to have no means of keeping our parks select.'

Victor flung Simeon Fenellan at him in thought. He remembered a fable of Fenellan's, about a Society of the Blest, and the salt it was to them to discover an intruder from below, and the consequent accelerated measure in their hymning.

'Have you seen anything offensive to you?' he asked.

'One sees notorious persons.'

Dudley spoke aloof from them--'out of his cold attics,' Fenellan would have said.

Victor approved: with the deadened feeling common to us when first in sad earnest we consent to take life as it is.

He perceived, too, the comicality of his having to resign himself to the fatherly embrace of goodness.

Lakelands had him fast, and this young Dudley was the kernel of Lakelands. If he had only been intellectually a little flexible in his morality! But no; he wore it cap a pie, like a mediaeval knight his armour. One had to approve. And there was no getting away from him. He was good enough to stay in town for the practise of the opening overture of the amateurs, and the flute-duet, when his family were looking for him at Tunbridge Wells; and almost every day Victor was waylaid by him at a corner of the Strand.

Occasionally, Victor appeared at the point of interception armed with Colney Durance, for whom he had called in the Temple, bent on self-defence, although Colney was often as bitter to his taste as to Dudley's. Latterly the bitter had become a tonic. We rejoice in the presence of goodness, let us hope; and still an impersonation of conventional, goodness perpetually about us depresses. Dudley drove him to Colney for relief. Besides it pleased Nataly that he should be bringing Colney home; it looked to her as if he were subjecting Dudley to critical

inspection before he decided a certain question much, and foolishly, dreaded by the dear soul. That quieted her. And another thing, she liked him to be with Colney, for a clog on him; as it were, a tuning-fork for the wild airs he started. A little pessimism, also, she seemed to like; probably as an appeasement after hearing, and having to share, high flights. And she was, in her queer woman's way, always reassured by his endurance of Colney's company:--she read it to mean, that he could bear Colney's perusal of him, and satiric stings. Victor had seen these petty matters among the various which were made to serve his double and treble purposes; now, thanks to the operation of young Dudley within him, he felt them. Preferring Fenellan's easy humour to Colney's acid, he was nevertheless braced by the latter's antidote to Dudley, while reserving his entire opposition in the abstract.

For Victor Radnor and Colney Durance were the Optimist and Pessimist of their society. They might have headed those tribes in the country. At a period when the omnibus of the world appears to its quaint occupants to be going faster, men are shaken into the acceptance, if not performance, of one part or the other as it is dictated to them by their temperaments. Compose the parts, and you come nigh to the meaning of the Nineteenth Century: the mother of these gosling affirmatives and negatives divorced from harmony and awakened by the slight increase of incubating motion to vitality. Victor and Colney had been champion duellists for the rosy and the saturnine since the former cheerfully slaved for a small stipend in the City of his affection, and the latter entered on an inheritance counted in niggard hundreds, that withdrew a briefless barrister disposed for scholarship from the forlornest of seats in the Courts. They had foretold of one another each the unfulfilled; each claimed the actual as the child of his prediction. Victor was to have been ruined long back; Colney the prey of independent bachelors. Colney had escaped his harpy, and Victor could be called a millionaire and more. Prophecy was crowned by Colney's dyspepsia, by Victor's ticklish domestic position. Their pity for one another, their warm regard, was genuine; only, they were of different temperaments; and we have to distinguish, that in many estimable and some gifted human creatures, it is the quality of the blood which directs the current of opinion.

Victor played-off Colney upon Dudley, for his internal satisfaction, and to lull Nataly and make her laugh; but he could not, as she hoped he was doing, take Colney into his confidence; inasmuch as the Optimist, impelled by his exuberant anticipatory trustfulness, is an author, and does things; whereas the Pessimist is your chaired critic, with the delivery of a censor, generally an undoer of things. Our Optimy has his instinct to tell him of the cast of Pessimy's countenance at the confession of a dilemma-foreseen! He hands himself to Pessimy, as it were a sugar-cane, for the sour brute to suck the sugar and whack with the wood. But he cannot perform his part in return; he gets no compensation: Pessimy is invulnerable. You waste your time in hurling a common 'tu-quoque' at one who hugs the worst.

The three walking in the park, with their bright view, and black view, and neutral view of life, were a comical trio. They had come upon the days of the unfanned electric furnace, proper to London's early August

when it is not piping March. Victor complacently bore heat as well as cold: but young Dudley was a drought, and Colney a drug to refresh it; and why was he stewing in London? It was for this young Dudley, who resembled a London of the sparrowy roadways and wearisome pavements and blocks of fortress mansions, by chance a water-cart spirting a stale water: or a London of the farewell dinner-parties, where London's professed anecdotist lays the dust with his ten times told: Why was not Nataly relieved of her dreary round of the purchases of furniture! They ought all now to be in Switzerland or Tyrol. Nesta had of late been turning over leaves of an Illustrated book of Tyrol, dear to her after a run through the Innthal to the Dolomites one splendid August; and she and Nataly had read there of Hofer, Speckbacher, Haspinger; and wrath had filled them at the meanness of the Corsican, who posed after it as victim on St. Helena's rock; the scene in grey dawn on Mantua's fortress-walls blasting him in the Courts of History, when he strikes for his pathetic sublime.

Victor remembered how he had been rhetorical, as the mouthpiece of his darlings. But he had in memory prominently now the many glorious pictures of that mountain-land beckoning to him, waving him to fly forth from the London oven:--lo, the Tyrolese limestone crags with livid peaks and snow lining shelves and veins of the crevices; and folds of pinewood undulations closed by a shoulder of snow large on the blue; and a dazzling pinnacle rising over green pasture-Alps, the head of it shooting aloft as the blown billow, high off a broken ridge, and wide-armed in its pure white shroud beneath; tranced, but all motion in immobility, to the heart in the eye; a splendid image of striving, up to crowned victory. And see the long valley-sweeps of the hanging meadows and maize, and lower vineyards and central tall green spires! Walking beside young Dudley, conversing, observing too, Victor followed the trips and twists of a rill, that was lured a little further down through scoops, ducts, and scaffolded channels to serve a wainwright.

He heard the mountain-song of the joyful water: a wren-robin-thrush on the dance down of a faun; till it was caught and muted, and the silver foot slid along the channel, swift as moonbeams through a cloud, with an air of 'Whither you will, so it be on'; happy for service as in freedom. Then the yard of the inn below, and the rillwater twirling rounded through the trout-trough, subdued, still lively for its beloved onward: dues to business, dues to pleasure; a wedding of the two, and the wisest on earth:--eh? like some one we know, and Nataly has made the comparison. Fresh forellen for lunch: rhyming to Fenellan, he had said to her; and that recollection struck the day to blaze; for his friend was a ruined military captain living on a literary quill at the time; and Nataly's tender pleading, 'Could you not help to give him another chance, dear Victor?'--signifying her absolute trust in his ability to do that or more or anything, had actually set him thinking of the Insurance Office; which he started to prosperity, and Fenellan in it, previously an untutored rill of the mountains, if ever was one.

Useless to be dwelling on holiday pictures: Lakelands had hold of him!

Colney or somebody says, that the greater our successes, the greater the

slaves we become.--But we must have an aim, my friend, and success must be the aim of any aim!--Yes, and, says Colney, you are to rejoice in the disappointing miss, which saved you from being damned by your bullet on the centre.--You're dead against Nature, old Colney.--That is to carry the flag of Liberty.--By clipping a limb!

Victor overcame the Pessimist in his own royal cranium-Court. He entertained a pronounced dissension with bachelors pretending to independence. It could not be argued publicly, and the more the pity:-- for a slight encouragement, he would have done it: his outlook over the waves of bachelors and (by present conditions mostly constrained) spinsters--and another outlook, midnight upon Phlegethon to the thoughts of men, made him deem it urgent. And it helped the plea in his own excuse, as Colney pointed out to the son of Nature. That, he had to admit, was true. He charged it upon Mrs. Burman, for twisting the most unselfish and noblest of his thoughts; and he promised himself it was to cease on the instant when the circumstance, which Nature was remiss in not bringing about to-day or to-morrow, had come to pass. He could see his Nataly's pained endurance beneath her habitual submission. Her effort was a poor one, to conceal her dread of the day of the gathering at Lakelands.

On the Sunday previous to the day, Dr. Themison accompanied the amateurs by rail to Wrensham, to hear 'trial of the acoustics' of the Concert-hall. They were a goodly company; and there was fun in the railway-carriage over Colney's description of Fashionable London's vast octopus Malady-monster, who was letting the doctor fly to the tether of its longest filament for an hour, plying suckers on him the while. He had the look, to general perception, of a man but half-escaped: and as when the notes of things taken by the vision in front are being set down upon tablets in the head behind. Victor observed his look at Nataly. The look was like a door aswing, revealing in concealing. She was not or did not appear struck by it; perhaps, if observant, she took it for a busy professional gentleman's holiday reckoning of the hours before the return train to his harness, and his arrangements for catching it. She was, as she could be on a day of trial, her enchanting majestic self again--defying suspicions. She was his true mate for breasting a world honoured in uplifting her.

Her singing of a duet with Nesta, called forth Dr. Themison's very warm applause. He named the greatest of contraltos. Colney did better service than Fenellan at the luncheon-table: he diverted Nataly and captured Dr. Themison's ear with the narrative of his momentous expedition of European Emissaries, to plead the cause of their several languages at the Court of Japan: a Satiric Serial tale, that hit incidentally the follies of the countries of Europe, and intentionally, one had to think, those of Old England. Nesta set him going. Just when he was about to begin, she made her father laugh by crying out in a rapture, 'Oh! Delphica!' For she was naughtily aware of Dudley Sowerby's distaste for the story and disgust with the damsel Delphica.

Nesta gave Dr. Themison the preliminary sketch of the grand object of the expedition: indeed one of the eminent ones of the world; matter for an

Epic; though it is to be feared, that our part in it will not encourage a Cis-Atlantic bard. To America the honours from beginning to end belong.

So, then, Japan has decided to renounce its language, for the adoption of the language it may choose among the foremost famous European tongues. Japan becomes the word for miraculous transformations of a whole people at the stroke of a wand; and let our English enrol it as the most precious of the powerful verbs. An envoy visits the principal Seats of Learning in Europe. He is of a gravity to match that of his unexampled and all but stupefying mission. A fluent linguist, yet an Englishman, the slight American accent contracted during a lengthened residence in the United States is no bar to the patriotism urging him to pay his visit of exposition and invitation from the Japanese Court to the distinguished Doctor of Divinity Dr. Bouthoin. The renown of Dr. Bouthoin among the learned of Japan has caused the special invitation to him; a scholar endowed by an ample knowledge and persuasive eloquence to cite and instance as well as illustrate the superior advantages to Japan and civilization in the filial embrace of mother English. 'For to this it must come predestinated,' says the astonishing applicant. 'We seem to see a fitness in it,' says the cogitative Rev. Doctor. 'And an Island England in those waters, will do wonders for Commerce,' adds the former. 'We think of things more pregnant,' concludes the latter, with a dry gleam of ecclesiastical knowingness. And let the Editor of the Review upon his recent pamphlet, and let the prelate reprimanding him, and let the newspapers criticizing his pure Saxon, have a care!

Funds, universally the most convincing of credentials, are placed at Dr. Bouthoin's disposal: only it is requested, that for the present the expedition be secret. 'Better so,' says pure Saxon's champion. On a day patented for secrecy, and swearing-in the whole American Continent through the cables to keep the secret by declaring the patent, the Rev. Dr. Bouthoin, accompanied by his curate, the Rev. Mancate Semhians, stumbling across portmanteaux crammed with lexicons and dictionaries and other tubes of the voice of Hermes, takes possession of berths in the ship Polypheme, bound, as they mutually conceive, for the biggest adventure ever embarked on by a far-thoughted, high-thoughted, patriotic pair speaking pure Saxon or other.

Colney, with apologies to his hearers, avoided the custom of our period (called the Realistic) to create, when casual opportunity offers, a belief in the narrative by promoting nausea in the audience. He passed under veil the Rev. Doctor's acknowledgement of Neptune's power, and the temporary collapse of Mr. Semhians. Proceeding at once to the comments of these high-class missionaries on the really curious inquisitiveness of certain of the foreign passengers on board, he introduced to them the indisputably learned, the very argumentative, crashing, arrogant, pedantic, dogmatic, philological German gentleman, Dr. Gannius, reeking of the Teutonic Professor, as a library volume of its leather. With him is his fairhaired artless daughter Delphica. An interesting couple for the beguilement of a voyage: she so beautifully moderates his irascible incisiveness! Yet there is a strange tone that they have. What, then, of the polite, the anecdotic Gallic M. Falarique, who studiously engages the young lady in colloquy when Mr. Semhians is agitating outside them to

say a word? What of that outpouring, explosive, equally voluble, uncontrolled M. Bobinikine, a Mongol Russian, shaped, featured, hued like the pot-boiled, round and tight young dumpling of our primitive boyhood, which smokes on the dish from the pot? And what of another, hitherto unnoticed, whose nose is of the hooked vulturine, whose name transpires as Pisistratus Mytharete? He hears Dr. Bouthoin declaim some lines of Homer, and beseeches him for the designation of that language. Greek, is it? Greek of the Asiatic ancient days of the beginning of the poetic chants? Dr. Gannius crashes cachinnation. Dr. Bouthoin caps himself with the offended Don. Mr. Semhians opens half an eye and a whole mouth. There must be a mystery, these two exclaim to one another in privacy. Delphica draws Mr. Semhians aside.

Blushing over his white necktie, like the coast of Labrador at the transient wink of its Jack-in-the-box Apollo, Mr. Semhians faintly tells of a conversation he has had with the ingenuous fair one; and she ardent as he for the throning of our incomparable Saxon English in the mouths of the races of mankind. Strange!--she partly suspects the Frenchman, the Russian, the attentive silent Greek, to be all of them bound for the Court of Japan. Concurrents? Can it be? We are absolutely to enter on a contention with rivals? Dr. Bouthoin speaks to Dr. Gannius. He is astonished, he says; he could not have imagined it

'Have you ever imagined anything?' Dr. Gannius asks him. Entomologist, botanist, palaeontologist, philologist, and at sound of horn a ready regimental corporal, Dr. Gannius wears good manners as a pair of bath-slippers, to rally and kick his old infant of an Englishman; who, in awe of his later renown and manifest might, makes it a point of discretion to be ultra-amiable; for he certainly is not in training, he has no alliances, and he must diplomatize; and the German is a strong one; a relative too; he is the Saxon's cousin, to say the least. This German has the habit of pushing past politeness to carry his argumentative war into the enemy's country: and he presents on all sides a solid rampart of recent great deeds done, and mailed readiness for the doing of more, if we think of assailing him in that way. We are really like the poor beasts which have cast their shells or cases, helpless flesh to his beak. So we are cousinly.

Whether more amused than amazed, we know not, Dr. Gannius hears from 'our simpleton of the pastures,' as he calls the Rev. Doctor to his daughter, that he and Mr. Semhians have absolutely pushed forth upon this most mighty of enterprises naked of any backing from their Government! Babes in the Wood that they are! 'a la grace de dieu' at every turn that cries for astutia, they show no sign or symbol of English arms behind them, to support--and with the grandest of national prizes in view!--the pleading oration before the Court of the elect, erudites, we will call them, of an intelligent, yet half barbarous, people; hesitating, these, between eloquence and rival eloquence, cunning and rival cunning. Why, in such a case, the shadow-nimbus of Force is needed to decide the sinking of the scale. But have these English never read their Shakespeare, that they show so barren an acquaintance with human, to say nothing of semi-barbaric, nature? But it is here that we Germans prove our claim to being the sons of his mind.--Dr. Gannius, in contempt, throws off the

mask: he also is a concurrent. And not only is he the chosen by election of the chief Universities of his land, he has behind him, as Athene dilating Achilles, the clenched fist of the Prince of thunder and lightning of his time. German, Japan shall be! he publicly swears before them all. M. Falarique damascenes his sharpest smile; M. Bobinikine double-dimples his puddingest; M. Mytharete rolls a forefinger over his beak; Dr. Bouthoin enlarges his eye on a sunny mote. And such is the masterful effect of a frank diplomacy, that when one party shows his hand, the others find the reverse of concealment in hiding their own.

Dr. Bouthoin and Mr. Semhians are compelled to suspect themselves to be encompassed with rivals, presumptively supported by their Governments. The worthy gentlemen had hoped to tumble into good fortune, as in the blessed old English manner. 'It has even been thus with us: unhelped we do it!' exclaims the Rev. Doctor. He is roused from dejection by hearing Mr. Semhians shyly (he has published verse) tell of the fairtressed Delphica's phosphorial enthusiasm for our galaxy of British Poets. Assisted by Mr. Semhians, he begins to imagine, that he has, in the person of this artless devotee an ally, who will, through her worship of our poets (by treachery to her sire-a small matter) sacrifice her guttural tongue, by enabling him (through the exercise of her arts, charms, intrigues--also a small matter) to obtain the first audience of the Japanese erudites. Delphica, with each of the rivals in turn, is very pretty Comedy. She is aware that M. Falarique is her most redoubtable adversary, by the time that the vast fleet of steamboats (containing newspaper reporters) is beheld from the decks of the Polypheme puffing past Sandy Hook.

There Colney left them, for the next instalment of the serial.

Nesta glanced at Dudley Sowerby. She liked him for his pained frown at the part his countrymen were made to play, but did wish that he would keep from expressing it in a countenance that suggested a worried knot; and mischievously she said: 'Do you take to Delphica?'

He replied, with an evident sincerity, 'I cannot say I do.'

Had Mr. Semhians been modelled on him?

'One bets on the German, of course--with Colney Durance,' Victor said to Dr. Themison, leading him over the grounds of Lakelands.

'In any case, the author teaches us to feel an interest in the rivals. I want to know what comes of it,' said the doctor.

'There's a good opportunity, one sees. But, mark me, it will all end in satire upon poor Old England. According to Colney, we excel in nothing.'

'I do not think there is a country that could offer the entertainment for which I am indebted to you to-day.'

'Ah, my friend, and you like their voices? The contralto?'

'Exquisite.'

Dr. Themison had not spoken the name of Radnor.

'Shall we see you at our next Concert-evening in town?' said Victor; and hearing 'the privilege' mentioned, his sharp bright gaze cleared to limpid. 'You have seen how it stands with us here!' At once he related what indeed Dr. Themison had begun speculatively to think might be the case.

Mrs. Burman Radnor had dropped words touching a husband, and of her desire to communicate with him, in the event of her being given over to the surgeons: she had said, that her husband was a greatly gifted man; setting her head in a compassionate swing. This revelation of the husband soon after, was filling. And this Mr. Radnor's comrade's manner of it, was winning: a not too self-justifying tone; not void of feeling for the elder woman; with a manly eulogy of the younger, who had flung away the world for him and borne him their one dear child. Victor took the blame wholly upon himself. 'It is right that you should know,' he said to the doctor's thoughtful posture; and he stressed the blame; and a flame shot across his eyeballs. He brought home to his hearer the hurricane of a man he was in the passion: indicating the subjection of such a temperament as this Victor Radnor's to trials of the moral restraints beyond his human power.

Dr. Themison said: 'Would you--we postpone that as long as we can: but supposing the poor lady . . . ?'

Victor broke in: 'I see her wish: I will.'

The clash of his answer rang beside Dr. Themison's faltering query.

We are grateful when spared the conclusion of a sentence born to stammer. If for that only, the doctor pressed Victor's hand warmly.

'I may, then, convey some form of assurance, that a request of the kind will be granted?' he said.

'She has but to call me to her,' said Victor, stiffening his back.

CHAPTER XX

THE GREAT ASSEMBLY AT LAKELANDS

Round the neighbourhood of Lakelands it was known that the day of the great gathering there had been authoritatively foretold as fine, by Mr. Victor Radnor; and he delivered his prophecy in the teeth of the South-western gale familiar to our yachting month; and he really inspired belief or a kind of trust; some supposing him to draw from reserves of

observation, some choosing to confide in the singularly winged sparkle of his eyes. Lady Rodwell Blachington did; and young Mrs. Blathenoy; and Mrs. Fanning; they were enamoured of it. And when women stand for Hope, and any worshipped man for Promise, nothing less than redoubled confusion of him dissolves the union. Even then they cling to it, under an ejaculation, that it might and should have been otherwise; fancy partly has it otherwise, in her caerulean home above the weeping. So it is good at all points to prophecy with the aspect of the radiant day foretold.

A storm, bearing battle overhead, tore the night to pieces. Nataly's faith in the pleasant prognostic wavered beneath the crashes. She had not much power of heart to desire anything save that which her bosom disavowed. Uproar rather appeased her, calmness agitated. She wished her beloved to be spared from a disappointment, thinking he deserved all successes, because of the rigours inflicted by her present tonelessness of blood and being. Her unresponsive manner with him was not due to lack of fire in the blood or a loss of tenderness. The tender feeling, under privations unwillingly imposed, though willingly shared, now suffused her reflections, owing to a gratitude induced by a novel experience of him; known, as it may chance, and as it does not always chance, to both sexes in wedded intimacy here and there; known to women whose mates are proved quick to compliance with delicate intuitions of their moods of nature.

A constant, almost visible, image of the dark thing she desired, and was bound not to desire, and was remorseful for desiring, oppressed her; a perpetual consequent warfare of her spirit and the nature subject to the thousand sensational hypocrisies invoked for concealment of its reviled brutish baseness, held the woman suspended from her emotions. She coldly felt that a caress would have melted her, would have been the temporary rapture. Coldly she had the knowledge that the considerate withholding of it helped her spirit to escape a stain. Less coldly, she thanked at heart her beloved, for being a gentleman in their yoke. It plighted them over flesh.

He talked to her on the pillow, just a few sentences; and, unlike himself, a word of City affairs: 'That fellow Blathenoy, with his increasing multitude of bills at the Bank: must watch him there, sit there regularly. One rather likes his wife. By the way, if you see him near me to-morrow, praise the Spanish climate; don't forget. He heads the subscription list of Lady Blachington's Charity.'

Victor chuckled at Colney's humping of shoulders and mouth, while the tempest seemed echoing a sulphurous pessimist. 'If old Colney had listened to me, when India gave proof of the metal and South Africa began heaving, he'd have been a fairly wealthy man by now . . . ha! it would have genialized him. A man may be a curmudgeon with money: the rule is for him to cuddle himself and take a side, instead of dashing at his countrymen all round and getting hated. Well, Colney popular, can't be imagined; but entertaining guests would have diluted his acid. He has the six hundred or so a year he started old bachelor on; add his miserable pay for Essays. Literature! Of course, he sours. But don't let me hear of bachelors moralists. There he sits at his Temple Chambers hatching epigrams . . . pretends to have the office of critic! Honest old fellow, as far as his condition permits. I tell him it will be fine

to-morrow.'

'You are generally right, dear,' Nataly said.

Her dropping breath was audible.

Victor smartly commended her to slumber, with heaven's blessing on her and a dose of soft nursery prattle.

He squeezed her hand. He kissed her lips by day. She heard him sigh settling himself into the breast of night for milk of sleep, like one of the world's good children. She could have turned to him, to show him she was in harmony with the holy night and loving world, but for the fear founded on a knowledge of the man he was; it held her frozen to the semblance of a tombstone lady beside her lord, in the aisle where horror kindles pitchy blackness with its legions at one movement. Verily it was the ghost of Mrs. Burman come to the bed, between them.

Meanwhile the sun of Victor Radnor's popularity was already up over the extended circle likely to be drenched by a falsification of his daring augury, though the scud flew swift, and the beeches raved, and the oaks roared and snarled, and pine-trees fell their lengths. Fine tomorrow, to a certainty! he had been heard to say. The doubt weighed for something; the balance inclined with the gentleman who had become so popular: for he had done the trick so suddenly, like a stroke of the wizard; and was a real man, not one of your spangled zodiacs selling for sixpence and hopping to a lucky hit, laughed at nine times out of ten. The reasoning went--and it somewhat affected the mansion as well as the cottage,--that if he had become popular in this astonishing fashion, after making one of the biggest fortunes of modern times, he might, he must, have secret gifts. 'You can't foretell weather!' cried a pothouse sceptic. But the workmen at Lakelands declared that he had foretold it. Sceptics among the common folk were quaintly silenced by other tales of him, being a whiff from the delirium attending any mention of his name.

How had he become suddenly so popular as to rouse in the mind of Mr. Caddis, the sitting Member for the division of the county (said to have the seat in his pocket), a particular inquisitiveness to know the bearing of his politics? Mr. Radnor was rich, true: but these are days when wealthy men, ambitious of notoriety, do not always prove faithful to their class; some of them are cunning to bid for the suffrages of the irresponsible, recklessly enfranchised, corruptible masses. Mr. Caddis, if he had the seat in his pocket, had it from the support of a class trusting him to support its interests: he could count on the landowners, on the clergy, on the retired or retiring or comfortably cushioned merchants resident about Wrensham, on the many obsequious among electoral shopmen; annually he threw open his grounds, and he subscribed, patronized, did what was expected; and he was not popular; he was unpopular. Why? But why was the sun of this 23rd August, shining from its rise royally upon pacified, enrolled and liveried armies of cloud, more agreeable to earth's populations than his pinched appearance of the poor mopped red nose and melancholic rheumy eyelets on a January day! Undoubtedly Victor Radnor risked his repute of prophet. Yet his

popularity would have survived the continuance of the storm and deluge. He did this:--and the mystery puzzling the suspicious was nothing wonderful: in addition to a transparent benevolence, he spread a sort of assurance about him, that he thought the better of the people for their thinking well of themselves. It came first from the workmen at his house. 'The right sort, and no humbug: likes you to be men.' Such a report made tropical soil for any new seed.

Now, it is a postulate, to strengthen all poor commoners, that not even in comparison with the highest need we be small unless we yield to think it of ourselves. Do but stretch a hand to the touch of earth in you, and you spring upon combative manhood again, from the basis where all are equal. Humanity's historians, however, tell us, that the exhilaration bringing us consciousness of a stature, is gas which too frequently has to be administered. Certes the cocks among men do not require the process; they get it off the sight of the sun arising or a simple hen submissive: but we have our hibernating bears among men, our yoked oxen, cab horses, beaten dogs; we have on large patches of these Islands, a Saxon population, much wanting assistance, if they are not to feel themselves beaten, driven, caught by the neck, yoked and heavyheaded. Blest, then, is he who gives them a sense of the pride of standing on legs. Beer, ordinarily their solitary helper beneath the iron canopy of wealth, is known to them as a bitter usurer; it knocks them flat in their persons and their fortunes, for the short spell of recreative exaltation. They send up their rough glory round the name of the gentleman--a stranger, but their friend: and never is friend to be thought of as a stranger--who manages to get the holiday for Wrensham and thereabout, that they may hurl away for one jolly day the old hat of a doddered humbleness, and trip to the strains of the internal music he has unwound.

Says he: Is it a Charity Concert? Charity begins at home, says he: and if I welcome you gentry on behalf of the poor of London, why, it follows you grant me the right to make a beginning with the poor of our parts down here. He puts it so, no master nor mistress neither could refuse him. Why, the workmen at his house were nigh pitching the contractors all sprawling on a strike, and Mr. Radnor takes train, harangues 'em and rubs 'em smooth; ten minutes by the clock, they say; and return train to his business in town; by reason of good sense and feeling, it was; poor men don't ask for more. A working man, all the world over, asks but justice and a little relaxation--just a collar of fat to his lean.

Mr. Caddis, M.P., pursuing the riddle of popularity, which irritated and repelled as constantly as it attracted him, would have come nearer to an instructive presentment of it, by listening to these plain fellows, than he was in the line of equipages, at a later hour of the day. The remarks of the comfortably cushioned and wheeled, though they be eulogistic to extravagance, are vapourish when we court them for nourishment; substantially, they are bones to the cynical. He heard enumerations of Mr. Radnor's riches, eclipsing his own past compute. A merchant, a holder of mines, Director of a mighty Bank, projector of running rails, a princely millionaire, and determined to be popular--what was the aim of the man? It is the curse of modern times, that we never can be sure of our Parliamentary seat; not when we have it in our pockets! The Romans

have left us golden words with regard to the fickleness of the populace; we have our Horace, our Juvenal, we have our Johnson; and in this vaunted age of reason it is, that we surrender ourselves into the hands of the populace! Panem et circenses! Mr. Caddis repeated it, after his fathers; his fathers and he had not headed them out of that original voracity. There they were, for moneyed legislators to bewail their appetites. And it was an article of his legislation, to keep them there.

Pedestrian purchasers of tickets for the Charity Concert, rather openly, in an envelope of humour, confessed to the bait of the Radnor bread with bit of fun. Savoury rumours were sweeping across Wrensham. Mr. Radnor had borrowed footmen of the principal houses about. Cartloads of provisions had been seen to come. An immediate reward of a deed of benevolence, is a thing sensibly heavenly; and the five-shilling tickets were paid for as if for a packet on the counter. Unacquainted with Mr. Radnor, although the reports of him struck a summons to their gastric juices, resembling in its effect a clamorous cordiality, they were chilled, on their steps along the halfrolled new gravel-roads to the house, by seeing three tables of prodigious length, where very evidently a feast had raged: one to plump the people--perhaps excessively courted by great gentlemen of late; shopkeepers, the villagers, children. These had been at it for two merry hours. They had risen. They were beef and pudding on legs; in some quarters, beer amiably manifest, owing to the flourishes of a military band. Boys, who had shaken room through their magical young corporations for fresh stowage, darted out of a chasing circle to the crumbled cornucopia regretfully forsaken fifteen minutes back, and buried another tart. Plenty still reigned: it was the will of the Master that it should.

We divert our attention, resigned in stoic humour, to the bill of the Concert music, handed us with our tickets at the park-gates: we have no right to expect refreshment; we came for the music, to be charitable. Signora Bianca Luciani: of whom we have read almost to the hearing her; enough to make the mistake at times. The grand violinist Durandarte: forcibly detained on his way to America. Mr. Radnor sent him a blank cheque:--no!--so Mr. Radnor besought him in person: he is irresistible; a great musician himself; it is becoming quite the modern style. We have now English noblemen who play the horn, the fife--the drum, some say! We may yet be Merrie England again, with our nobles taking the lead.

England's nobles as a musical band at the head of a marching and dancing population, pictured happily an old Conservative country, that retained its members of aristocracy in the foremost places while subjecting them to downright uses. Their ancestors, beholding them there, would be satisfied on the point of honour; perhaps enlivened by hearing them at fife and drum.

But middle-class pedestrians, having paid five shillings for a ticket to hear the music they love, and not having full assurance of refreshment, are often, latterly, satirical upon their superiors; and, over this country at least, require the refreshment, that the democratic sprouts in them may be reconciled with aristocracy. Do not listen to them further on the subject. They vote safely enough when the day comes, if there is

no praeternaturally strong pull the other way.

They perceive the name of the Hon. Dudley Sowerby, fourth down the Concert-bill; marked for a flute-duet with Mr. Victor Radnor, Miss Nesta Victoria Radnor accompanying at the piano. It may mean? . . . do you want a whisper to suggest to you what it may mean? The father's wealth is enormous; the mother is a beautiful majestic woman in her prime. And see, she sings: a wonderful voice. And lower down, a duet with her daughter: violins and clarinet; how funny; something Hungarian. And in the Second Part, Schubert's Ave Maria--Oh! when we hear that, we dissolve. She was a singer before he married her, they say: a lady by birth one of the first County families. But it was a gift, and she could not be kept from it, and was going, when they met--and it was love! the most perfect duet. For him she abandoned the Stage. You must remember, that in their young days the Stage was many stages beneath the esteem entertained for it now. Domestic Concerts are got up to gratify her: a Miss Fredericks: good old English name. Mr. Radnor calls his daughter, Freddy; so Mr. Taplow, the architect, says. They are for modern music and ancient. Tannhauser, Wagner, you see. Pergolese.

Flute-duet, Mercadante. Here we have him! O--Durandarte: Air Basque, variations--his own. Again, Senor Durandarte, Mendelssohn. Encore him, and he plays you a national piece. A dark little creature a Life-guardsmen could hold-up on his outstretched hand for the fifteen minutes of the performance; but he fills the hall and thrills the heart, wafts you to heaven; and does it as though he were conversing with his Andalusian lady-love in easy whispers about their mutual passion for Spanish chocolate all the while: so the musical critic of the Tirra-Lirra says. Express trains every half hour from London; all the big people of the city. Mr. Radnor commands them, like Royalty. Totally different from that old figure of the wealthy City merchant; young, vigorous, elegant, a man of taste, highest culture, speaks the languages of Europe, patron of the Arts, a perfect gentleman. His mother was one of the Montgomerys, Mr. Taplow says.

And it was General Radnor, a most distinguished officer, dying knighted. But Mr. Victor Radnor would not take less than a Barony--and then only with descent of title to his daughter, in her own right.

Mr. Taplow had said as much as Victor Radnor chose that he should say.

Carriages were in flow for an hour: pedestrians formed a wavy coil. Judging by numbers, the entertainment was a success; would the hall contain them? Marvels were told of the hall. Every ticket entered and was enfolded; almost all had a seat. Chivalry stood. It is a breeched abstraction, sacrificing voluntarily and genially to the Fair, for a restoring of the balance between the sexes, that the division of good things be rather in the fair ones' favour, as they are to think: with the warning to them, that the establishment of their claim for equality puts an end to the priceless privileges of petticoats. Women must be mad, to provoke such a warning; and the majority of them submissively show their good sense. They send up an incense of perfumery, all the bouquets of the chemist commingled; most nourishing to the idea of woman in the nose

of man. They are a forest foliage--rustle of silks and muslins, magic interweaving, or the mythology, if you prefer it. See, hear, smell, they are Juno, Venus, Hebe, to you. We must have poetry with them; otherwise they are better in the kitchen. Is there--but there is not; there is not present one of the chivalrous breeched who could prefer the shocking emancipated gristly female, which imposes propriety on our sensations and inner dreams, by petrifying in the tender bud of them.

Colonel Corfe is the man to hear on such a theme. He is a colonel of Companies. But those are his diversion, as the British Army has been to the warrior. Puellis idoneus, he is professedly a lady's man, a rose-beetle, and a fine specimen of a common kind: and he has been that thing, that shining delight of the lap of ladies, for a spell of years, necessitating a certain sparkle of the saccharine crystals preserving him, to conceal the muster. He has to be fascinating, or he would look outworn, forlorn. On one side of him is Lady Carmine; on the other, Lady Swanage; dames embedded in the blooming maturity of England's conservatory. Their lords (an Earl, a Baron) are of the lords who go down to the City to sow a title for a repair of their poor incomes, and are to be commended for frankly accepting the new dispensation while they retain the many advantages of the uncanceled ancient. Thus gently does a maternal Old England let them down. Projectors of Companies, Directors, Founders; Railway magnates, actual kings and nobles (though one cannot yet persuade old reverence to do homage with the ancestral spontaneity to the uncrowned, uncoroneted, people of our sphere); holders of Shares in gold mines, Shares in Afric's blue mud of the glittering teeth we draw for English beauty to wear in the ear, on the neck, at the wrist; Bankers and wives of Bankers. Victor passed among them, chatting right and left.

Lady Carmine asked him: 'Is Durandarte counted on?'

He answered: 'I made sure of the Luciani.'

She serenely understood. Artistes are licenced people, with a Bohemian instead of the titular glitter for the bewildering of moralists; as paste will pass for diamonds where the mirror is held up to Nature by bold supernumeraries.

He wished to introduce Nesta. His girl was on the raised orchestral flooring. Nataly held her fast to a music-scroll.

Mr. Peridon, sad for the absence and cause of absence of Louise de Seilles,--summoned in the morning abruptly to Bourges, where her brother lay with his life endangered by an accident at Artillery practise,-- Mr. Peridon was generally conductor. Victor was to lead the full force of amateurs in the brisk overture to Zampa. He perceived a movement of Nataly, Nesta, and Peridon. 'They have come,' he said; he jumped on the orchestra boards and hastened to greet the Luciani with Durandarte in the retiring-room.

His departure raised the whisper that he would wield the baton. An opinion was unuttered. His name for the flute-duet with the Hon. Dudley

Sowerby had not provoked the reserve opinion; it seemed, on the whole, a pretty thing in him to condescend to do: the sentiment he awakened was not flustered by it. But the act of leading, appeared as an official thing to do. Our soufe of sentiment will be seen subsiding under a breath, without a repressive word to send it down. Sir Rodwell Blachington would have preferred Radnor's not leading or playing either. Colonel Corfe and Mr. Caddis declined to consider such conduct English, in a man of station . . . notwithstanding Royal Highnesses, who are at least partly English: partly, we say, under our breath, remembering our old ideal of an English gentleman, in opposition to German tastes. It is true, that the whole country is changing, decomposing!

The colonel fished for Lady Carmine's view. And Lady Swanage too? Both of the distinguished ladies approved of Mr. Radnor's leading--for a leading off. Women are pleased to see their favourite in the place of prominence--as long as Fortune swims him unbuffeted, or one should say, unbattered, up the mounting wave. Besides these ladies had none of the colonel's remainder of juvenile English sense of the manly, his adolescent's intolerance of the eccentric, suspicion and contempt of any supposed affectation, which was not ostentatiously, stalkerly practised to subdue the sex. And you cannot wield a baton without looking affected. And at one of the Colonel's Clubs in town, only five years back, an English musical composer, who had not then made his money--now by the mystery of events knighted!--had been (he makes now fifteen thousand a year) black-balled. 'Fiddler? no; can't admit a Fiddler to associate on equal terms with gentlemen.' Only five years back: and at present we are having the Fiddler everywhere.

A sprinkling of the minor ladies also would have been glad if Mr. Radnor had kept himself somewhat more exclusive. Dr. Schlesien heard remarks, upon which his weighty Teutonic mind sat crushingly. Do these English care one bit for music?--for anything finer than material stuffs?--what that man Durance calls, 'their beef, their beer, and their pew in eternity'? His wrath at their babble and petty brabble doubted that they did.

But they do. Art has a hold of them. They pay for it; and the thing purchased grapples. It will get to their bosoms to breathe from them in time: entirely overcoming the taste for feudalism, which still a little objects to see their born gentleman acting as leader of musicians. A people of slow movement, developing tardily, their country is wanting in the distincter features, from being always in the transitional state, like certain sea-fish rolling head over-you know not head from tail. Without the Welsh, Irish, Scot; in their composition, there would not be much of the yeasty ferment: but it should not be forgotten that Welsh, Irish, Scot, are now largely of their numbers; and the taste for elegance, and for spiritual utterance, for Song, nay, for Ideas, is there among them, though it does not everywhere cover a rocky surface to bewitch the eyes of aliens;--like Louise de Seilles and Dr. Schlesien, for example; aliens having no hostile disposition toward the people they were compelled to criticize; honourably granting, that this people has a great history. Even such has the Lion, with Homer for the transcriber of his deeds. But the gentle aliens would image our emergence from wildness

as the unsocial spectacle presented by the drear menagerie Lion, alone or mated; with hardly an animated moment save when the raw red joint is beneath his paw, reminding him of the desert's pasture.

Nevertheless, where Strength is, there is hope:--it may be said more truly than of the breath of Life; which is perhaps but the bucket of breath, muddy with the sediment of the well: whereas we have in Strength a hero, if a malefactor; whose muscles shall haul him up to the light he will prove worthy of, when that divinity has shown him his uncleanness. And when Strength is not exercising, you are sure to see Satirists jump on his back. Dozens, foreign and domestic, are on the back of Old England; a tribute to our quality if at the same time an irritating scourge. The domestic are in excess; and let us own that their view of the potentate, as an apathetic beast of power, who will neither show the power nor woo the graces; pretending all the while to be eminently above the beast, and posturing in an inefficient mimicry of the civilized, excites to satire. Colney Durance had his excuses. He could point to the chief creative minds of the country for generations, as beginning their survey genially, ending venomously, because of an exasperating unreason and scum in the bubble of the scenes, called social, around them. Viola under his chin, he gazed along the crowded hall, which was to him a rich national pudding of the sycophants, the hypocrites, the burlies, the idiots; dregs of the depths and froth of the surface; bowing to one, that they may scorn another; instituting a Charity, for their poorer fawning fellows to relieve their purses and assist them in tricking the world and their Maker: and so forth, a tiresome tirade: and as it was not on his lips, but in the stomach of the painful creature, let him grind that hurdy-gurdy for himself. His friend Victor set it stirring: Victor had here what he aimed at!

How Success derides Ambition! And for this he imperilled the happiness of the worthy woman he loved! Exposed her to our fen-fogs and foul snakes--of whom one or more might be in the assembly now: all because of his insane itch to be the bobbing cork on the wave of the minute! Colney's rapid interjections condensed upon the habitual shrug at human folly, just when Victor, fronting the glassy stare of Colonel Corfe, tapped to start his orchestra through the lively first bars of the overture to Zampa.

We soon perceive that the post Mr. Radnor fills he thoroughly fills, whatever it may be. Zampa takes horse from the opening. We have no amateur conductor riding ahead: violins, 'cellos, piano, wind-stops: Peridon, Catkin, Pempton, Yatt, Cormyn, Colney, Mrs. Cormyn, Dudley Sowerby: they are spirited on, patted, subdued, muted, raised, rushed anew, away, held in hand, in both hands. Not earnestness worn as a cloak, but issuing, we see; not simply a leader of musicians, a leader of men. The halo of the millionaire behind, assures us of a development in the character of England's merchant princes. The homage we pay him flatters us. A delightful overture, masterfully executed; ended too soon; except that the programme forbids the ordinary interpretation of prolonged applause. Mr. Radnor is one of those who do everything consummately. And we have a monition within, that a course of spiritual enjoyment will rouse the call for bodily refreshment. His genial nod and

laugh and word of commendation to his troop persuade us oddly, we know not how, of provision to come. At the door of the retiring-room, see, he is congratulated by Luciani and Durandarte. Miss Priscilla Graves is now to sing a Schumann. Down later, it is a duet with the Rev. Septimus Barmby. We have nothing to be ashamed of in her, before an Italian Operatic singer! Ices after the first part is over.

CHAPTER XXI

DARTREY FENELLAN

Had Nataly and Nesta known who was outside helping Skepsey to play ball with the boys, they would not have worked through their share of the performance with so graceful a composure. Even Simeon Fenellan was unaware that his half-brother Dartrey had landed in England. Dartrey went first to Victor's office, where he found Skepsey packing the day's letters and circulars into the bag for the delivery of them at Lakelands. They sprang a chatter, and they missed the last of the express trains which did, not greatly signify, Skepsey said, 'as it was a Concert.' To hear his hero talk, was the music for him; and he richly enjoyed the pacing along the railway-platform.

Arrived on the grounds, they took opposite sides in a game of rounders, at that moment tossing heads or tails for innings. These boys were slovenly players, and were made unhappy by Skepsey's fussy instructions to them in smartness. They had a stupid way of feeding the stick, and they ran sprawling; it concerned Great Britain for them to learn how to use their legs. It was pitiful for the country to see how lumpish her younger children were. Dartrey knew his little man and laughed, after warning him that his English would want many lessons before they stomached the mixture of discipline and pleasure. So it appeared: the pride of the boys in themselves, their confidence, enjoyment of the game, were all gone; and all were speedily out but Skepsey; who ran for the rounder, with his coat off, sharp as a porpoise, and would have got it, he had it in his grasp, when, at the jump, just over the line of the goal, a clever fling, if ever was, caught him a crack on that part of the human frame where sound is best achieved. Then were these young lumps transformed to limber, lither, merry fellows. They rejoiced Skepsey's heart; they did everything better, ran and dodged and threw in a style to win the nod from the future official inspector of Games and Amusements of the common people; a deputy of the Government, proposed by Skepsey to his hero with a deferential eagerness. Dartrey clapped him on the shoulder, softly laughing.

'System--Mr. Durance is right--they must have system, if they are to appreciate a holiday,' Skepsey said; and he sent a wretched gaze around, at the justification of some of the lurid views of Mr. Durance, in signs of the holiday wasted;--impoverishing the country's manhood in a small degree, it may be argued, but we ask, can the country afford it, while foreign nations are drilling their youth, teaching them to be ready to

move in squads or masses, like the fist of a pugilist. Skepsey left it to his look to speak his thought. He saw an enemy in tobacco. The drowsiness of beer had stretched various hulks under trees. Ponderous cricket lumbered half-alive. Flabby fun knocked-up a yell. And it was rather vexatious to see girls dancing in good time to the band-music. One had a male-partner, who hopped his loutish burlesque of the thing he could not do.

Apparently, too certainly, none but the girls had a notion of orderly muscular exercise. Of what use are girls! Girls have their one mission on earth; and let them be healthy by all means, for the sake of it; only, they should not seem to prove that old England is better represented on the female side. Skepsey heard, with a nip of spite at his bosom, a small body of them singing in chorus as they walked in step, arm in arm, actually marched: and to the rearward, none of these girls heeding; there were the louts at their burlesque of jigs and fisticuffs! 'Cherry Ripe,' was the song.

'It's delightful to hear them!' said Dartrey.

Skepsey muttered jealously of their having been trained.

The song, which drew Dartrey Fenellan to the quick of an English home, planted him at the same time in Africa to hear it. Dewy on a parched forehead it fell, England the shedding heaven.

He fetched a deep breath, as of gratitude for vital refreshment. He had his thoughts upon the training of our English to be something besides the machinery of capitalists, and upon the country as a blessed mother instead of the most capricious of maudlin step-dames.

He flicked his leg with the stick he carried, said: 'Your master's the man to make a change among them, old friend!' and strolled along to a group surrounding two fellows who shammed a bout at single-stick. Vacuity in the attack on either side, contributed to the joint success of the defense. They paused under inspection; and Dartrey said: 'You're burning to give them a lesson, Skepsey.'

Skepsey had no objection to his hero's doing so, though at his personal cost.

The sticks were handed to them; the crowd increased; their rounders boys had spied them, and came trooping to the scene. Skepsey was directed to hit in earnest. His defensive attitude flashed, and he was at head and right and left leg, and giving point, recovering, thrusting madly, and again at shoulder and thigh, with bravos for reward of a man meaning business; until a topper on his hat, a cut over the right thigh, and the stick in his middlerib, told the spectators of a scientific adversary; and loudly now the gentleman was cheered. An undercurrent of warm feeling ran for the plucky little one at it hot again in spite of the strokes, and when he fetched his master a handsome thud across the shoulder, and the gentleman gave up and complimented him, Skepsey had applause.

He then begged his hero to put the previous couple in position, through a few of the opening movements. They were horribly sheepish at first. Meantime two boys had got hold of sticks, and both had gone to work in Skepsey's gallant style; and soon one was howling. He excused himself, because of the funny-bone, situated, in his case, higher than usual up the arm. And now the pair of men were giving and taking cuts to make a rhinoceros caper.

'Very well; begin that way; try what you can bear,' said Dartrey.

Skepsey watched them, in felicity for love of the fray, pained by the disregard of science.

Comments on the pretty play, indicating a reminiscent acquaintance with it, and the capacity for critical observations, were started. Assaults, wonderful tricks of a slashing Life-Guardsman, one spectator had witnessed at an exhibition in a London hall. Boxing too. You may see displays of boxing still in places. How about a prizefight?--With money on it?--Eh, but you don't expect men to stand up to be knocked into rumpsteaks for nothing?--No, but it's they there bets!--Right, and that's a game gone to ruin along of outsiders.--But it always was and it always will be popular with Englishmen!

Great English names of young days, before the wintry shadow of the Law had blighted them, received their withered laurels. Emulous boys were in the heroic posture. Good! sparring does no hurt: Skepsey seized a likely lad, Dartrey another. Nature created the Ring for them. Now then, arms and head well up, chest hearty, shoulders down, out with the right fist, just below the level of the chin; out with the left fist farther, right out, except for that bit of curve; so, and draw it slightly back for wary-pussy at the spring. Firm you stand, feeling the muscles of both legs, left half a pace ahead, right planted, both stringy. None of your milk-pail looks; show us jaw, you bulldogs. Now then, left from the shoulder, straight at right of head.--Good, and alacrity called on vigour in Skepsey's pupil; Dartrey's had the fist on his mouth before he could parry right arm up. 'Foul blow!' Dartrey cried. Skepsey vowed to the contrary. Dartrey reiterated his charge. Skepsey was a figure of negation, gesticulating and protesting. Dartrey appealed tempestuously to the Ring; Skepsey likewise, in a tone of injury. He addressed a remonstrance to Captain Dartrey.

'Hang your captain, sir! I call you a coward; come on,' said the resolute gentleman, already in ripe form for the attack. His blue eyes were like the springing sunrise over ridges of the seas; and Skepsey jumped to his meaning.

Boys and men were spectators of a real scientific set-to, a lovely show. They were half puzzled, it seemed so deadly. And the little one got in his blows at the gentleman, who had to be hopping. Only, the worse the gentleman caught it, the friendlier his countenance became. That was the wonder, and that gave them the key. But it was deliciously near to the real thing.

Dartrey and Skepsey shook hands.

'And now, you fellows, you're to know, that this is one of the champions; and you take your lesson from him and thank him,' Dartrey said, as he turned on his heel to strike and greet the flow from the house.

'Dartrey come!' Victor, Fenellan, Colney, had him by the hand in turn. Pure sweetness of suddenly awakened joy sat in Nataly's eyes as she swam to welcome him, Nesta moved a step, seemed hesitating, and she tripped forward. 'Dear Captain Dartrey!'

He did not say: 'But what a change in you!'

'It is blue-butterfly, all the same,' Nataly spoke to his look.

Victor hurriedly pronounced the formal introduction between the Hon. Dudley Sowerby and Captain Dartrey Fenellan. The bronze face and the milky bowed to one another ceremoniously; the latter faintly flushing.

'So here you are at last,' Victor said. 'You stay with us.'

'To-morrow or later, if you'll have me. I go down to my people to-night.'

'But you stay in England now?' Nataly's voice wavered on the question.

'There's a chance of my being off to Upper Burmah before the week's ended.'

'Ah, dear, dear!' sighed Fenellan; 'and out of good comes evil!--as grandfather Deucalion exclaimed, when he gallantly handed up his dripping wife from the mud of the Deluge waters. Do you mean to be running and Dewing it on for ever, with only a nod for friends, Dart?'

'Lord, Simmy, what a sound of home there is in your old nonsense!' Dartrey said.

His eyes of strong dark blue colour and the foreign swarthinness of his brows and cheeks and neck mixed the familiar and the strange, in the sight of the women who knew him.

The bill-broker's fair-tressed young wife whispered of curiosity concerning him to Nataly. He dressed like a sailor, he stood like a soldier: and was he married? Yes, he was married.

Mrs. Blathenoy imagined a something in Mrs. Radnor's tone. She could account for it; not by the ordinary reading of the feminine in the feminine, but through a husband who professed to know secrets. She was young in years and experience, ten months wedded, disappointedly awakened, enlivened by the hour, kindled by a novel figure of man, fretful for a dash of imprudence. This Mrs. Radnor should be the one to second her very innocent turn for a galopade; her own position allowed

of any little diverting jig or reel, or plunge in a bath--she required it, for the domestic Jacob Blathenoy was a dry chip: proved such, without a day's variation during the whole of the ten wedded months. Nataly gratified her spoken wish. Dartrey Fenellan bowed to the lady, and she withdrew him, seeing composedly that other and greater ladies had the wish ungratified. Their husbands were not so rich as hers, and their complexions would hardly have pleased the handsome brown-faced officer so well.

Banquet, equal to a blast of trumpet, was the detaining word for the multitude. It circulated, one knows not how. Eloquent as the whiffs to the sniffs (and nowhere is eloquence to match it, when the latter are sharpened from within to without), the word was very soon over the field. Mr. Carling may have helped; he had it from Fenellan; and he was among the principal groups, claiming or making acquaintances, as a lawyer should do. The Concert was complimentarily a topic: Durandarte divine!--did not everybody think so? Everybody did, in default of a term for overtopping it. Our language is poor at hyperbole; our voices are stronger. Gestures and heaven-sent eyeballs invoke to display the ineffable. Where was Durandarte now? Gone; already gone; off with the Luciani for evening engagements; he came simply to oblige his dear friend Mr. Radnor. Cheque fifty guineas: hardly more on both sides than an exchange of smiles. Ah, these merchant-princes! What of Mr. Radnor's amateur instrumentalists? Amateurs, they are not to be named: perfect musicians. Mr. Radnor is the perfection of a host. Yes, yes; Mrs. Radnor; Miss Radnor too: delicious voices; but what is it about Mr. Radnor so captivating! He is not quite English, yet he is not at all foreign. Is he very adventurous in business, as they say?

'Soundest head in the City of London,' Mr. Blathenoy remarked.

Sir Rodwell Blachington gave his nod.

The crowd interjected, half-sighing. We ought to be proud of such a man! Perhaps we are a trifle exaggerating, says its heart. But that we are wholly grateful to him, is a distinct conclusion. And he may be one of the great men of his time: he has a quite individual style of dress.

Lady Rodwell Blachington observed to Colney Durance:

'Mr. Radnor bids fair to become the idol of the English people.'

'If he can prove himself to be sufficiently the dupe of the English people,' said Colney.

'Idol--dupe?' interjected Sir Rodwell, and his eyebrows fixed at the perch of Colney's famous 'national interrogation' over vacancy of understanding, as if from the pull of a string. He had his audience with him; and the satirist had nothing but his inner gush of acids at sight of a planted barb.

Colney was asked to explain. He never explained. He performed a series of astonishing leaps, like the branchy baboon above the traveller's head

in the tropical forest, and led them into the trap they assisted him to prepare for them. 'No humour, do you say? The English have no humour?' a nephew of Lady Blachington's inquired of him, with polite pugnacity, and was cordially assured, that 'he vindicated them.'

'And Altruistic! another specimen of the modern coinage,' a classical Church dignitary, in grammarian disgust, remarked to a lady, as they passed.

Colney pricked-up his ears. It struck him that he might fish for suggestions in aid of the Grand Argument before the Elders of the Court of Japan. Dr. Wardan, whose recognition he could claim, stated to him, that the lady and he were enumerating words of a doubtfully legitimate quality now being inflicted upon the language.

'The slang from below is perhaps preferable?' said Colney.

'As little-less.'

'But a pirate-tongue, cut-off from its roots, must continue to practise piracy, surely, or else take reinforcements in slang, otherwise it is inexpressive of new ideas.'

'Possibly the new ideas are best expressed in slang.'

'If insular. They will consequently be incommunicable to foreigners. You would, then, have us be trading with tokens instead of a precious currency? Yet I cannot perceive the advantage of letting our ideas be clothed so racy of the obscener soil; considering the pretensions of the English language to become the universal. If we refuse additions from above, they force themselves on us from below.'

Dr. Wardan liked the frame of the observations, disliked the substance.

'One is to understand that the English language has these pretensions?' he said:--he minced in his manner, after the well-known mortar-board and tassel type; the mouthing of a petrification: clearly useless to the pleadings of the patriotic Dr. Bouthoin and his curate.

He gave no grip to Colney, who groaned at cheap Donnish sarcasm, and let him go, after dealing him a hard pellet or two in a cracker-covering.

There was Victor all over the field netting his ephemerae! And he who feeds on them, to pay a price for their congratulations and flatteries, he is one of them himself!

Nesta came tripping from the Rev. Septimus Barmby. 'Dear Mr. Durance, where is Captain Dartrey?'

Mrs. Blathenoy had just conducted her husband through a crowd, for an introduction of him to Captain Dartrey. That was perceptible.

Dudley Sowerby followed Nesta closely: he struck across the path of the

Rev. Septimus: again he had the hollow of her ear at his disposal.

'Mr. Radnor was excellent. He does everything consummately: really, we are all sensible of it. I am. He must lead us in a symphony. These light "champagne overtures" of French composers, as Mr. Fenellan calls them, do not bring out his whole ability:--Zampa, Le Pre aux clerics, Masaniello, and the like.'

'Your duet together went well.'

'Thanks to you--to you. You kept us together.'

'Papa was the runaway or strain-the-leash, if there was one.'

'He is impetuous, he is so fervent. But, Miss Radnor, I could not be the runaway-with you . . . with you at the piano. Indeed, I . . . shall we stroll down? I love the lake.'

'You will hear the bell for your cold dinner very soon.'

'I am not hungry. I would so much rather talk--hear you. But you are hungry? You have been singing twice: three times! Opera singers, they say, eat hot suppers; they drink stout. And I never heard your voice more effective. Yours is a voice that . . . something of the feeling one has in hearing cathedral voices: carry one up. I remember, in Dresden, once, a Fraulein Kuhnstreich, a prodigy, very young, considering her accomplishments. But it was not the same.'

Nesta wondered at Dartrey Fenellan for staying so long with Mr. and Mrs. Blathenoy.

'Ah, Mr. Sowerby, if I am to have flattery, I cannot take it as a milliner's dumb figure wears the beautiful dress; I must point out my view of some of my merits.'

'Oh! do, I beg, Miss . . . You have a Christian name and I too: and once . . . not Mr. Sowerby: yes, it was Dudley!',

'Quite accidentally, and a world of pardons entreated.'

'And Dudley begged Dudley might be Dudley always !'

He was deepening to the Barmby intonation--apparently Cupid's; but a shade more airily Pagan, not so fearfully clerical.

Her father had withdrawn Dartrey Fenellan from Mr. and Mrs. Blathenoy. Dr. Schlesien was bowing with Dartrey.

'And if Durandarte would only--but you are one with Miss Graves to depreciate my Durandarte, in favour of the more classical Jachimo; whom we all admire; but you shall be just,' said she, and she pouted. She had seen her father plant Dartrey Fenellan in the midst of a group of City gentlemen.

Simeon touched among them to pluck at his brother. He had not a chance; he retired, and swam into the salmon-net of seductive Mrs. Blathenoy's broad bright smile.

'It's a matter of mines, and they're hovering in the attitude of the query, like corkscrews over a bottle, profoundly indifferent to blood-relationships,' he said to her.

'Pray, stay and be consoled by me,' said the fair young woman. 'You are to point me out all the distinguished people. Is it true, that your brother has left the army?'

'Dartrey no longer wears the red. Here comes Colonel Corfe, who does. England has her army still!'

'His wife persuaded him?'

'You see he is wearing the black.'

'For her? How very very sad! Tell me--what a funnily dressed woman meeting that gentleman!'

'Hush--a friend of the warrior. Splendid weather, Colonel Corfe.'

'Superb toilettes!' The colonel eyed Mrs. Blathenoy dilatingly, advanced, bowed, and opened the siege.

She decided a calculation upon his age, made a wall of it, smilingly agreed with his encomium of the Concert, and toned her voice to Fenellan's comprehension: 'Did it occur recently?'

'Months; in Africa; I haven't the date.'

'Such numbers of people one would wish to know! Who are those ladies holding a Court, where Mr. Radnor is?'

'Lady Carmine, Lady Swanage--if it is your wish?' interposed the colonel.

She dealt him a forgiving smile. 'And that pleasant-looking old gentleman?'

Colonel Corfe drew-up. Fenellan said: 'Are we veterans at forty or so?'

'Well, it 's the romance, perhaps!' She raised her shoulders.

The colonel's intelligence ran a dog's nose for a lady's interjections. 'The romance? . . . at forty, fifty? gone? Miss Julinks, the great heiress and a beauty; has chosen him over the heads of all the young men of his time. Cranmer Lotsdale. Most romantic history!'

'She's in love with that, I suppose.'

'Now you direct my attention to him,' said Fenellan, 'the writing of the romantic history has made the texture look a trifle thready. You have a terrible eye.'

It was thrown to where the person stood who had first within a few minutes helped her to form critical estimates of men, more consciously to read them.

'Your brother stays in England?'

'The fear is, that he's off again.'

'Annoying for you. If I had a brother, I would not let him go.'

'How would you detain him?'

'Locks and bolts, clock wrong, hands and arms, kneeling--the fourth act of the Huguenots!'

'He went by way of the window, I think. But that was a lover.'

'Oh! well!' she flushed. She did not hear the 'neglected and astonished colonel speak, and she sought diversion in saying to Fenellan: 'So many people of distinction are assembled here to-day! Tell me, who is that pompous gentleman, who holds his arms up doubled, as he walks?'

'Like flappers of a penguin: and advances in jerks: he is head of the great Firm of Quatley Brothers: Sir Abraham: finances or farms one of the South American Republics: we call him, Pride of Port. He consumes it and he presents it.'

'And who is that little man, who stops everybody?'

'People of distinction indeed! That little man--is your upper lip underrateing him? . . . When a lady's lip is erratically disdainful, it suggests a misuse of a copious treasury, deserving to be mulcted, punished--how?--who can say?--that little man, now that little man, with a lift of his little finger, could convulse the Bacon Market!'

Mrs. Blathenoy shook. Hearing Colonel Corfe exclaim:

'Bacon Market!' she let fly a peal. Then she turned to a fresh satellite, a round and a ruddy, 'at her service ever,' Mr. Beaves Urmsing, and repeated Fenellan's words. He, in unfeigned wonderment at such unsuspected powers, cried: 'Dear me!' and stared at the little man, making the pretty lady's face a twinkling dew.

He had missed the Concert. Was it first-rate? Ecstasy answered in the female voice.

'Hem'd fool I am to keep appointments!' he muttered.

She reproved him: 'Fie, Mr. Urmsing; it's the making of them, not the

keeping!

'Ah, my dear ma'am, if I'd had Blathenoy's luck when he made a certain appointment. And he was not so much older than me? The old ones get the prizes!'

Mr. Beaves Urmsing prompted Colonel Corfe to laugh in triumph. The colonel's eyebrows were up in fixity over sleepy lids. He brightened to propose the conducting of the pretty woman to the banquet.

'We shall see them going in,' said she. 'Mr. Radnor has a French cook, who does wonders. But I heard him asking for Mr. Beaves Urmsing. I'm sure he expected The Marigolds at his Concert.'

'Anything to oblige the company,' said the rustic ready chorister, clearing his throat.

The lady's feet were bent in the direction of a grassy knoll, where sunflowers, tulips, dahlias, peonies, of the sex eclipsed at a distance its roses and lilies. Fenellan saw Dartrey, still a centre of the merchantmen, strolling thither.

'And do you know, your brother is good enough to dine with us next week, Thursday, down here,' she murmured. 'I could venture to command?--if you are not induced.'

'Whichever word applies to a faithful subject.'

'I do so wish your brother had not left the army!'

'You have one son of Mars.'

Her eyes took the colonel up to cast him down: he was not the antidote. She said to him: 'Luciani's voice wears better than her figure.'

The colonel replied: 'I remember,' and corrected himself, 'at Eton, in jackets: she was not so particularly slim; never knew how to dress. You beat Italians there! She moved one as a youngster.'

'Eton boys are so susceptible!'

'Why, hulloa, don't I remember her coming out!--and do you mean to tell me,' Mr. Beaves Urmsing brutally addressed the colonel, 'that you were at Eton when . . . why, what age do you give the poor woman, then!' He bellowed, 'Eh?' as it were a bull crowing.

The colonel retreated to one of his defensive corners. 'I am not aware that I meant to tell you anything.'

Mr. Beaves Urmsing turned square-breasted on Fenellan: 'Fellow's a born donkey!'

'And the mother lived?' said Fenellan.

Mr. Beaves Urmsing puffed with wrath at the fellow.

Five minutes later, in the midst of the group surrounding and felicitating Victor, he had sight of Fenellan conversing with fair ones, and it struck a light in him; he went three steps backward, with shouts. 'Dam funny fellow! eh? who is he? I must have that man at my table. Worth fifty Colonel Jackasses! And I 've got a son in the Guards: and as much laugh in him, he 's got, as a bladder. But we'll make a party, eh, Radnor? with that friend o' yours. Dam funny fellow! and precious little of it going on now among the young lot. They're for seeing ghosts and gaping their jaws; all for the quavers instead of the capers.'

He sounded and thrummed his roguish fling-off for the capers. A second glimpse of Fenellan agitated the anecdote, as he called it, seizing Victor's arm, to have him out of earshot of the ladies. Delivery, not without its throes, was accomplished, but imperfectly, owing to sympathetic convulsions, under which Mr. Beaves Urmsing's countenance was crinkled of many colours, as we see the Spring rhubarb-leaf. Unable to repeat the brevity of Fenellan's rejoinder, he expatiated on it to convey it, swearing that it was the kind of thing done in the old days, when men were witty dogs:--'pat! and pat back! as in the pantomime.'

'Repartee !' said Victor. 'He has it. You shall know him. You're the man for him.'

'He for me, that he is!--"Hope the mother's doing well? My card":--eh? Grave as an owl! Look, there goes the donkey, lady to right and left, all ears for him--ha! ha! I must have another turn with your friend. "Mother lived, did she?" Dam funny fellow, all of the olden time! And a dinner, bachelor dinner, six of us, at my place, next week, say Wednesday, half-past six, for a long evening--flowing bowl--eh, shall it be?'

Nesta came looking to find her Captain Dartrey.

Mr. Beaves Urmsing grew courtly of the olden time. He spied Colonel Corfe anew, and 'Donkey!' rose to split the roar at his mouth, and full of his anecdote, he pursued some congenial acquaintances, crying to his host: 'Wednesday, mind! eh? by George, your friend's gizzarded me for the day!'

Plumped with the rich red stream of life, this last of the squires of old England thumped along among the guests, a very tuning-fork to keep them at their pitch of enthusiasm. He encountered Mr. Caddis, and it was an encounter. Mr. Caddis represented his political opinions; but here was this cur of a Caddis whineing his niminy note from his piminy nob, when he was asked for his hearty echo of the praises of this jolly good fellow come to waken the neighbourhood, to be a blessing, a blazing hearth, a fall of manna:--and thank the Lord for him, you desertdog! 'He 's a merchant prince, and he's a prince of a man, if you're for titles. Eh? you "assent to my encomiums." You'll be calling me Mr. Speaker next. Hang me, Caddis, if those Parliamentary benches of yours aren't freezing

you from your seat up, and have got to your jaw--my belief!

Mr. Caddis was left reflecting, that we have, in the dispensations of Providence, when we have a seat, to submit to castigations from butcherly men unaccountably commissioned to solidify the seat. He could have preached a discourse upon Success, to quiet the discontentment of the unseated. And our world of seats oddly gained, quaintly occupied, maliciously beset, insensately envied, needs the discourse. But it was not delivered, else would it have been here written down without mercy, as a medical prescript, one of the grand specifics. He met Victor, and, between his dread of him and the counsels of a position subject to stripes, he was a genial thaw. Victor beamed; for Mr. Caddis had previously stood eminent as an iceberg of the Lakelands' party. Mr. Inchling and Mr. Caddis were introduced. The former in Commerce, the latter in Politics, their sustaining boast was, the being our stable Englishmen; and at once, with cousinly minds, they fell to chatting upon the nothings agreeably and seriously. Colney Durance forsook a set of ladies for fatter prey, and listened to them. What he said, Victor did not hear. The effect was always to be seen, with Inchling under Colney. Fenellan did better service, really good service.

Nataly played the heroine she was at heart. Why think of her as having to act a character! Twice had Carling that afternoon, indirectly and directly, stated Mrs. Burman to be near the end we crape a natural, a defensible, satisfaction to hear of:--not wishing it--poor woman!--but pardonably, before man and all the angels, wishing, praying for the beloved one to enter into her earthly peace by the agency of the other's exit into her heavenly.

Fenellan and Colney came together, and said a word apiece of their friend.

'In his element! The dear old boy has the look of a goldfish, king of his globe.'

'The dear old boy has to me the look of a pot on the fire, with a loose lid.'

I may have the summons from Themison to-morrow, Victor thought. The success of the day, was a wine that rocked the soberest of thoughts. For, strange to confess, ever since the fall on London Bridge, his heart, influenced in some degree by Nataly's depression perhaps, had been shadowed by doubts of his infallible instinct for success. Here, at a stroke, and before entering the house, he had the whole neighbourhood about him: he could feel that he and Nataly stood in the minds of the worthy people variously with the brightness if not with the warmth distinguishable in the bosom of Beaves Urmsing--the idea of whom gave Lakelands an immediate hearth-glow.

Armandine was thirteen minutes, by his watch, behind the time she had named. Small blame to her. He excused her to Lady Carmine, Lady Swanage, Lady Blachington, Mrs. Fanning, Sir Abraham Quatley, Mr. Danny (of Bacon fame) and the rest of the group surrounding Nataly on the mound

leftward of the white terraces descending to the lake; where she stood beating her foot fretfully at the word brought by Nesta, that Dartrey Fenellan had departed. It was her sunshine departed. But she went through her task of conversing amiably. Colney, for a wonder, consented to be useful in assisting Fenellan to relate stories of French Cooks; which were, like the Royal Hanoverian oyster, of an age for offering acceptable flavour to English hearers. Nesta drew her mother's attention to Priscilla Graves and Skepsey; the latter bending head and assenting. Nataly spoke of the charm of Priscilla's voice that day, in her duet with the Rev. Septimus. Mr. Pempton looked; he saw that Priscilla was proselytizing. She was perfection to him but for one blotting thing. With grief on his eyelids, he said to Nataly or to himself: 'Meat!'

'Dear friend, don't ride your hobby over us,' she replied.

'But it's with that object they mount it,' said Victor.

The greater ladies of the assembly were quite ready to accuse the sections, down to the individuals, of the social English (reserving our elect) of an itch to be tyrants.

Colney was apologizing for them, with his lash: 'It's merely the sensible effect of a want of polish of the surface when they rub together.'

And he heard Carling exclaim to Victor: 'How comes the fellow here!'

Skepsey had rushed across an open space to intercept a leisurely progressive man, whose hat was of the shape Victor knew; and the man wore the known black gaiters. In appearance, he had the likeness of a fallen parson.

Carling and Victor crossed looks that were questions carrying their answers.

Nataly's eyes followed Victor's. 'Who is the man?' she said; and she got no reply beyond a perky sparkle in his gaze.

Others were noticing the man, who was trying to pass by Skepsey, now on his right side, now on his left.

'There'll be no stopping him,' Carling said, and he slipped to the rear.'

At this juncture, Armandine's mellow bell proclaimed her readiness.

Victor rubbed the back of his head. Nataly asked him: 'Dear, is it that man?'

He nodded scantily: 'Expected, expected. I think we have our summons from Armandine. One moment--poor soul! poor soul! Lady Carmine--Sir Abraham Quatley. Will you lead? Lady Blachington, I secure you. One moment.'

He directed Nataly to pair a few of the guests; he hurried down the slope of sward.

Nataly applied to Colney Durance. 'Do you know the man?--is it that man?'

Colney rejoined: 'The man's name is Jarniman.'

Armandine's bell swung melodiously. The guests had grouped, thickening for the stream to procession. Mrs. Blathenoy claimed Fenellan; she requested him to tell her whether he had known Mrs. Victor Radnor many years. She mused. 'You like her?'

'One likes one's dearest of friends among women, does one not?'

The lady nodded to his response. 'And your brother?'

'Dartrey is devoted to her.'

'I am sure,' said she, 'your brother is a chivalrous gentleman. I like her too.' She came to her sentiment through the sentiment of the chivalrous gentleman. Sinking from it, she remarked that Mr. Radnor was handsome still. Fenellan commended the subject to her, as one to discourse of when she met Dartrey. A smell of a trap-hatch, half-open, afflicted and sharpened him. It was Blathenoy's breath: husbands of young wives do these villanies, for the sake of showing their knowledge. Fenellan forbore to praise Mrs. Victor: he laid his colours on Dartrey. The lady gave ear till she reddened. He meant no harm, meant nothing but good; and he was lighting the most destructive of our lower fires.

Visibly, that man Jarniman was disposed of with ease. As in the street-theatres of crowing Punch, distance enlisted pantomime to do the effective part of the speeches. Jarniman's hat was off, he stood bent, he delivered his message. He was handed over to Skepsey's care for the receiving of meat and drink. Victor returned; he had Lady Blachington's hand on his arm; he was all hers, and in the heart of his company of guests at the same time. Eyes that had read him closely for years, were unable to spell a definite signification on his face, below the overflowing happiness of the hospitable man among contented guests. He had in fact something within to enliven him; and that was the more than suspicion, amounting to an odour of certainty, that Armandine intended one of her grand surprises for her master, and for the hundred and fifty or so to be seated at her tables in the unwarmed house of Lakelands.

CHAPTER XXII

CONCERNS THE INTRUSION OF JARNIMAN

Armandine did her wonders. There is not in the wide range of the Muses a more responsive instrument than man to his marvellous cook; and if his notes were but as flowing as his pedals are zealous, we should be carried on the tale of the enthusiasm she awakened, away from the rutted

highroad, where History now thinks of tightening her girdle for an accelerated pace.

The wonders were done: one hundred and seventy guests plenteously fed at tables across the great Concert Hall, down a length of the conservatory-glass, on soups, fish, meats, and the kitchen-garden, under play of creative sauces, all in the persuasive steam of savouriness; every dish, one may say, advancing, curtsying, swimming to be your partner, instead of passively submitting to the eye of appetite, consenting to the teeth, as that rather melancholy procession of the cold, resembling established spinsters thrice-corseted in decorum, will appear to do. Whether Armandine had the thought or that she simply acted in conformity with a Frenchwoman's direct good sense, we do require to smell a sort of animation in the meats we consume. We are still perhaps traceably related to the Adamite old-youngster just on his legs, who betrayed at every turn his Darwinian beginnings, and relished a palpitating unwillingness in the thing refreshing him; only we young-oldsters cherish the milder taste for willingness, with a throb of the vanquished in it. And a seeming of that we get from the warm roast. The banquet to be fervently remembered, should smoke, should send out a breath to meet us. Victor's crowded saloon-carriage was one voice of eulogy, to raise Armandine high as the finale rockets bursting over Wrensham Station at the start Londonward. How had she managed? We foolishly question the arts of magicians.

Mr. Pempton was an apparent dissentient, as the man must be who is half a century ahead of his fellows in humaneness, and saddened by the display of slaughtered herds and their devourers. He had picked out his vegetable and farinaceous morsels, wherever he could get them uncontaminated; enough for sustenance; and the utmost he could show was, that he did not complain. When mounted and ridden by the satirist, in wrath at him for systematically feasting the pride of the martyr on the maceration of his animal part, he put on his martyr's pride, which assumed a perfect contentment in the critical depreciation of opposing systems: he was drawn to state, as he had often done, that he considered our animal part shamefully and dangerously over nourished, and that much of the immorality of the world was due to the present excessive indulgence in meats. 'Not in drink?' Miss Graves inquired. 'No,' he said boldly; 'not equally; meats are more insidious. I say nothing of taking life--of fattening for that express purpose: diseases of animals: bad blood made: cruelty superinduced: it will be seen to be, it will be looked back on, as a form of, a second stage of, cannibalism. Let that pass. I say, that for excess in drinking, the penalty is paid instantly, or at least on the morrow.'

'Paid by the drunkard's wife, you should say.'

'Whereas intemperance in eating, corrupts constitutionally, more spiritually vitiates, we think: on the whole, gluttony is the least-generous of the vices.'

Colney lured Mr. Pempton through a quagmire of the vices to declare, that it brutalized; and stammeringly to adopt the suggestion, that our

breeding of English ladies--those lights of the civilized world--can hardly go with a feeding upon flesh of beasts. Priscilla regretted that champagne should have to be pleaded in excuse of impertinences to her sex. They were both combative, nibbed for epigram, edged to inflict wounds; and they were set to shudder openly at one another's practises; they might have exposed to Colney which of the two maniacal sections of his English had the vaster conceit of superiority in purity; they were baring themselves, as it were with a garment flung-off at each retort. He reproached them for undermining their countrymen; whose Falstaff panics demanded blood of animals to restore them; and their periods of bragging, that they should brandify their wits to imagine themselves Vikings.

Nataly interposed. She was vexed with him. He let his eyelids drop: but the occasion for showing the prickliness of the bristly social English, could not be resisted. Dr. Peter Yatt was tricked to confess, that small annoyances were, in his experience, powerful on the human frame; and Dr. John Cormyn was very neatly brought round to assure him he was mistaken if he supposed the homoeopathic doctor who smoked was exercising a destructive influence on the efficacy of the infinitesimal doses he prescribed; Dr. Yatt chuckled a laugh at globules; Dr. Cormyn at patients treated as horses; while Mr. Catkin was brought to praise the smoke of tobacco as our sanctuary from the sex; and Mr. Peridon quietly denied, that the taking of it into his nostrils from the puffs of his friend caused him sad silences: Nesta flew to protect the admirer of her beloved Louise. Her subsiding young excitement of the day set her Boating on that moony melancholy in Mr. Peridon.

No one could understand the grounds for Colney's more than usual waspishness. He trotted out the fulgent and tonal Church of the Rev. Septimus; the skeleton of worship, so truly showing the spirit, in that of Dudley Sowerby's family; maliciously admiring both; and he had a spar with Fenellan, ending in a snarl and a shout. Victor said to him: 'Yes, here, as much as you like, old Colney, but I tell you, you've staggered that poor woman Lady Blachington to-day, and her husband too; and I don't know how many besides. What the pleasure of it can be, I can't guess.'

'Nor I,' said Fenellan, 'but I'll own I feel envious; like the girl among a family of boys I knew, who were all of them starved in their infancy by a miserly father, that gave them barely a bit of Graves to eat and not a drop of Pempton to drink; and on the afternoon of his funeral, I found them in the drawing-room, four lank fellows, heels up, walking on their hands, from long practice; and the girl informed me, that her brothers were able so to send the little blood they had in their bodies to their brains, and always felt quite cheerful for it, happy, and empowered to deal with the problems of the universe; as they couldn't on their legs; but she, poor thing, was forbidden to do the same! And I'm like her. I care for decorum too much to get the brain to act on Colney's behaviour; but I see it enraptures him and may be comprehensible to the topsy-turvy.'

Victor rubbed hands. It was he who filled Colney's bag of satiric spite. In addition to the downright lunacy of the courting of country society,

by means of the cajolements witnessed this day, a suspicion that Victor was wearing a false face over the signification--of Jarniman's visit and meant to deceive the trustful and too-devoted loving woman he seemed bound to wreck, irritated the best of his nature. He had a resolve to pass an hour with the couple, and speak and insist on hearing plain words before the night had ended. But Fenellan took it out of him. Victor's show of a perfect contentment emulating Pempton's, incited Colney to some of his cunning rapier-thrusts with his dancing adversary; and the heat which is planted in us for the composition: of those cool epigrams, will not allow plain words to follow. Or, handing him over to the police of the Philistines, you may put it, that a habit of assorting spices will render an earnest simplicity distasteful. He was invited by Nataly to come home with them; her wish for his presence, besides personal, was moved by an intuition, that his counsel might specially benefit them. He shrugged; he said he had work at his chambers.

'Work!' Victor ejaculated: he never could reach to a right comprehension of labour, in regard to the very unremunerative occupation of literature. Colney he did not want, and he let him go, as Nataly noticed, without a sign of the reluctance he showed when the others, including Fenellan, excused themselves.

'So! we're alone?' he said, when the door of the hall had closed on them. He kept Nesta talking of the success of the day until she, observing her mother's look, simulated the setting-in of a frenzied yawn. She was kissed, and she tripped to her bed.

'Now we are alone,' Nataly said.

'Well, dear, and the day was, you must own . . . ' he sought to trifle with her heavy voice; but she recalled him: 'Victor!' and the naked anguish in her cry of his name was like a foreign world threatening the one he filled.

'Ah, yes; that man, that Jarniman. You saw him, I remember. You recollected him?--stouter than he was. In her service ever since. Well, a little drop of bitter, perhaps: no harm, tonic.'

'Victor, is she very ill?'

'My love, don't feel at your side: she is ill, ill, not the extreme case: not yet: old and ill. I told Skepsey to give the man refreshment: he had to do his errand.'

'What? why did he come?'

'Curious; he made acquaintance with Skepsey, and appears to have outwitted poor Skepsey, as far as I see it. But if that woman thinks of intimidating me now--!' His eyes brightened; he had sprung from evasions. 'Living in flagrant sin, she says: you and I! She will not have it; warns me. Heard this day at noon of company at Lakelands. Jarniman off at once. Are to live in obscurity;--you and I! if together! Dictates from her death-bed--I suppose her death-bed.'

'Dearest,' Nataly pressed hand on her left breast, 'may we not think that she may be right?'

'An outrageous tyranny of a decrepit woman naming herself wife when she is only a limpet of vitality, with drugs for blood, hanging-on to blast the healthy and vigorous! I remember old Colney's once, in old days, calling that kind of marriage a sarcophagus. It was to me. There I lay --see myself lying! wasting! Think what you can good of her, by all means! From her bed! despatches that Jarniman to me from her bedside, with the word, that she cannot in her conscience allow--what imposition was it I practised? . . . flagrant sin?--it would have been an infinitely viler . . . She is the cause of suffering enough: I bear no more from her; I've come to the limit. She has heard of Lakelands: she has taken one of her hatreds to the place. She might have written, might have sent me a gentleman, privately. No: it must be done in dramatic style--for effect: her confidential--lawyer?--doctor?--butler! Perhaps to frighten me:--the boy she knew, and--poor soul! I don't mean to abuse her: but such conduct as this is downright brutal. I laugh at it, I snap my fingers. I can afford to despise it. Only I do say it deserves to be called abominable.'

'Victor, has she used a threat?'

'Am I brought to listen to any of her threats!--Funny thing, I 'm certain that woman never can think of me except as the boy she knew. I saw her first when she was first a widow. She would keep talking to me of the seductions of the metropolis--kept informing me I was a young man . . . shaking her head. I 've told you. She--well, I know we are mixtures, women as well as men. I can, I hope, grant the same--I believe I can--allowances to women as to men; we are poor creatures, all of using one sense: though I won't give Colney his footing; there's a better way of reading us. I hold fast to Nature. No violation of Nature, my good Colney! We can live the lives of noble creatures; and I say that happiness was meant for us:--just as, when you sit down to your dinner, you must do it cheerfully, and you make good blood: otherwise all's wrong. There's the right answer to Colney! But when a woman like that . . . and marries a boy: well, twenty-one--not quite that: and an innocent, a positive innocent--it may seem incredible, after a term of school-life: it was a fact: I can hardly understand it myself when I look back. Marries him! And then sets to work to persecute him, because he has blood in his veins, because he worships beauty; because he seeks a real marriage, a real mate. And, I say it! let the world take its own view, the world is wrong! because he preferred a virtuous life to the kind of life she would, she must--why, necessarily!--have driven him to, with a mummy's grain of nature in his body. And I am made of flesh, I admit it.'

'Victor, dearest, her threat concerns only your living at Lakelands.'

'Pray, don't speak excitedly, my love,' he replied to the woman whose tones had been subdued to scarce more than waver. 'You see how I meet it: water off a duck's back, or Indian solar beams on the skin of a

Hindoo! I despise it hardly worth contempt;--But, come: our day was a good one. Fenellan worked well. Old Colney was Colney Durance, of course. He did no real mischief.'

'And you will not determine to enter Lakelands--not yet, dear?' said Nataly.

'My own girl, leave it all to me.'

'But, Victor, I must, must know.'

'See the case. You have lots of courage. We can't withdraw. Her intention is mischief. I believe the woman keeps herself alive for it: we've given her another lease!--though it can only be for a very short time; Themison is precise; Carling too. If we hold back--I have great faith in Themison--the woman's breath on us is confirmed. We go down, then; complete the furnishing, quite leisurely; accept--listen--accept one or two invitations: impossible to refuse!--but they are accepted! --and we defy her: a crazy old creature: imagines herself the wife of the ex-Premier, widow of Prince Le Boo, engaged to the Chinese Ambassador, et caetera. Leave the tussle with that woman to me. No, we don't repeat the error of Crayc Farm and Creckholt. And here we have stout friends. Not to speak of Beaver Urmsing: a picture of Old Christmas England! You took to him?--must have taken to Beaver Urmsing! The Marigolds! And Sir Rodwell and Lady Blachington are altogether above the mark of Sir Humphrey and Lady Pottil, and those half and half Mountneys. There's a warm centre of home in Lakelands. But I know my Nataly: she is thinking of our girl. Here is the plan: we stand our ground: my dear soul won't forsake me only there's the thought of Fredi, in the event . . . improbable enough. I lift Fredi out of the atmosphere awhile; she goes to my cousins the Duvidney ladies.'

Nataly was hit by a shot. 'Can you imagine it, Victor?'

'Regard it as done.'

'They will surely decline!'

'Their feeling for General Radnor is a worship.'

'All the more . . . ?'

'The son inherits it. He goes to them personally. Have you ever known me personally fail? Fredi stays at Moorsedge for a month or two. Dorothea and Virginia Duvidney will give her a taste of a new society; good for the girl. All these little shiftings can be turned to good. Meantime, I say, we stand our ground: but you are not to be worried; for though we have gone too far to recede, we need not and we will not make the entry into Lakelands until--you know: that is, auspiciously, to suit you in every way. Thus I provide to meet contingencies. What one may really fancy is, that the woman did but threaten. There's her point of view to be considered: silly, crazy; but one sees it. We are not sure that she struck a blow at Craye or Creckholt. I wonder she never wrote.

She was frightened, when she came to manage her property, of signing her name to anything. Absurd, that sending of Jarniman! However, it's her move; we make a corresponding disposition of our chessmen.'

'And I am to lose my Nesta for a month?' Nataly said, after catching here and there at the fitful gleams of truce or comfort dropped from his words. And simultaneously, the reproach of her mind to her nature for again and so constantly yielding to the domination of his initiative: unable to find the words, even the ideas, to withstand him,--brought big tears. Angry at herself both for the internal feebleness and the exhibition of it, she blinked and begged excuse. There might be nothing that should call her to resist him. She could not do much worse than she had done to-day. The reflection, that to-day she had been actually sustained by the expectation of a death to come, diminished her estimate of to-morrow's burden on her endurance, in making her seem a less criminal woman, who would have no such expectation: which was virtually a stab at a fellow creature's future. Her head was acute to work in the direction of the casuistries and the sensational webs and films. Facing Victor, it was a block.

But the thought came: how could she meet those people about Lakelands, without support of the recent guilty whispers! She said coldly, her heart shaking her: 'You think there has been a recovery?'

'Invalids are up and down. They are--well, no; I should think she dreads the . . .' he kept 'surgeon' out of hearing. 'Or else she means this for the final stroke: "though I'm lying here, I can still make him feel." That, or--poor woman--she has her notions of right and wrong.'

'Could we not now travel for a few weeks, Victor?'

'Certainly, dear; we will, after we have kept our engagements to dine-- I accepted--with the Blathenoys, the Blachingtons, Beaver Urmsing.'

Nataly's vision of the peaceful lost little dairy cottage swelled to brilliance, like the large tear at the fall; darkening under her present effort to comprehend the necessity it was for him to mix and be foremost with the world. Unable to grasp it perfectly in mind, her compassionate love embraced it: she blamed herself, for being the obstruction to him.

'Very well,' she said on a sigh. 'Then we shall not have to let our girl go from us?'

'Just a few weeks. In the middle of dinner, I scribbled a telegram to the Duvidneys, for Skepsey to take.'

'Speaking of Nesta?'

'Of my coming to-morrow. They won't stop me. I dine with them, sleep at the Wells; hotel for a night. We are to be separated for a night.'

She laid her hand in his and gave him a passing view of her face: 'For two, dear. I am . . . that man's visit--rather shaken: I shall have a

better chance of sleeping if I know I am not disturbing you.'

She was firm; and they kissed and parted. Each had an unphrased speculation upon the power of Mrs. Burman to put division between them.

CHAPTER XXIII

TREATS OF THE LADIES' LAPDOG TASSO FOR AN INSTANCE OF MOMENTOUS EFFECTS PRODUCED BY VERY MINOR CAUSES

The maiden ladies Dorothea and Virginia Duvidney were thin--sweet old-fashioned grey gentlewomen, demurely conscious of their excellence and awake to the temptation in the consciousness, who imposed a certain reflex primness on the lips of the world when addressing them or when alluding to them. For their appearance was picturesque of the ancestral time, and their ideas and scrupulousness of delivery suggested the belated in ripeness; orchard apples under a snow-storm; or any image that will ceremoniously convey the mind's profound appreciation together with the tooth's panic dread of tartness. They were by no means tart; only, as you know, the tooth is apprehensively nervous; an uninviting sign will set it on edge. Even the pen which would sketch them has a spell on it and must don its coat of office, walk the liveried footman behind them.

Their wealth, their deeds of charity, their modesty, their built grey locks, their high repute; a 'Chippendale elegance' in a quaintly formal correctness, that they had, as Colney Durance called it; gave them some queenliness, and allowed them to claim the ear as an oracle and banish rebellious argument. Intuitive knowledge, assisted by the Rev. Stuart Rem and the Rev. Abram Posterley, enabled them to pronounce upon men and things; not without effect; their country owned it; the foreigner beheld it. Nor were they corrupted by the servility of the surrounding ear. They were good women, striving to be humbly good. They might, for all the little errors they nightly unrolled to then perceptions, have stood before the world for a study in the white of our humanity. And this may be but a washed wall, it is true: revolutionary sceptics are measuring the depths of it. But the hue refreshes, the world admires; and we know it an object of aim to the bettermost of the wealthy. If, happily, complacent circumstances have lifted us to the clean paved platform out of grip of puddled clay and bespattering wheeltracks, we get our chance of coming to it.

Possessing, for example, nine thousand pounds per annum in Consols, and not expending the whole of it upon our luxuries, we are, without further privation, near to kindling the world's enthusiasm for whiteness. Yet there, too, we find, that character has its problems to solve; there are shades in salt. We must be charitable, but we should be just; we give to the poor of the land, but we are eminently the friends of our servants; duty to mankind diverts us not from the love we bear to our dog; and with a pathetic sorrow for silt, we discard it from sight and hearing. We hate dirt. Having said so much, having shown it, by sealing the mouth of

Mr. Stuart Rem and iceing the veins of Mr. Abram Posterley, in relation to a dreadful public case and a melancholy private, we have a pleased sense of entry into the world's ideal.

At the same time, we protest our unworthiness. Acknowledgeing that they were not purely spotless, these ladies genuinely took the tiny fly-spot for a spur to purification; and they viewed it as a patch to raise in relief their goodness. They gazed on it, saw themselves in it, and veiled it: warned of the cunning of an oft-defeated Tempter.

To do good and sleep well, was their sowing and their reaping. Uneasy consciences could not have slept. The sleeping served for proof of an accurate reckoning and an expungeing of the day's debits. They differed in opinion now and then, as we see companion waves of the river, blown by a gust, roll a shadow between them; and almost equally transient were their differences with a world that they condemned when they could not feel they (as an embodiment of their principles) were leading it. The English world at times betrayed a restiveness in the walled pathway of virtue; for, alas, it closely neighbours the French; only a Channel, often dangerously smooth, to divide: but it is not perverted for long; and the English Funds are always constant and a tower. Would they be suffered to be so, if libertinism were in the ascendant?

Colney Durance was acquainted with the Duvidney ladies. Hearing of the journey to them and the purport of it, he said, with the mask upon glee: 'Then Victor has met his match!' Nataly had sent for him to dine with her in Victor's absence: she was far from grieved, as to the result, by his assurance to her, that Victor had not a chance. Colney thought so. 'Just like him! to be off gaily to try and overcome or come over the greatest power in England.' They were England herself; the squat old woman she has become by reason of her overlapping numbers of the comfortable fund-holder annuitants: a vast body of passives and negatives, living by precept, according to rules of precedent, and supposing themselves to be righteously guided because of their continuing undisturbed. Them he branded, as hypocritical materialists, and the country for pride in her sweetmeat plethora of them:--mixed with an ancient Hebrew fear of offence to an inscrutable Lord, eccentrically appeasable through the dreary iteration of the litany of sinfulness. He was near a truth; and he had the heat of it on him.

Satirists in their fervours might be near it to grasp it, if they could be moved to moral distinctness, mental intention, with a preference of strong plain speech over the crack of their whips. Colney could not or would not praise our modern adventurous, experimental, heroic, tramping active, as opposed to yonder pury passives and negatives; he had occasions for flicking the fellow sharply: and to speak of the Lord as our friend present with us, palpable to Reason, perceptible to natural piety solely through the reason, which justifies punishment; that would have stopped his mouth upon the theme of God-forsaken creatures. Our satirist is an executioner by profession, a moralist in excuse, or at the tail of it; though he thinks the position reversed, when he moralizes angrily to have his angry use of the scourge condoned. Nevertheless, he fills a serviceable place; and certainly he is not happy in his business.

Colney suffered as heavily as he struck. If he had been no more than a mime in the motley of satire, he would have sucked compensation from the acid of his phrases, for the failure to prick and goad, and work amendment.

He dramatized to Nataly some of the scene going on at the Wells: Victor's petition; his fugue in urgency of it; the brief reply of Miss Dorothea and her muted echo Miss Virginia. He was rather their apologist for refusing. But, as when, after himself listening to their 'views,' he had deferentially withdrawn from the ladies of Moorsedge, and had then beheld their strangely-hatted lieutenants and the regiments of the toneless respectable on the pantiles and the mounts, the curse upon the satirist impelled him to generalize. The quiet good ladies were multiplied: they were 'the thousands of their sisters, petticoated or long-coated or buck-skinned; comfortable annuitants under clerical shepherding, close upon outnumbering the labourers they paralyze at home and stultify abroad.' Colney thumped away. The country's annuitants had for type 'the figure with the helmet of the Owl-Goddess and the trident of the Earth-shaker, seated on a wheel, at the back of penny-pieces; in whom you see neither the beauty of nakedness nor the charm of drapery; not the helmet's dignity or the trident's power; but she has patently that which stops the wheel; and posing for representative of an imperial nation, she helps to pass a penny.' So he passed his epigram, heedless of the understanding or attention of his hearer; who temporarily misjudged him for a man impelled by the vanity of literary point and finish, when indeed it was hot satiric spite, justified of its aim, which crushed a class to extract a drop of scathing acid, in the interests of the country, mankind as well. Nataly wanted a picture painted, colours and details, that she might get a vision of the scene at Moorsedge. She did her best to feel an omen and sound it, in his question 'whether the yearly increasing army of the orderly annuitants and their parasites does not demonstrate the proud old country as a sheath for pith rather than of the vital run of sap.'

Perhaps it was patriotic to inquire; and doubtless she was the weakest of women; she could follow no thought; her heart was beating blindly beside Victor, hoping for the refusal painful to her through his disappointment.

'You think me foolish,' she made answer to one of Colney's shrugs; 'and it has come to that pitch with me, that I cannot be sensible of a merit except in being one with him--obeying, is the word. And I have never yet known him fail. That terrible Lakelands wears a different look to me, when I think of what he can do; though I would give half my days to escape it.'

She harped on the chord of feverish extravagance; the more hateful to Colney because of his perceiving, that she simulated a blind devotedness to stupefy her natural pride; and he was divided between stamping on her for an imbecile and dashing at Victor for a maniac. But her situation rendered her pitiable. 'You will learn tomorrow what Victor has done,' he said, and thought how the simple words carried the bitterness.

That was uttered within a few minutes of midnight, when the ladies of Moorsedge themselves, after an exhausting resistance to their dearest relative, were at the hall-door of the house with Victor, saying the good-night, to which he responded hurriedly, cordially, dumbly, a baffled man. They clasped hands. Miss Dorothea said:

'You, Victor, always.' Miss Virginia said: 'You will be sure of welcome.' He walked out upon the moonless night; and for lack of any rounded object in the smothering darkness to look at, he could nowhere take moorings to gather himself together and define the man who had undergone so portentous a defeat. He was glad of quarters at an hotel, a solitary bed, absence from his Nataly.

For their parts, the ladies were not less shattered. They had no triumph in their victory: the weight of it bore them down. They closed, locked, shot the bolts and fastened the chain of the door. They had to be reminded by the shaking of their darling dog Tasso's curly silky coat, that he had not taken his evening's trot to notify malefactors of his watchfulness and official wrath at sound of footfall or a fancied one. Without consultation, they unbolted the door, and Tasso went forth, to 'compose his vesper hymn,' as Mr. Posterley once remarked amusingly.

Though not pretending to the Muse's crown so far, the little dog had qualities to entrance the spinster sex. His mistresses talked of him; of his readiness to go forth; of the audible first line of his hymn or sonnet; of his instinct telling him that something was wrong in the establishment. For most of the servants at Moorsedge were prostrated by a fashionable epidemic; a slight attack, the doctor said; but Montague, the butler, had withdrawn for the nursing of his wife; Perrin, the footman, was confined to his chamber; Manton, the favourite maid, had appeared in the morning with a face that caused her banishment to bed; and the cook, Mrs. Bannister, then sighingly agreed to send up cold meat for the ladies' dinner. Hence their melancholy inhospitality to their cousin Victor, who had, in spite of his errors, the right to claim his place at their table, was 'of the blood,' they said. He was recognized as the living prince of it. His every gesture, every word, recalled the General. The trying scene with him had withered them, they did not speak of it; each had to the other the look of a vessel that has come out of a gale. Would they sleep? They scarcely dared ask it of themselves. They had done rightly; silence upon that reflection seemed best. It was the silence of an inward agitation; still they knew the power of good consciences to summon sleep.

Tasso was usually timed for five minutes. They were astonished to discover by the clock, that they had given him ten. He was very quiet: if so, and for whatever he did, he had his reason, they said: he was a dog endowed with reason: endowed--and how they wished that Mr. Stuart Rem would admit it!--with, their love of the little dog believed (and Mr. Posterley acquiesced), a soul. Do but think it of dear animals, and any form of cruelty to them becomes an impossibility, Mr. Stuart Rem! But he would not be convinced: ungenerously indeed he named Mr. Posterley a courtier. The ladies could have retorted, that Mr. Posterley had not a brother who was the celebrated surgeon Sir Nicholas Rem.

Usually Tasso came running in when the hall-door was opened to him. Not a sound of him could be heard. The ladies blew his familiar whistle. He trotted back to a third appeal, and was, unfortunately for them, not caressed; he received reproaches from two forefingers directed straight at his reason. He saw it and felt it. The hug of him was deferred to the tender good-night to him in his basket at the foot of the ladies' beds.

On entering their spacious bed-chamber, they were so fatigued that sleep appeared to their minds the compensating logical deduction. Miss Dorothea suppressed a yawn, and inflicted it upon Miss Virginia, who returned it, with an apology, and immediately had her sister's hand on her shoulder, for, an attempted control of one of the irresistibles; a spectacle imparting bitter shudders and shots to the sympathetic jawbones of an observer. Hand at mouth, for not in privacy would they have been guilty of exposing a grimace, they signified, under an interim smile, their maidenly submission to the ridiculous force of nature: after which, Miss Virginia retired to the dressing-room, absorbed in woeful recollection of the resolute No they had been compelled to reiterate, in response to the most eloquent and, saving for a single instance, admirable man, their cousin, the representative of 'the blood,' supplicating them. A recreant thankfulness coiled within her bosom at the thought, that Dorothea, true to her office of speaker, had tasked herself with the cruel utterance and repetition of the word. Victor's wonderful eyes, his voice, yet more than his urgent pleas; and also, in the midst of his fiery flood of speech, his gentleness, his patience, pathos, and a man's tone through it all; were present to her.

Disrobed, she knocked at the door.

'I have called to you twice,' Dorothea said; and she looked a motive for the call.

'What is it?' said Virginia, with faltering sweetness, with a terrible divination.

The movement of a sigh was made. 'Are you aware of anything, dear?'

Virginia was taken with the contrary movement of a sniff. But the fear informing it prevented it from being venturesome. Doubt of the pure atmosphere of their bed-chamber, appeared to her as too heretic even for the positive essay. In affirming, that she was not aware of anything, her sight fell on Tasso. His eyeballs were those of a little dog that has been awfully questioned.

'It is more than a suspicion,' said Dorothea; and plainly now, while open to the seductions of any pleasing infidel testimony, her nose in repugnance convicted him absolutely.

Virginia's nose was lowered a few inches; it inhaled and stopped midway. 'You must be mistaken, dear. He never . . .'

'But are you insensible to the' Dorothea's eyelids fainted.

Virginia dismissed the forlornest of efforts at incredulity. A whiff of Tasso had smitten her. 'Ah!' she exclaimed and fell away. 'Is it Tasso! How was it you noticed nothing before undressing, dear?'

'Thinking of what we have gone through to-night! I forgot him. At last the very strange . . . The like of it I have not ever! . . . And upon that thick coat! And, dear, it is late. We are in the morning hours.'

'But, my dear-Oh, dear, what is to be done with him?'

That was the crucial point for discussion. They had no servant to give them aid; Manton, they could not dream of disturbing. And Tasso's character wag in the estimate; he hated washing; it balefully depraved his temper; and not only, creature of habit that he was, would he decline to lie down anywhere save in their bedroom, he would lament, plead, insist unremittingly, if excluded; terrifying every poor invalid of the house. Then again, were they at this late hour to dress themselves, and take him downstairs, and light a fire in the kitchen, and boil sufficient water to give him a bath and scrubbing? Cold water would be death to him. Besides, he would ring out his alarum for the house to hear, pour out all his poetry, poor dear, as Mr. Posterley called it, at a touch of cold water. The catastrophe was one to weep over, the dilemma a trial of the strongest intelligences.

In addition to reviews of their solitary alternative-the having of a befouled degraded little dog in their chamber through the night, they were subjected to a conflict of emotions when eyeing him: and there came to them the painful, perhaps irreverent, perhaps uncharitable, thought:--that the sinner who has rolled in the abominable, must cleanse him and do things to polish him and perfume before again embraced even by the mind: if indeed we can ever have our old sentiment for him again! Mr. Stuart Rem might decide it for them. Nay, before even the heart embraces him, he must completely purify himself. That is to say, the ordinary human sinner--save when a relative. Contemplating Tasso, the hearts of the ladies gushed out in pity of an innocent little dog, knowing not evil, dependent on his friends for help to be purified;--necessarily kept at a distance: the very look of him prescribed extreme separation, as far as practicable. But they had proof of a love almost greater than it was previous to the offence, in the tender precautions they took to elude repulsion.

He was rolling on the rug, communicating contagion. Flasks of treble-distilled lavender water, and their favourite, traditional in the family, eau d'Arquebusade, were on the toilet-table. They sprinkled his basket, liberally sprinkled the rug and the little dog. Perfume-pastilles were in one of the sitting-rooms below; and Virginia would have gone down softly to fetch a box, but Dorothea restrained her, in pity for the servants, with the remark: 'It would give us a nightmare of a Roman Catholic Cathedral!' A bit of the window was lifted by Dorothea, cautiously, that prowling outsiders might not be attracted. Tasso was

wooded to his basket. He seemed inquisitive; the antidote of his naughtiness excited him; his tail circled after his muzzle several times; then he lay. A silken scarf steeped in eau d'Arquebusade was flung across him.

Their customary devout observances concluded, lights were extinguished, and the ladies kissed, and entered their beds.

Their beds were not homely to them. Dorothea thought that Virginia was long in settling herself. Virginia did not like the sound of Dorothea's double sigh. Both listened anxiously for the doings of Tasso. He rested.

He was uneasy; he was rounding his basket once more; unaware of the exaggeration of his iniquitous conduct, poor innocent, he shook that dreadful coat of his! He had displaced the prophylactic cover of the scarf.

He drove them in a despair to speculate on the contention between the perfume and the stench in junction, with such a doubt of the victory of which of the two, as drags us to fear our worst. It steals into our nostrils, possesses them. As the History of Mankind has informed us, we were led up to our civilization by the nose. But Philosophy warns us on that eminence; to beware of trusting exclusively to our conductor, lest the mind of us at least be plunged back into barbarism. The ladies hated both the cause and the consequence, they had a revulsion from the object, of the above contention. But call it not a contention: there is nobility in that. This was a compromise, a degrading union, with very sickening results. Whether they came of an excess of the sprinkling, could not well be guessed. The drenching at least was righteously intended.

Beneath their shut eyelids, they felt more and more the oppression of a darkness not laden with slumber. They saw it insolidity; themselves as restless billows, driven dashing to the despondent sigh. Sleep was denied them.

Tasso slept. He had sinned unknowingly, and that is not a spiritual sin; the chastisement confers the pardon.

But why was this ineffable blessing denied to them? Was it that they might have a survey of all the day's deeds and examine them under the cruel black beams of Insomnia?

Virginia said: 'You are wakeful.'

'Thoughtful,' was the answer.

A century of the midnight rolled on.

Dorothea said: 'He behaved very beautifully.'

'I looked at the General's portrait while he besought us,' Virginia

replied.

'One sees him in Victor, at Victor's age. Try to sleep.'

'I do. I pray that you may.'

Silence courted slumber. Their interchange of speech from the posture of bodies on their backs, had been low and deliberate, in the tone of the vaults. Dead silence recalled the strangeness of it. The night was breathless; their open window a peril bestowing no boon. They were mutually haunted by sound of the gloomy query at the nostrils of each when drawing the vital breath. But for that, they thought they might have slept.

Bed spake to bed:

'The words of Mr. Stuart Rem last Sunday!' 'He said: "Be just." Could one but see direction!'

'In obscurity, feeling is a guide.'

'The heart.'

'It may sometimes be followed.'

'When it concerns the family.'

'He would have the living, who are seeking peace, be just.'

'Not to assume the seat of justice.'

Again they lay as tombstone effigies, that have committed the passage of affairs to another procession of the Ages.

There was a gentle sniff, in hopeless confirmation of the experience of its predecessors. A sister to it ensued.

'Could Victor have spoken so, without assurance in his conscience, that his entreaty was righteously addressed to us? that we . . .'

'And no others!'

'I think of his language. He loves the child.'

'In heart as in mind, he is eminently gifted; acknowledgeing error.'

'He was very young.'

The huge funereal minutes conducted their sonorous hearse, the hour.

It struck in the bed-room: Three.

No more than three of the clock, it was the voice telling of half the

precious restorative night-hours wasted.

Now, as we close our eyelids when we would go to sleep, so must we, in expectation of the peace of mind granting us the sweet oblivion, preliminarily do something which invokes, that we may obtain it.

'Dear,' Dorothea said.

'I know indeed,' said Virginia.

'We may have been!'

'Not designingly.'

'Indeed not. But harsh it may be named, if the one innocent is to be the sufferer.'

'The child can in no sense be adjudged guilty.'

'It is Victor's child.'

'He adores the child.'

Wheels were in mute motion within them; and presently the remark was tossed-up:

'In his coming to us, it is possible to see paternal solicitude'

Thence came fruit of reflection:

'To be instrumental as guides to a tender young life!'

Reflection heated with visions:

'Once our dream!'

They had the happier feeling of composure, though Tasso possessed the room. Not Tasso, but a sublimated offensiveness, issue of the antagonistically combined, dispersed to be the more penetrating; insomuch that it seemed to them they could not ever again make use of eau d'Arquebusade without the vitiating reminder. So true were the words of Mr. Stuart Rem: 'Half measures to purification are the most delusive of our artifices.' Fatigue and its reflections helped to be peacefuller. Their souls were mounting to a serenity above the nauseating degradation, to which the poor little dog had dragged them.

'Victor gave his promise.'

'At least, concession would not imply contact with the guilty.'

Both sighed as they took up the burden of the vaporous Tasso to drop him; with the greater satisfaction in the expelling of their breath.

'It might be said, dear, that concession to his entreaty does not in any way countenance the sin.'

'I can see, dear, how it might be read as a reproof.'

Their exchange of sentences followed meditative pauses; Dorothea leading.

'To one so sensitive as Victor!'

'A month or two of our society for the child!'

'It is not the length of time.'

'The limitation assures against maternal claims.'

'She would not dare.'

'He used the words: "her serious respect" for us. I should not wish to listen to him often.'

'We listen to a higher.'

'It may really be, that the child is like him.'

'Not resembling Mr. Stuart Rem's Clementina!'

'A week of that child gave us our totally sleepless night.' 'One thinks more hopefully of a child of Victor's.'

'He would preponderate.'

'He would.'

They sighed; but it was now with the relief of a lightened oppression.

'If, dear, in truth the father's look is in the child, he has the greater reason to desire for her a taste of our atmosphere.'

'Do not pursue it. Sleep.'

'One prayer!'

'Your mention of our atmosphere, dear, destroys my power to frame one. Do you, for two. But I would cleanse my heart.'

'There is none purer.'

'Hush.'

Virginia spoke a more fervent word of praise of her sister, and had not the hushing response to it. She heard the soft regular breathing. Her own was in downy fellowship with it a moment later.

At the hour of nine, in genial daylight, sitting over the crumbs of his hotel breakfast, Victor received a little note that bore the handwriting of Dorothea Duvidney.

'Dear Victor, we are prepared to receive the child for a month. In haste, before your train. Our love. D. and V.'

His face flashed out of cloud.

A more precious document had never been handed to him. It chased back to midnight the doubt hovering over his belief in himself;--phrased to say, that he was no longer the Victor Radnor known to the world. And it extinguished a corpse-like recollection of a baleful dream in the night. Here shone radiant witness of his being the very man; save for the spot of his recent confusion in distinguishing his identity or in feeling that he stood whole and solid.--Because of two mature maiden ladies? Yes, because of two maiden ladies, my good fellow. And friend Colney, you know the ladies, and what the getting round them for one's purposes really means.

The sprite of Colney Durance had struck him smartly overnight. Victor's internal crow was over Colney now. And when you have the optimist and pessimist acutely opposed in a mixing group, they direct lively conversations at one another across the gulf of distance, even of time. For a principle is involved, besides the knowledge of the other's triumph or dismay. The couple are scales of a balance; and not before last night had Victor ever consented to think of Colney ascending while he dropped low to graze the pebbles.

He left his hotel for the station, singing the great aria of the fourth Act of the Favorita: neglected since that mighty German with his Rienzi, and Tannhauser, and Tristan and Isolda, had mastered him, to the displacement of his boyhood's beloved sugary -inis and -antes and -zettis; had clearly mastered, not beguiled, him; had wafted him up to a new realm, invigorating if severer. But now his youth would have its voice. He travelled up to town with Sir Abraham Quatley and talked, and took and gave hints upon City and Commercial affairs, while the honeyed Italian of the conventional, gloriously animal, stress and flutter had a revel in his veins, now and then mutedly ebullient at the mouth: honeyed, golden, rich in visions;--having surely much more of Nature's encouragement to her children?

CHAPTER XXIV

NESTA'S ENGAGEMENT

A word in his ear from Fenellan, touching that man Blathenoy, set the wheels of Victor's brain at work upon his defences, for a minute, on the walk Westward. Who knew?--who did not know! He had a torpid consciousness that he cringed to the world, with an entreaty to the great

monster to hold off in ignorance; and the next instant, he had caught its miserable spies by the lurcher neck and was towering. He dwelt on his contempt of them, to curtain the power they could stir.

'The little woman, you say, took to Dartrey?'

Fenellan, with the usual apologetic moderation of a second statement, thought 'there was the look of it.'

'Well, we must watch over her. Dartrey!--but Dartrey's an honest fellow with women. But men are men. Very few men spare a woman when the mad fit is on her. A little woman--pretty little woman!--wife to Jacob Blathenoy! She mustn't at her age have any close choosing--under her hand. And Dartrey's just the figure to strike a spark in a tinder-box head.'

'With a husband who'd reduce Minerva's to tinder, after a month of him!'

'He spent his honeymoon at his place at Wrensham; told me so.' Blathenoy had therefore then heard of the building of Lakelands by the Victor Radnor of the City; and had then, we guess--in the usual honeymoon boasting of a windbag with his bride--wheezed the foul gossip, to hide his emptiness and do duty for amusement of the pretty little caged bird. Probably so. But Victor knew that Blathenoy needed him and feared him. Probably the wife had been enjoined to keep silence; for the Blachingtons, Fannings and others were, it could be sworn, blank and unscratched folio sheets on the subject--as yet; unless Mrs. Burman had dropped venom.

'One pities the little woman, eh, Fenellan?'

'Dartrey won't be back for a week or so; and they're off to Switzerland, after the dinner they give. I heard from him this morning; one of the Clanconans is ill.

'Lucky. But wherever Blathenoy takes her, he must be the same "arid bore," as old Colney says.'

'A domestic simoom,' said Fenellan, booming it: and Victor had a shudder.

'Awful thing, marriage, to some women! We chain them to that domestic round; most of them haven't the means of independence or a chance of winning it; and all that's open to them, if they've made a bad cast for a mate--and good Lord! how are they to know before it's too late!--they haven't a choice except to play tricks or jump to the deuce or sit and "drape in blight," as Colney has it; though his notion of the optional marriages, broken or renewed every seven years!--if he means it. You never know, with him. It sounds like another squirt of savage irony. It's donkey nonsense, eh?'

'The very hee-haw of nonsense,' Fenellan acquiesced.

'Come, come; read your Scriptures; donkeys have shown wisdom,' Victor

said, rather leaning to the theme of a fretfulness of women in the legal yoke. 'They're donkeys till we know them for prophets. Who can tell! Colney may be hailed for one fifty years hence.'

Fenellan was not invited to enter the house, although the loneliness of his lodgings was known, and also, that he played whist at his Club. Victor had grounds for turning to him at the door and squeezing his hand warmly, by way of dismissal. In ascribing them to a weariness at Fenellan's perpetual acquiescence, he put the cover on them, and he stamped it with a repudiation of the charge, that Colney's views upon the great Marriage Question were the 'very hee-haw of nonsense.' They were not the hee-haw; in fact, viewing the host of marriages, they were for discussion; there was no bray about them. He could not feel them to be absurd while Mrs. Burman's tenure of existence barred the ceremony. Anything for a phrase! he murmured of Fenellan's talk; calling him, Dear old boy, to soften the slight.

Nataly had not seen Fenellan or heard from Dartrey; so she continued to be uninformed of her hero's release; and that was in the order of happy accidents. She had hardly to look her interrogation for the news; it radiated. But he stated such matter-of-course briefly. 'The good ladies are ready to receive our girl.'

Her chagrin resolved to a kind of solace of her dragged pride, in the idea, that he who tamed everybody to submission, might well have command of her.

The note, signed D. and V., was shown.

There stood the words. And last night she had been partly of the opinion of Colney Durance. She sank down among the unreasoning abject;--not this time with her perfect love of him, but with a resistance and a dubiety under compression. For she had not quite comprehended why Nesta should go. This readiness of the Duvidney ladies to receive the girl, stopped her mental inquiries.

She begged for a week's delay; 'before the parting'; as her dear old silly mother's pathos whimpered it, of the separation for a month! and he smiled and hummed pleasantly at any small petition, thinking her in error to expect Dartrey's return to town before the close of a week; and then wondering at women, mildly denouncing in his heart the mothers who ran risk of disturbing their daughters' bosoms with regard to particular heroes married or not. Dartrey attracted women: he was one of the men who do it without effort. Victor's provident mind blamed the mother for the indiscreetness of her wish to have him among them. But Dudley had been making way bravely of late; he improved; he began to bloom, like a Spring flower of the garden protected from frosts under glass; and Fredi was the sheltering and nourishing bestower of the lessons. One could see, his questions and other little points revealed, that he had a certain lover's dread of Dartrey Fenellan; a sort of jealousy: Victor understood the feeling. To love a girl, who has her ideal of a man elsewhere in another; though she may know she never can wed the man, and has not the hope of it; is torment to the lover quailing, as we do in

this terrible season of the priceless deliciousness, stripped against all the winds that blow; skinless at times. One gets up a sympathy for the poor shy dependent shivering lover. Nevertheless, here was young Dudley waking, visibly becoming bolder. As in the flute-duets, he gained fire from concert. The distance between Cronidge and Moorsedge was two miles and a quarter.

Instead of the delay of a whole week, Victor granted four days, which embraced a musical evening at Mrs. John Cormyn's on the last of the days, when Nesta was engaged to sing with her mother a duet of her own composition, the first public fruit of her lessons in counterpoint from rigid Herr Strauscher, who had said what he had said, in letting it pass: eulogy, coming from him. So Victor heard, and he doated am the surprise to come for him, in a boyish anticipation. The girl's little French ballads under tutelage of Louise de Seilles promised, though they were imitative. If Strauscher let this pass . . . Victor saw Grand Opera somewhere to follow; England's claim to be a creative musical nation vindicated; and the genius of the fair sex as well.

He heard the duet at Mrs. Cormyn's; and he imagined a hearing of his Fredi's Opera, and her godmother's delight in it; the once famed Sanfredini's consent to be the diva at a rehearsal, and then her compelling her hidalgo duque to consent further: an event not inconceivable. For here was downright genius; the flowering aloe of the many years in formation; and Colney admitted the song to have a streak of genius; though he would pettishly and stupidly say, that our modern newspaper Press is able now to force genius for us twenty or so to the month, excluding Sundays-our short pauses for the incubation of it. Real rare genius was in that song, nothing forced; and exquisite melody; one of those melodies which fling gold chains about us and lead us off, lead us back into Eden. Victor hummed at bars of it on the drive homeward. His darlings had to sing it again in the half-lighted drawing-room. The bubble-happiness of the three was vexed only by tidings heard from Colney during the evening of a renewed instance of Skepsey's misconduct. Priscilla Graves had hurried away to him at the close of Mr. John Cormyn's Concert, in consequence; in grief and in sympathy. Skepsey was to appear before the magistrate next morning, for having administered physical chastisement to his wife during one of her fits of drunkenness. Colney had seen him. His version of the story was given, however, in the objectionable humorous manner: none could gather from it of what might be pleaded for Skepsey. His 'lesson to his wife in the art of pugilism, before granting her Captain's rank among the Defensive Amazons of Old England,' was the customary patent absurdity. But it was odd, that Skepsey always preferred his appeal for help to Colney Durance. Nesta proposed following Priscilla that night. She had hinted her wish, on the way home; she was urgent, beseeching, when her father lifted praises of her: she had to start with her father by the train at seven in the morning, and she could not hear of poor Skepsey for a number of hours. She begged a day's delay; which would enable her, she said, to join them in dining at the Blachingtons', and seeing dear Lakelands again. 'I was invited, you know.' She spoke in childish style, and under her eyes she beheld her father and mother exchange looks. He had a fear that Nataly might support the girl's petition. Nataly read him to mean, possible

dangers among the people at Wrensham. She had seemed hesitating. After meeting Victor's look, her refusal was firm. She tried to make it one of distress for the use of the hard word to her own dear girl. Nesta spied beneath.

But what was it? There was a reason for her going! She had a right to stay, and see and talk with Captain Dartrey, and she was to be deported!

So now she set herself to remember little incidents at Creckholt: particularly a conversation in a very young girl's hearing, upon Sir Humphrey and Lady Pottil's behaviour to the speakers, her parents. She had then, and she now had, an extraordinary feeling, as from a wind striking upon soft summer weather off regions of ice, that she was in her parents' way. How? The feeling was irrational; it could give her no reply, or only the multitudinous which are the question violently repeated. She slept on it.

She and her father breakfasted by the London birds' first twitter. They talked of Skepsey. She spoke of her going as exile. 'No,' said he, 'you're sure to meet friends.'

Her cheeks glowed. It came wholly through the suddenness of the recollection, that the family-seat of one among the friends was near the Wells.

He was allowed to fancy, as it suited him to fancy, that a vivid secret pleasure laid the colour on those ingenuous fair cheeks.

'A solitary flute for me, for a month! I shall miss my sober comrade: got the habit of duetting: and he's gentle, bears with me.'

Tears lined her eyelids. 'Who would not be, dearest dada! But there is nothing to bear except the honour.'

'You like him? You and I always have the same tastes, Fredi.'

Now there was a reddening of the sun at the mount; all the sky aflame. How could he know that it was not the heart in the face! She reddened because she had perused his wishes; had detected a scheme striking off from them, and knew a man to be the object of it; and because she had at the same time the sense of a flattery in her quick divination; and she was responsively emotional, her blood virginal; often it was a tropical lightning.

It looked like the heart doing rich painter's work on maiden features. Victor was naturally as deceived as he wished to be.

From his being naturally so, his remarks on Dudley had an air of embracing him as one of the family. 'His manner to me just hits me.'

'I like to see him with you,' she said.

Her father let his tongue run: 'One of the few young men I feel perfectly

at home with! I do like dealing with a gentleman. I can confide in a gentleman: honour, heart, whatever I hold dearest.'

There he stopped, not too soon. The girl was mute, fully agreeing, slightly hardening. She had a painful sense of separation from her dear Louise. And it was now to be from her mother as well: she felt the pain when kissing her mother in bed. But this was moderated by the prospect of a holiday away out of reach of Mr. Barnby's pursuing voice, whom her mother favoured: and her mother was concealing something from her; so she could not make the confidante of her mother. Nataly had no forewarnings. Her simple regrets filled her bosom. All night she had been taking her chastisement, and in the morning it seemed good to her, that she should be denuded, for her girl to learn the felicity of having relatives.

For some reason, over which Nataly mused in the succeeding hours, the girl had not spoken of any visit her mother was to pay to the Duvidney ladies or they to her. Latterly she had not alluded to her mother's family. It might mean, that the beloved and dreaded was laying finger on a dark thing in the dark; reading syllables by touch; keeping silence over the communications to a mind not yet actively speculative, as it is a way with young women. 'With young women educated for the market, to be timorous, consequently secretive, rather snaky,' Colney Durance had said. Her Nesta was not one of the 'framed and glazed' description, cited by him, for an example of the triumph of the product; 'exactly harmonious with the ninny male's ideal of female innocence.' No; but what if the mother had opened her heart to her girl? It had been of late her wish or a dream, shaping hourly to a design, now positively to go through that furnace. Her knowledge of Victor's objection, restrained an impulse that had not won spring enough to act against his counsel or vivify an intelligence grown dull in slavery under him, with regard to the one seeming right course. The adoption of it would have wounded him--therefore her. She had thought of him first; she had also thought of herself, and she blamed herself now. She went so far as to think, that Victor was guilty of the schemer's error of counting human creatures arithmetically, in the sum, without the estimate of distinctive qualities and value here and there. His return to a shivering sensitiveness on the subject of his girl's enlightenment 'just yet,' for which Nataly pitied and loved him, sharing it, with humiliation for doing so, became finally her excuse. We must have some excuse, if we would keep to life.

Skepsey's case appeared in the evening papers. He confessed, 'frankly,' he said, to the magistrate, that, 'acting under temporary exasperation, he had lost for a moment a man's proper self-command.' He was as frank in stating, that he 'occupied the prisoner's place before his Worship a second time, and was a second time indebted to the gentleman, Mr. Colney Durance, who so kindly stood by him.' There was hilarity in the Court at his quaint sententious envelopment of the idiom of the streets, which he delivered with solemnity: 'He could only plead, not in absolute justification--an appeal to human sentiments--the feelings of a man of the humbler orders, returning home in the evening, and his thoughts upon things not without their importance, to find repeatedly the guardian of his household beastly drunk, and destructive.' Colney made the case quite intelligible to the magistrate; who gravely robed a strain of the

idiomatic in the officially awful, to keep in tune with his delinquent. No serious harm had been done to the woman. Skepsey was admonished and released. His wife expressed her willingness to forgive him, now he had got his lesson; and she hoped he would understand, that there was no need for a woman to learn pugilism. Skepsey would have explained; but the case was over, he was hustled out.

However, a keen young reporter present smelt fun for copy; he followed the couple; and in a particular evening Journal, laughable matter was printed concerning Skepsey's view of the pugilism to be imparted to women for their physical-protection in extremity, and the distinction of it from the blow conveying the moral lesson to them; his wife having objected to the former, because it annoyed her and he pestered her; and she was never, she said, ready to stand up to him for practice, as he called it, except when she had taken more than he thought wholesome for her: he had no sense. There was a squabble between them, because he chose to scour away to his master's office instead of conducting her home with the honours. Nesta read the young reporter's version, with shrieks. She led the ladies of Moorsedge to discover amusement in it.

At first, as her letter to her mother described them, they were like a pair of pieces of costly China, with the settled smile, and cold. She saw but the outside of them, and she continued reporting the variations, which steadily determined the warmth. On the night of the third day, they kissed her tenderly; they were human figures.

No one could be aware of the trial undergone by the good ladies in receiving her: Victor's child; but, as their phrase would have run, had they dared to give it utterance to one another, a child of sin. How foreign to them, in that character, how strange, when she was looked on as an inhabitant of their house, they hardly dared to estimate; until the timorous estimation, from gradually swelling, suddenly sank; nature invaded them; they could discard the alienating sense of the taint; and not only did they no longer fear the moment when Mr. Stuart Rem or Mr. Posterley might call for evening tea, but they consulted upon inviting the married one of those gentlemen, to 'divert dear Nesta.' Every night she slept well. In all she did, she proved she was 'of the blood.' She had Victor's animated eyes; she might have, they dreaded to think, his eloquence. They put it down to his eloquence entirely, that their resistance to his petition had been overcome, for similarly with the treatment of the private acts of royal personages by lacquey History, there is, in the minds of the ultra-civilized, an insistance, that any event having a consequence in matters personal to them, be at all hazards recorded with the utmost nicety in decency. By such means, they preserve the ceremonial self-respect, which is a necessity of their existence; and so they maintain the regal elevation over the awe-struck subjects of their interiors; who might otherwise revolt, pull down, scatter, dishonour, expose for a shallow fiction the holiest, the most vital to them. A democratic evil spirit is abroad, generated among congregations, often perilously communicating its wanton laughter to the desperate wickedness they know (not solely through the monition of Mr. Stuart Rem) to lurk within. It has to be excluded: on certain points they must not think. The night of Tasso was darkly clouded in the minds of the pure

ladies: a rift would have seized their half-slumbering sense of smell, to revive the night, perhaps disorder the stately march of their intelligences.

Victor's eloquence, Victor's influence, Victor's child he carried them as a floodstream, insomuch, that their reception of this young creature of the blot on her birth, was regarded by them in the unmentioned abstract, and the child's presence upon earth seen with the indulgence (without the naughty curiosity) of the loyal moral English for the numerous offspring of the peccadillos of their monarchs. These things pass muster from being 'Britannically cocooned in the purple,' says our irreverent satirist; and the maiden ladies' passion of devotion to 'the blood' helped to blind them; but still more so did the imperious urgency to curtain closely the night of Tasso, throwing all its consequences upon Victor's masterful tongue. Whence it ensued (and here is the danger for illogical individuals as well as vast communities, who continue to batten upon fiction when the convenience of it has taken the place of pleasure), that they had need to exalt his eloquence, for a cloak to their conduct; and doing it, they fell into a habit of yielding to him; they disintegrated under him; rules, principles, morality, were shaken to some confusion. And still proceeding thus, they now and then glanced back, more wonderingly than convicted sinners upon their days of early innocence, at the night when successfully they withstood him. They who had doubted of the rightness of letting Victor's girl come into collision with two clerical gentlemen, one of whom was married, permitted him now to bring the Hon. Dudley Sowerby to their house, and make appointments to meet Mr. Dudley Sowerby under a roof that sheltered a young lady, evidently the allurements to the scion of aristocracy; of whose family Mr. Stuart Rem had spoken in the very kindling hushed tones, proper to the union of a sacerdotal and an English citizen's veneration.

How would it end? And if some day this excellent Mr. Dudley Sowerby reproached them! He could not have a sweeter bride, one more truly a lady in education and manners; but the birth! the child's name! Their trouble was emitted in a vapour of interjections. Very perplexing was it for the good ladies of strict principles to reflect, as dimly they did, that the concrete presence of dear Nesta silenced and overcame objections to her being upon earth. She seemed, as it were, a draught of redoubtable Nature inebriating morality. But would others be similarly affected? Victor might get his release, to do justice to the mother: it would not cover the child. Prize as they might the quality of the Radnor blood (drawn from the most ancient of original Britain's princes), there was also the Cantor blood for consideration; and it was old, noble, proud. Would it be satisfied in matching itself with great wealth, a radiant health, and the good looks of a young flower? For the sake of the dear girl, the ladies hoped that it would; and they enlarged the outline of their wedding present, while, in their minds, the noble English family which could be satisfied so, was lowered, partaking of the taint they had personally ceased to recognize.

Of one thing they were sure, and it enlisted them: the gentleman loved the girl. Her love of him, had it been prominent to view, would have stirred a feminine sigh; not more, except a feminine lecture to follow.

She was quite uninflamed, fresh and cool as a spring. His ardour had no disguise. They measured him by the favourite fiction's heroes of their youth, and found him to gaze, talk, comport himself, according to the prescription; correct grammar, finished sentences, all that is expected of a gentleman enamoured; and ever with the watchful intentness for his lady's faintest first dawn of an inclining to a wish. Mr. Dudley Sowerby's eye upon Nesta was really an apprentice. There is in Love's young season a magnanimity in the male kind. Their superior strength and knowledge are made subservient to the distaff of the weaker and shallower: they crown her queen; her look is their mandate. So was it when Sir Charles and Sir Rupert and the estimable Villiers Davenant touched maidenly hearts to throb: so is it now, with the Hon. Dudley Sowerby.

Very haltingly, the ladies were guilty of a suggestion to Victor. 'Oh! Fredi?' said he; 'admires her, no doubt; and so do I, so we all do; she's one of the nice girls; but as to Cupid's darts, she belongs to the cucumber family, and he shoots without firing. We shall do the mischief if we put an interdict. Don't you remember the green days when obstacles were the friction to light that match?' Their pretty nod of assent displayed the virgin pride of the remembrance: they dreamed of having once been exceedingly wilful; it refreshed their nipped natures; and dwelling on it, they forgot to press their suggestion. Incidentally, he named the sum his Fredi would convey to her husband; with, as was calculable, the further amount his only child would inherit. A curious effect was produced on them. Though they were not imaginatively mercenary, as the creatures tainted with wealth commonly are, they talked of the sum over and over in the solitude of their chamber. 'Dukes have married for less.' Such an heiress, they said, might buy up a Principality. Victor had supplied them with something of an apology to the gentleman proposing to Nesta in their house.

The chronicle of it is, that Dudley Sowerby did this on the fifteenth day of September; and that it was not known to the damsel's parents before the twenty-third; as they were away on an excursion in South Tyrol:-- away, flown, with just a word of the hurried departure to their envious, exiled girl; though they did not tell her of new constructions at the London house partly causing them to fly. Subject to their consent, she wrote, she had given hers. The letter was telegraphic on the essential point. She wrote of Mr. Barmby's having visited Mr. Posterley at the Wells, and she put it just as flatly. Her principal concern, to judge by her writing, was, to know what Mr. Durance had done, during her absence, with the group of emissary-advocates of the various tongues of Europe on board the steam-Liner conducting them the first stage of their journey to the Court of Japan.

Mr. Simeon Fenellan had written his opinion, that all these delegates of the different European nationalities were nothing other than dupes of a New-York Syndicate of American Humorists, not without an eye on the mainchance; and he was sure they would be set to debate publicly, before an audience of high-priced tickets, in the principal North American Cities, previous to the embarkation for Japan at San Francisco. Mr. Fenellan eulogized the immense astuteness of Dr. Gannius in taking his

daughter Delphica with him. Dr. Gannius had singled forth poor Dr. Bouthoin for the object of his attacks; but Nesta was chiefly anxious to hear of Delphica's proceedings; she was immensely interested in Delphica, and envied her; and the girl's funny speculations over the play of Delphica's divers arts upon the Greek, and upon the Russian, and upon the English curate Mr. Semhians, and upon M. Falarique--set Gallically pluming and crowing out of an Alsace-Lorraine growl--were clever. Only, in such a letter, they were amazing.

Nataly received it at Campiglio, when about to start for an excursion down the Sarca Valley to Arco. Her letter of reply was delayed. One to Victor from Dudley Sowerby, awaited them, on their return. 'Confirms Fredi,' he said, showing it, and praising it as commendable, properly fervid. She made pretence to read, she saw the words.

Her short beat of wings was over. She had joined herself with Victor's leap for a change, thirsting for the scenery of the white peaks in heaven, to enjoy through his enjoyment, if her own capacity was dead: and she had found it revive, up to some recovery of her old songful readiness for invocations of pleasure. Escape and beauty beckoned ahead; behind were the chains. These two letters of the one fact plucked her back. The chained body bore the fluttering spirit: or it was the spirit in bonds, that dragged the body. Both were abashed before the image of her girl. Out of the riddle of her strange Nesta, one thing was clear: she did not love the man: and Nataly tasted gladness in that, from the cup of poisonous regrets at the thought. Her girl's heart would not be broken. But if he so strongly loved her, as to hold to this engagement? . . . It might then be worse. She dropped a plumb-line into the young man, sounding him by what she knew of him and judged. She had to revert to Nesta's charm, for the assurance of his anchored attachment.

Her holiday took the burden of her trouble, and amid the beauty of a disenchanting scene, she resumed the London incubus.

'You told him of her being at the Wells? in the neighbourhood, Victor?'

'Didn't you know, my dear, the family-seat is Cronidge, two miles out from the Wells?--and particularly pretty country.'

'I had forgotten, if I ever heard. You will not let him be in ignorance?'

'My dear love, you are pale about it. This is a matter between men. I write, thanking for the honour and so forth; and I appoint an interview; and I show him my tablets. He must be told, necessarily. Incidents of this kind come in their turn. If Dudley does not account himself the luckiest young fellow in the kingdom, he's not worthy of his good fortune. I wish they were both here now, honeymooning among these peaks, seeing the crescent over one, as we did last night!'

'Have you an idea, in reading Nesta's letter?'

'Seems indifferent?--mere trick to hide the blushes. And I, too, I'm

interested in Delphica. Delphica and Falarique will be fine stage business. Of course, Dr. Bouthoin and his curate!--we know what Old England has to expect from Colney.'

'At any rate, Mr. Durance hurts no one. You will, in your letter, appoint the day of the interview?'

'Hurts himself! Yes, dearest; appoint for--ten days homeward--eleventh day from to-day. And you to Fredi: a bit of description--as you can, my Nataly! Happy to be a dolomite, to be painted by Nataly's pen.'

The sign is evil, when we have a vexatious ringing in the ear of some small piece of familiar domestic chatter, and subject it to scrutiny, hang on it, worry and magnify it. What will not creatures under sway of the sensational life, catch at to emphasize and strengthen distaste, until distaste shall have a semblance of reason, in the period of the mind's awakening to revolt! Nataly shrank from the name of dolomite, detested the name, though the scenes regained their beauty or something of it beneath her showery vision. Every time Victor spoke of dolomites on the journey homeward, she had at heart an accusation of her cowardice, her duplicity, frailty, treachery to the highest of her worship and sole support of her endurance in the world: not much blaming him: but the degrading view of herself sank them both. On a shifty soil, down goes the idol. For him she could plead still, for herself she could not.

The smell of the Channel brine inspirited her sufficiently to cast off the fit and make it seem, in the main, a bodily depression; owing to causes, of which she was beginning to have an apprehensive knowledge: and they were not so fearful to her as the gloom they displaced.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Belief in the narrative by promoting nausea in the audience

Claim for equality puts an end to the priceless privileges

Consent to take life as it is

Dialogue between Nature and Circumstance

Dudley was not gifted to read behind words and looks

Exuberant anticipatory trustfulness

Fell to chatting upon the nothings agreeably and seriously

Greater our successes, the greater the slaves we become

He never explained

How Success derides Ambition!

If only been intellectually a little flexible in his morality

Naturally as deceived as he wished to be

Official wrath at sound of footfall or a fancied one

Optional marriages, broken or renewed every seven years

Pessimism is invulnerable

Repeatedly, in contempt of the disgust of iteration

Satirist is an executioner by profession

Semblance of a tombstone lady beside her lord

The banquet to be fervently remembered, should smoke
The homage we pay him flatters us
We must have some excuse, if we would keep to life

[The End]

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